Fly Fishing ADVENTURES

Special Report



SPECIAL REPORT: BELIZE

THE BELIZE EXPERIENCE



Since 1986, we have annually fished Belize including the Turneff Islands, Ambergris Cay, Placencia and virtually everywhere between those points. There are many aspects to Belize including private islands with villas and resorts and the finest permit fishing on the globe. However, the overriding appeal of the Belize fishery to those anglers who visit annually is the variety of shallow water, saltwater species and the different fishing environments. These various environments range from mangrove edges to bonefish, permit, and tarpon flats and includes channels and jungle rivers.

To those familiar with the Belize mothership approach, there is no better way to cover the options than living on the protected waters inside the Belize barrier reef, the second largest barrier reef in the world. What brings our regulars back each year, in spite of the sometimes fickle tropical weather, are these aspects:



- A comfortable, bug free (with rare exception), air conditioned living environment with home-cooked meals prepared around the fishing hours.
- Control of the schedule – fish basically whatever hours you want. Start early and fish late.
- Privacy – no one to answer to or dress for. Separation from the rest of the world.
- Native captains and guides who love to be on the water and who pursue the sight fishing opportunities with passion.
- A spectacular shallow water and reef marine environment – it's just a great place to be.
- While this is primarily a fishing adventure, other activities like visiting Cays, snorkeling and scuba diving can be incorporated.
- Belize is one of the strongest shallow water flats fishery on earth, and on the days when you "hit it right," it is unforgettable, whether it's tarpon, permit, bonefish, snook, or the multitude of other species ranging from cobia to jacks, cuda, etc.


Permit

Your mothership, the Rising Tide, comes with an experienced captain (who doubles as the head guide) and the steward/cook who basically spends the day doing the housekeeping and preparing meals to meet the fishing schedule.

AN ENVIRONMENT FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS



Since there is no one else on board but the people you bring with you (and the crew), the nature of this trip is such that it is a great experience for small groups of friends and family that enjoy spending time together. John Bobbitt (left) and sons, Mike and Sean and friends, have completed six Belize mothership trips. John does an excellent job of capturing the appeal of this adventure with the following excerpts from a report he wrote for the Angling Report:

"This was the sixth year that two of my sons and I fished Belize using the Belize mothership as our base. In the early years, we took the standard 7 night trip, but we've

elected to go for 10 days the last two years because we enjoy it so much. The crew make you very welcome and work very hard to make sure you are comfortable, well fed, and on to fish. Excellent guides. On the average day, you are in the skiffs fishing the flats for at least 10-11 hours starting at 6:00am and continuing, with meal breaks, to dark or sometimes later. Although there are destinations where you can catch more of a specific species (usually bonefish), there are very few places you can go for the diversity of species that can be found in the coastal waters of Belize. I have never found a better value."

Their last trip had a few days of uncooperative weather, as most tropical trips do. However, they did manage to jump several tarpon up to 130#, took lots of snook to 16#, bonefish, and three permit. The permit included Mike's 2nd and 3rd and John's 4th.

THE BOAT – YOUR FLOATING LODGE



THE *RISING TIDE*

The "top of the line" mothership (at left) available in Belize definitely qualifies for the term "yacht." The same experienced crew that clients have enjoyed will be operating it.

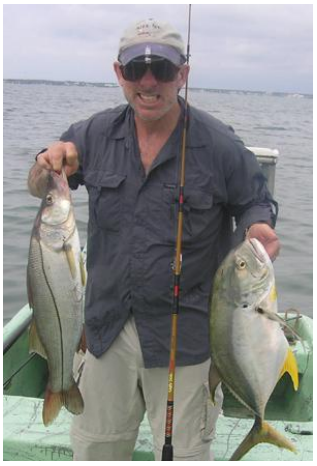
Features of the *Rising Tide:*

- **Will sleep 2 to 6 guests in three staterooms.**
- **3 bathrooms, each with hot and cold water shower (tub in Master stateroom).**
- **Master stateroom has queen bed (below left).**
- **Upgraded air conditioning throughout the spacious living (below, right-middle) and dining areas.**
- **Quality furniture and fixtures**
- **built-in entertainment center with a color TV, VCR, stereo system, cassette deck and CD Changer.**
- **Horizon VHF and GPS unit.**
- **Engines are twin Detroit Diesel 8V92TI - 650 Horsepower each.**
- **Kohler 20 Kw generator with sound shield for quiet operation, and a backup generator.**





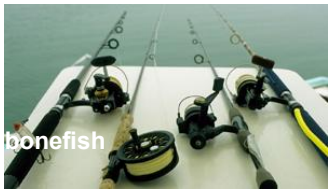

GETTING STARTED ON THE SALT WATER FLATS



Learning to handle the challenges of fishing the salt water flats with a fly rod is an issue all beginners have to deal with. Jim Hine, on his first ever salt water flats trip, took exactly the right approach in getting acquainted with the excitement of fishing the flats. Jim brought with him spinning rods along with a few fly rods. He used the fly rod for bonefish and caught his first bonefish on a fly (got 10 bones). He dappled with fly rods in other situations, but, when necessary, retreated to the spinning rod to avoid frustration.



He was able to jump his first tarpon on a fly – actually had three tarpon on with one cast as another fish picked up the fly after it came free from the tarpon in front of him. All three made their freedom earlier than desired. Jim did jump two tarpon in the 80# range, but couldn't hold onto them (he did comment that those two bruisers left him with "two sets of soiled underwear.") However, he did land one 40# fish with the spinning rod.



Jim's trip comments: "You got us hooked on the Belize mothership drug! We had a great trip. Lots of snook (best take of the trip was a 10 pounder on topwater popper), jacks, barracuda, ladyfish in addition to tarpon and bonefish. Most enjoyable. We'll be back."

Pictured is the rod selection we (my son Scott and I) used on our first Belize mothership trips in the mid-80's. An 8 wt. fly rod for bonefish coupled with a light, medium, and heavy spin rod. As our fly casting skills developed over the years, we dropped spinning rods one at a time and added fly rods.

"BELIZE INVITATIONAL FLYFISHING TOURNAMENT"



For their first few years on a Belize mothership, William Owens and friends were a party of four. That has now grown to a party of six. They have created a fun program to add some extra excitement to the trip and make every fish count, even the occasional small jack or snapper. It's their annual "Belize Invitational Flyfishing Tournament," complete with a rotating trophy and cash prize money from a pot generated by the group. Point values are awarded to each species – for example, a Tarpon jumped is worth 50 (125 if he's landed), Permit 200, Bonefish 50, Snook 100, Cuda 5, Jack 5. They have a set of rules that have evolved over the last few years and William has given us permission to share their experience with anyone who would like to see their guidelines.



This year's tournament winner was Jeff Aldridge, pictured with one of his winning permit. Jeff took two permit with the deciding fish on the last day. These were his second and third career permit. The group had not yet forgiven Jeff for catching the first permit he ever saw on his first cast during his first day EVER fishing the salt water flats two years ago…and now they have to live with him holding the tournament trophy, at least for another year.

PERMIT EXPRESS – BELIZE CITY TO PLACENCIA



For the avid permit fisherman, there is no place on earth where as many shots at permit can be obtained as the flats inside the barrier reef between Belize City and Placencia. Permit specialists Art Hinckley (at left, who at last count has released over 110 permit), Dennis Banks, and friends have annually chartered the Rising Tide for more than ten years. They motor south from Belize City and usually take trips of 10 or 11 nights. They access these "world class" permit flats and return to Belize City at the conclusion of their trip. It was largely due to this group's "permit pioneering" that Belize Fishing Adventures created the dedicated permit trip in 2005.



This permit adventure now has the trip beginning and finishing in Belize City, meandering south, visiting all the legendary permit flats. While these areas provide numbers of shots at tailing permit, there is not much action for other species – this is trip for permit addicts!



This "permit express," has provided lots of permit shots. To maximize this opportunity requires patience, diligence, skills, and some would say foolishness to be dedicated enough to be known as "permit fisherman." In my 30 years of pursuing this finicky and ultimate fly rod trophy, one of the finest permit days I know of was had by Pat March on the flats near Sand Fly and Mosquito Cays. Pat was on his second dedicated permit trip with partner, Marc Dollahite. The previous year, on their first trip, Marc had released his first permit and Pat, while he had many shots, did not get a fish to the boat. However, this trip was to be different. On this particular day, on flats about half way between Belize City and Placencia, Pat was to get shots at only four permit. He took five casts to those four fish, had all four of them eat, and got three of them to the boat. Each fish weighed between 12 and 13 pounds, virtually the same size. The fourth and last fish to eat that day was lost due to a frayed leader. In the excitement of the day, no one thought to double check the leader which had taken a beating with the long



runs of the three previous fish (Pat at right with one of those fish). For those of us who have been ignored by 20 or 25 permit during the course of a single day, this day is almost unbelievable.

For the fly rodder, the permit provides the finest, most challenging, stalking and hunting experience. Seeing that big black tail pop up in two feet of gin clear water is a sight that provides a rush of anticipation unique in the realm of fly fishing. Note: the big tail in photo above is attached to a 30+ pound permit.

QUIPS AND QUOTES AND UNIQUE FIRST TIME EVENTS

Over the years, many great stories and photos have been submitted for our newsletters. Below are photos and reports on some of those memorable events.

First time that:

- **Captured a grand slam (permit, bonefish, and tarpon) on their first ever saltwater trip – Schuyler Marshall. (below left)**
- **Someone hooked and landed the first tarpon they ever saw on the shallow white sand flats of "Miami Beach" on the first day of their first ever salt water flats trip – Tony Brookfield and his 40# tarpon. (below left center)**
- **It seems that there have been a lot of last day IGFA grand slams….virtually on the way to the airport. Three trips (that I know of) in the last year finished with grand slams on the last morning. Bill Pitman didn't complete a slam, but 7 bonefish and two tarpon on the last morning can send you home with a smile on your face! (below right center)**
- **Witnessed and photographed by Mike Bertoldi – a large hammerhead shark venturing onto a shallow permit flat near Placencia, attacking and eating a spotted eagle ray. (below right)**






- **How 'bout one tarpon breaking 3 fly rods worth over $1500 in less than 2 seconds – Gary Bulla decided to bring his 60+ pound fish into the boat for photos….and lost control. Not surprising! (below left)**
- **Gary's partner, Marshall Bissett, had a day with 8 baby tarpon released. (below right center)**
- **Tom Brutsche, on his annual mothership trip, actually jumped five big tarpon in the 80-100# range on one cast. As one fish threw the fly, another picked it up – there was a giant school of big fish – five times! Tom also hooked and fought for 1 hour and 20 minutes his largest tarpon ever, a fish of over 120 pounds, before losing it. This salt water veteran commented, "some fish aren't meant to be landed."**
- **With Tom in April, Ron Knowles captured his first tarpon, a 50 pound fish, and Lee Lewis took his first permit (below right), always a memorable moment.**






- **Mike Phelps, who took his first grand slam two years ago. He and his father-in-law, Tom, and had their usual collection of bonefish, jacks, barracuda, snapper, and 12 tarpon jumped.**

- **Bob Cazort, the ongoing mangrove champion, had two trips this summer with a two trip total of over 110 tarpon (mostly "babies") jumped and 30 landed along with numerous snook, snapper, and jacks.**

THE 20+ POUND SNOOK



For years, snook up to 6, 7, and 8 pounds were often taken on a fly from the mangrove edges in Belize. However, for years, the 10+ pound fish on a fly had been elusive. That changed about ten years ago when our son, Scott, took the fish that's stalking his fly in the photo at left. The fish jumped the floating fly right at his rod tip after following it for 50 feet. The fish was weighed at 10.5#, our first 10 pounder on a fly. This fish was part of a frantic few hours of snook fishing where 14 fish were released. Shortly after that, Sean Bobbitt took a 16 pounder on a fy. Most snook are hooked sight-casting on the surface with either a popper or floater/diver Dahlberg-type tie.



In the last few years, we've had at least three 20+ pound snook hooked up on a fly; however, none of them reached the net. Holding on to a large snook with a fly rod on the edge of the mangrove roots is a great challenge. My recent experience with a giant of well over 20 pounds is typical. This fish was hooked and on for about 10 minutes. Then he separated my level 40# leader right at the edge of the mangroves as I completely put the brakes on him, attempting to keep him out of the roots. He had attacked a floater/diver fly within 5 feet of our skiff after stalking it all the way from the mangrove edge so we had a good look at him. Immense fish and a great thrill.

Either phone or drop us an e-mail if you have questions or would like more information about any of our destinations.

An enthusiastic traveling fly fisherman,
Don Muelrath
Fly Fishing Adventures
www.flyfishingadventures.org

888-347-4896
flyfish@napanet.net