

CROCODILE BAY TRIP REPORT

Weather and timing note: we were about a month before the “dry season” begins, but had a week free and wanted to check out Crocodile Bay.

First week in Dec, '03

Arrived in San Jose (10:30am flight out of SFO connecting in Dallas and arrived SJ at 9:00pm). Stayed at the Herradura Hotel – www.hotelherradura.com.

Exchanged dollars for colones at exchange booth at Dallas airport at rate of 390 colones to \$1 US.

Mon – 10:00 am flight on Nature Air (pd 180 for overweight of 25#pp). 50 minute flight to Puerto Jimenez on the Osa Peninsula – Golfo Dulce, just north of the Panama border.

Rainy season just ending (early to mid-Dec) and summer lasts til end of April. Turned out that the rainy season lasted through our week as we saw very little of the “blue-bird” skies that are prevalent in the summer. Crocodile Bay Lodge fabulous property – can’t do any better in the tropics. Rooms spacious, whirlpool tub, two queens, and A/C with remote operation that works. Has 7 quad units and three 3-bedroom homes on the property – can host 80. Conference center for 80. Butterfly farm and crocodiles on property. Everything works at CB – top quality equip from fishing equipment to boats and vehicles. Most important, the people – never met a group at a tropical lodge so accommodating including the maintenance people, waitresses, guides, eco-tour leaders – just everybody.

Tides are 8 – 10 feet greatly affecting the shoreline and river fishery – makes it very different from the Caribbean side – probably also explains the absence of coral reefs??

Offshore fishery for sails one of world’s best – large average size of 90-100#. Also excellent for tuna, marlin and dorado during right times.

Saw lots of surfers – world class surfing at entrance to bay, second longest “left break” in the world.

Our guide, Alan, is from the USA and a talented fly fisherman and fly fishing guide. Enjoyed our time with him.

Equipment – Have fly rods/reels and spin eq for use from 8 wts up. Have 5 flats skiffs and three inshore boats like Alan’s center console – can’t see any advantage to using a flats skiff over the center console – more options with the cc.

Tues – Marte went snorkeling with Johnny and Wilbur from 7:00am to 2:00pm. Bob and I started casting over rocky reefs – had some follows but nothing. Bob tried trolling live sardines on rocky south point at opening of bay and I did some casting with poppers. Had a take from a skip jack, but no hook-up – was slow. Moved outside and found roosters near beach – released four 6-8#. Bob had one about 20 pounds that broke off on motor. Rain moved in and ended day about 2:00.

Met Craig and Susie. Real excited about their three days fishing. First day, landed two sails over 100#, second day three sails about the same, and third day a 230# marlin plus another 8 species including a 20+ pound rooster. Got me thinking that maybe I should go offshore and try to get a sail on a fly.

Wed – Marte slept in. Bob and I fished again with Alan. Started off casting small bait fish imitation to black skip jack tuna boiling on the surface chasing bait. Lots of big schools crashing the surface – very cool. Released four about 3# each – very tough fish for the size. Could have caught more, but moved across the bay to work a shoreline. Tide was slack and we pounded the shoreline for over an hour without seeing a fish. Then I took a small mangrove snapper on a blue and white clouser. Soon after, we found a school of jacks crashing bait and I hooked a 6# Golden Trevally on a chartreuse and white clouser – strong fish and

beautiful while in the water, lost some of his golden hue on body and fins as soon as removed. On way back to dock, found a school of about 50 dolphin playing all about the boat. Dropped me at the dock at noon so I could have lunch with Marte and spend the afternoon doing a eco-tour of the primary rain forest. Within 10 minutes of dropping me, Alan and Bob found big roosters crashing bait. First they spent 40 minutes landing a 30# on light tackle and then had a double on. One broke off, but landed another 30# with a 40 minute struggle.

We did tour with Johnny as our guide and Marcello as our driver. Saw monkeys, sloth, coon-type critter, birds, turkey, etc. Hiked up small creek looking to photo the Poison Dart Frog, but couldn't find him.

Wound up evening as usual with a few drinks, a good dinner, and early to bed.

Thurs – took Striker 33 outside to try and get a sail on a fly - with Eduardo and Leandro (with Alan). Saw pilot whales, dolphins, and three turtles. Had five dorado and four sails (one double) rise to our trolled baits. Hooked and released a 25# dorado. Hooked two sails – one broke off and the other had the hook pull. All hook-ups on the fly with a 14 wt rod and Teeney 500.

Fri – All day tough – got two small groupers on b/w deceiver – trolled live blue runners, even chummed and couldn't make anything happen?????? Most exciting aspect of the day was watching a 15# rooster chase bait fish on the surface in a small cove while we were eating lunch – he was gone by time I got line stripped out. Roosters chasing on the surface is a great sight and I can now understand why Bob was so thrilled by the sight of 40 or 50 big roosters on surface Wed – great stuff

Regular schedule – breakfast between 6 and 7, lunch at noon, cocktails and horsd'eouvres 5 – 6:30 followed by dinner. Drinks are part of the package as long as it's Costa R stuff – call drinks are paid for independently.

Sat – started looking for black skip jacks for special photo – fun chasing them on the surface. Great sport on 8 wt – need to be able to make 50-60 foot cast quickly. Released at least four of them and took lots of photos, but don't know if we got the one we wanted. Took 40# rooster drifting live bait – strong fish, real bulldog. Came in at 11:30 to clean up and have lunch and meet Johnny for kayak trip up the river. Wendy took 4 roosters to 50#.

Did mangrove kayak trip up the river – trolled my fly. Am becoming a very good troller!!!! After kayak trip, spent two hours shooting photos of butterflys in the butterfly farm.

Todd, the fishing manager, persuaded us over dinner that we should get a sail on a fly before we left and offered one of the Strike 33's for us to use our last day

Sun – Rained all night and the morning looked gray and breezy. Hesitated going offshore, but decided to give it a try since it was our last day and I was somewhat encouraged by the "formula" we used Thurs to help me deal with my motion sickness (take a pill before bed, another first thing in the morning, and have marinated ginger to eat whenever feeling quezy – those three things coupled with not looking down very often made it work better than anything I've ever tried).

Weather continued bad and the seas were very rough. Couldn't raise a sail or a dorado – did find big schools of skip jack tuna on the surface and took an 7 pounder on a chartruse and white clouser – great fish on a 9 wt. Could have taken many more, but didn't want to take the time as I was looking for a sail.

Decided to come in early and stopped at mouth of the bay to drift some live bait. Took a 50# Rooster on heavy tackle. Great fish.

In retrospect, the time we spent trolling live bait for roosters was as productive as fishing can be. Two hours on Tuesday produced 4 schoolies (6-8 #) on fly rod poppers – most of that two hours was spent fighting

fish. Wed, ten minutes with baits in the water and over an hour fighting and landing the two 30 #. Fri, I was in the water for about 20 minutes before hooking and releasing a 40# fish. Sat, on way in from offshore fishing for sails, trolled about 15 minutes before hooking and releasing a 50#+ after about 30 minute struggle. Roughly, two hours of total time trolling for roosters and over three hours of time fighting and releasing the fish caught from those two hours. Can't imagine it's always that productive, but it was on our trip.

Met four guys who come down each year from Florida to fish sails. With two boats, they raised 23 fish in the previous two days and released over a dozen sails taken on flys between 90 and 120 #.

By Don Meulrath