

I love fishing in Belize for Permit as well as Tarpon and Bonefish. When I learned of this opportunity to fish from a mother ship and move through the islands in Belize, I pursued the opportunity vigorously.

Don Muelrath, of Fly Fishing Adventures, represents the Rising Tide, a 58 foot Hatteras and the Meca, a homemade 38 foot boat that seems like more than 38 feet. The Rising Tide has three staterooms and accommodates up to six anglers and the Meca has two staterooms and can accommodate up to four. I was looking for a partner to share a Belize mothership trip and Don connected me with another fisherman, Rod. Rod and I both like fishing single with our own guide and getting all the "shots" so that is what we arranged.

Since it was just the two of us, we chose to go on the Meca. The Meca is very comfortable and suits all your needs. Each stateroom has two single beds and a full bathroom. The room also has small dressers, places to hang clothes and plenty of room. There is also a dining-kitchen area as well as a small parlor with dvd movies etc. Surprisingly, there is lots of room.

On our trip there were four crew---Dean was the captain as well one of the guides. Edward was the other guide. Generally, Edward is the captain of the Meca while Dean captains the Rising Tide. Dean's wife Georgia and Nikki were our cooks/housekeepers.

Logistics are usually very simple as there are flights of under three hours to Belize City from many US cities. After you clear customs in Belize City, you are met and, within fifteen minutes, transferred to your mothership. However, in our case, both of our flights were late. Rod's flight was several hours late due to fog in Houston so our trip got off to a late start.

The fishing is focused on the shallow flats around the Belize keys that stretch the full length of Belize, inside the shelter of the world's second largest barrier reef. Dean can fish north of Belize City into Chetumal Bay to about 40 miles south of the city on a one week trip. With trips longer than seven nights, the mothership can explore more waters. The trips can be customized according to the anglers' preferences. Species preference is always a consideration. Also available is a choice of fishing environments that include shallow flats, mangrove lagoons and edges, jungle rivers, and the reef system.

Most of our trip was fishing the many flats near the Belize keys. We also fished along one main north-south channel where large Tarpon migrate each year during the summer months. We did not see many of the large Tarpon on our trip, however, the guides said that had seen Tarpon in that channel the week prior to our trip.

Dean recommends a ten weight for the Permit and an eleven or twelve weight for the Tarpon. I fished with a nine weight for the Permit and it worked fine. Of course, when fishing the saltwater flats, coastal wind is usually present. One day the winds got to 25 knots, but overall the wind was not much of a factor.

They recommend an eight weight for the Bonefish. We didn't really fish for Bonefish much at all. We saw a few including one very large school on one flat. I did hook one Bonefish on a Permit crab fly on my second cast of the trip.

The guides prefer Raghead crab patterns that are specially tied with light eyes to allow the flies to sink slowly over the Turtle grass. I had one fly that seemed to work well (two eats), but the Permit used their "crushers" to bend the hook while obtaining their freedom. Great fly with cheap, bad hooks.

Don Muelrath provides a very good tackle list that describes the appropriate equipment, including the best flies, etc. He has fished on mother ships in Belize for thirty years and knows the operation and Belize very well.

Don tells me that anglers choose whether they want to focus on Tarpon, Bonefish, Snook, or Permit or a combination on any trip depending on the client's desire. Of course, catching a Permit or Tarpon is never easy and if you focus on them, this is not a trip for an angler who is interested in large numbers of fish. However, if you are a fishing addict, this trip might just work for you. You get a lot of hours on the water during a three-shift fishing day, from dawn to dusk and sometimes later. Meals are prepared around the fishing schedule rather than the other way around, like most lodge operations which have a pre-set meal schedule.

The skiffs are 23 foot pangas with raised decks in the bow. They also have aluminum "leaning posts" on the casting deck to aid those like me that don't have perfect balance. That leaning posts take the weight off your legs and makes the long fishing day as comfortable as possible.

Both guides were very good at poling the boat, staying in the right locations, and setting up the best cast for each angler. Details on both the Rising Tide and Meca can be found on the website www.flyfishbelize.com

Our fishing shifts provided different levels of activity and excitement. Sometimes, we wouldn't find fish during a specific shift and, other times, the activity was "world class." On our trip, it was the permit that supplied the most activity. A good example of a typical day was our first day.

Our first day taught us what was meant by three fishing "sessions". We began the day around 6:00am looking for rolling tarpon in a certain channel where they often can be found early and late. We tried some blind casting - no luck and we didn't see any fish. Then back to the Meca for a fantastic breakfast.

After breakfast, we focused on looking for Permit and didn't find any. Back to the boat for a great lunch (meals were a highlight!).

Then we were back on the water for the incoming tide. Dean immediately saw tailing Permit. On my first cast I was hooked up. We got the fish back to within 30 feet and it broke off. Dean thought it was because the fish dragged the line across some coral and it finally broke. Soon after, I saw some tails and cast. We decided these were Bonefish. I got a strike immediately. My first two casts and I had two fish eat! We spent the rest of that afternoon and early evening getting many shots at Permit.....it was amazing, seeing that many tailing fish!

We stayed in this area for one more day before moving the Meca south to a new anchorage. We had a few more tailing Permit shots where we had found fish the day before. On my last cast of the day, after missing on opportunities to get a decent cast to some tailing fish, I hooked up and landed a five pound Permit. A great ending to that day.

Over the next four days, we moved south to two different anchorages. We found new flats to fish as we moved. After our first move south, we saw no other anglers. There were many islands, many of them having some inhabitants as care takers or commercial lobster fishermen, but no other recreational fishermen.

We learned the downside of finding a school of up to 100 Permit, which twice we encountered. Unfortunately, with schools that size any little thing can spook the entire school and that is what happened to us.

We had one day when the weather was basically ugly with 25 knot winds in the morning with rain squalls. The raincoats were necessary whenever we moved and there were times we got soaked. However, I did manage one permit eat on this cloudy day – it was one of the fish who crushed my fly!

One “non-Permit” highlight – on our fifth day, Dean took me to a mangrove key with several beautiful mangrove creeks and a sheltered large lagoon on the inside. We found small pods of 15-20 pound tarpon rolling and splashing. Using a black and purple tarpon fly, we “jumped” four of these tarpon and landed two.

Since my flight out on our last day wasn't until 4:00, we fished around the city. We found a few tailing Permit (no luck) and released one snook.

We heard the record number of permit released from a Belize mothership trip was 23 fish. While our results certainly weren't in that arena on our first trip ever, I did get a solid 35 to 50 shots at Permit and had five fish eat my crab pattern with one of them to the boat. Two hooks let me down or maybe we would have landed another fish or two. Get flies tied tightly on good hooks! The size of the Permit we saw ranged from 5 to 25 pounds.

Price for a seven night Belize mothership trip can vary from \$3,000 to \$5,000 depending on the number in your group and which boat you use. The cost for our trip was just over \$4,300 based on a single room and a single angler per skiff.

Would I go back? I am hoping to go back in 2017. I still need between one and four anglers to join me. Please e-mail me at don@mountainpacificre.com if you might have an interest in fishing for Permit in Belize next year.

(Questions and bookings for the Rising Tide and the Meca are handled by Don Muelrath at Fly Fishing Adventures – 888-347-4896. E-mail is flyfish@napanet.net. Website www.flyfishingadventures.org)