

# TUNA ON A FLY

## CALAFORNIA BAJA MEXICO-A FLYFISHERS DREAM

Some of the most exciting fishing in the world can be had on the California Baja, a 600-mile strip of land extending south from California U.S.A. On one side is the Pacific Ocean and on the other the Sea of Cortez. It is a part of Mexico as was once California until the battle of Alamo.



My first Yellow Fin Tuna-14lb

The sea is alive with game fish that are intent on fighting and if there is saltwater fly fishing in heaven then I imagine this is what it would be like. Most of the tuna family live there plus other species such as Dora do [bars of gold that light up] roosterfish with their extending dorsal fins resembling a cockerel's tail, jack crevalle that duck and dive, sailfish with their large dorsal fin, plus many other species.



Brian Horsley a well respected skipper from South Carolina with a good sized jack crevalle 18lb



A 25lb Dorado gave Ross a good tussle for 20 mins on a 10wt rod.

All the fish are tremendously fast and strong and in particular the tunas and the large dorado. Its not uncommon for the backing to almost run out on the first run, it's not for the feint hearted.

The sea of Cortez [named after a famous Spanish explorer] is an almost enclosed sea and because it is very warm it is an ideal environment for breeding fish, from tiny sprats to marlin and even whales. Not that I would suggest catching a whale on a fly rod even though it feels like it when into decent tuna.



Roosterfish with fins displayed

It is one of the few places in the world where you can predictably fish saltwater species with confidence. The method employed is quite simple and perfected by the Mexican fishermen. They take you out sea in a Panga [small fishing boat] and literally throw handfuls of small live bait into the clear blue water and wait for the fish to find them. The water may be a thousand feet deep but its not long before fish come to feed. It is just a matter of casting to the feeding fish with a good fly and retrieving like mad. There is no need to cast long distances but sinking and intermediate lines are the order of the day. When you get a take just hold on and make sure you clear the fly line from any obstacles especially your feet otherwise they will be going through the rod rings. It is advisable to be bare footed in order to feel the line beneath your feet; you don't get a second chance with these fish.

Not only is the scenery spectacular and dramatic but also the food is something to savour especially Mexican style dorado or yellowfin tuna sushi style with soy sauce. To add to this the sun shines all day an often reaches 90deg f.

A typical day starts with breakfast at 5 am [this is not a problem for the Brits due to the time difference] a ride to Punta Arena and arrive just as the sun starts to rise- that in itself is spectacular to see the turquoise and blood red sky. We meet the captains on the beach next to their boats parked on the sand. The boats are basically a 'V' hull with a flat bottom and powered by an outboard. The front has a casting deck commonly known as the diving board for obvious reasons and a 1/3 of the way along is a bait well. At the rear of the boat is a clear area at about sea level for the second angler. Casting never seemed to be a problem because the fish appear at either side of the boat. The advantage of being on the diving board is that you can see the fish easier but you may take a premature bath or do the Mexican fandango. The flat bottom hull serves two purposes, one is that there is nothing to catch or cut your fly line and secondly the boat can be beached, this is done at high speed and makes Disney rides seam tame.



Two to a boat Rooster fishing near the shore

The days fishing starts with everybody helping to launch the boats and within fifteen minutes we are near the fishing grounds. A boat full of baitfish awaits you and 20 dollars buys 3 buckets of bait. After motoring for a few more minutes we stop and the captain tosses handfuls of baitfish over the side of the boat in what appears a baron sea. Within minutes a few dorado turn up, bars gold circling the boat about 10ft down. A quick cast with an intermediate line, a few strips and bang fish on. Its hang on time whilst you guide the fly line through the rod rings and then watch your backing rapidly disappear, hopefully the fish stops and heads back towards you, in which case is reel like mad time, as soon as the fish gets close to the boat then the battle starts, moving the rod from side to side and turning the fishes head to wear it out. The closer the fish to the boat the harder it gets. The trick is to keep the rod tip in the water and pump only 6ins at a time; long lifts will double the fight time. But eventually the dorado comes to heal glowing like a neon bulb, truly a spectacular sight. A suitable rod for this type of fishing is a 10wt with a good quality reel and lots of backing [2-300 yds] an intermediate and a fast sinking line are what you need. It is possible to come in contact with bigger fish such as sailfish and big dorado in which case a 12wt rod is more suitable.



Selection of flies that worked. Black Green Tan with A White body were most effective colours



Loop connection gave the flies more action

After the dorado tuna usually turn up, they go down deep so fast sinking lines are employed and after catching 10 tuna in the 6 to 20lb range we are usually exhausted and out of fresh bait so we move off to the coastline to top up and catch roosterfish. They predominately feed on the surface and can be seen breaking the surface with there rooster fins as they chase their prey.



Catching bait fish with a casting net. -the secret to success

The captains throw out a casting net for bait in the shallows and then proceed to toss baitfish all around the boat, the water erupts as the roosters go on the feed. Its heart raising stuff and after a few casts into the boils a fish is on, although not big they have attitude and in the relatively shallow water race off in all directions. They average 4to6lbs but can reach 60lbs, what a fish that would be. Somebody caught a 50 pounder off the beach near to the fishing lodge. To finish the day jack crevalles are targeted in shallow water, which do off course fight like hell, again only small about 10lb still with attitude. Sometime small green jacks, needle fish [giant

gars] and skipjack tuna are mixed up with them all of them great fun on a fly rod. To add to the fun and games pelicans often spot the free bait and home in for a feed. Playing a fish through a flock of these birds is quite challenging. To wrap up the days fishing around lunchtime we are told to sit facing the engine whilst the captain revs up the outboard and launches the boat onto the beach, a fitting end to an exciting day. Some fish are retained and soon filleted by the captains; yellow fin tuna and dorado are the best eating. A quick ride to a local bar where a cool beer awaits. Finally it's a ride back to the lodge via the cactus-laden roads, just like the movies.



Rooms located in the gardens next  
To the beach



Jeff fly tying at the lodge

To add to this fishing Mecca is a really friendly lodge called Baja Joes and is run by Angie and Joe. Although layed back they run the lodge like clockwork, all your needs are catered for. The lodge is located right on a beautiful beach so you can swim, fish, walk, surf or even kite board, its all to be had. I used to like fishing as the sun set just before dinner. A communal table is where you dine which makes for a perfect end to the day. Talking about who caught what and reflecting on the days events plus a few tequilas. Bed is usually about ten. The rooms are air conditioned and quite basic which is ideal for anglers and all their gear and smelly clothes. All the food is cooked fresh each day and probably accounts for nobody falling ill-a common problem in hot climates.

This fantastic fishing does not happen by chance and is in fact organised by superb angler called Gary Bulla. After many years of research Garry discovered this place and now runs guided tours to Punta Arena. He is quite reasonable and only charge £800 for 6 days fishing which includes accommodation, all food, and all drinks except spirits, fishing 6 days and transport to and fro the lodge etc. Flights are not included and cost around £600.

For more information e-mail Gary Bulla - [gary@garybulla.com](mailto:gary@garybulla.com) or look at his website Gary Bulla Saltwater Fly fishing Adventures.