

# Intro To Saltwater Fly Fishing

By Craig Amacker

## I. Tackle

- a. Rods: 8 weight is the single must have. Top 3 weights are 8, 9, and 10.
  - i. 8-9 weight are for bonefish, permit, jacks, redfish, snook, baby tarpon.
  - ii. 10 weight is for permit, sharks, tarpon to 80 + lbs, big barracudas etc.
  - iii. 12 weight for tarpon over 100 lbs. 14 weight for Bluewater species.
- b. Reels: Corrosion proof Saltwater size reels with durable disc drags.
- c. Lines: Tropical saltwater tapers with stiff coatings and cores to withstand tropical heat.
- d. Leaders and tippet: Stiff abrasion resistant monofilament with fluorocarbon tippets in the 10-20 lb range. 60-80LB shock tippet with 20 lb class tippet for tarpon.
- e. Saltwater pliers and hook file
- f. Sling pack
- g. Good polarized sunglasses with copper or brown lenses.
- h. Good lightweight wading shoes to withstand coral and mangroves.

## II. Fish Species

- a. Bonefish(primary species in the tropics), permit, tarpon, barracuda, snook, redfish, and sea trout.
- b. Secondary species: Jacks(several species), snappers(several species), Spanish mackerel, and grunts.

## III. Flies

- a. General Purpose: Gotcha, Bonefish Junk, Clouser Deep Minnow etc.
- b. Specific imitations: crab patterns, bonefish bitters, baitfish patterns
- c. Key patterns: Gotcha, Bonefish Bitters, Turneffe Crab, Merkin Crab, Lefty's deceiver, Toad, Black Death, Big Eye Tarpon Fly Orange/Grizzly, Clouser Minnow(sz 2-6).

## IV. Rigging and Knots

- a. Most inshore species 10-16 lb tapered leader with 10-16 lb Fluorocarbon tippet.
- b. Baby Tarpon and Snook: Big Game leader with 20lb class tippet and 40 lb shock tippet.
- c. Big Tarpon: Big Game leader with 20 lb class tippet and 60-80 lb shock tippet.
- d. Sharks and Barracuda: 30 lb butt section with 30lb wire tippet.
- e. Backing to fly line and fly line to leader connections are loop to loop.
- f. Leader to tippet connections are surgeons knot, blood knot, spider hitch, or Bimini Twist.

## V. Guides and Lodges

- a. Choosing a lodge: Book with an established and trusted outfitting operation, ask for client references, ask when the best time to fish there is, ask if the lodge/fishing is beginner friendly, and ask if the guides speak English. Ask for a thorough pre trip packing list so you arrive with the right equipment and flies.

- b. Choosing a Guide: Same questions as you ask lodges, also do advanced research to ensure the guide is beginner friendly, has a good boat, and is established in the area. **The highest paid person in many of these areas is a Fishing Guide so everybody tries to be one-not all are created equal.**
- c. Use a reliable and established booking agent who has visited and fished the area you're going to several times. I've had good luck with the following agents: **Yellow Dog Fly Fishing Travel, Angling destinations, and Angler Adventures.** They have experienced staff, visit the destinations and lodges annually, have accurate pre-trip information/packing suggestions, provide honest information, and don't charge extra for their services.
- d. To find the best local guides at your destination, start with the conceiger at your hotel- they want repeat customers so they have a vested interest in setting you up with a quality guide. Also talk to the best tour operators-SCUBA, snorkeling, sailing, kayaking etc. Again they're well connected to the area, know the right people, and don't want bad press by sending you to a bad fishing guide.
- e. Lodges I've had good success with: **Tarpon Caye Lodge, Belize; Pesca Maya, Yucatan Peninsula Mexico; Andros Island Bonefish Club, Bahamas; Water Cay Lodge, Grand Bahama; El Pescador Lodge, Belize; Turneffe Flats Lodge, Belize.**
- f. Guides who are reliable; **Kingfisher Adventures, Placencia Belize; Tres Pescados, Ambergris Cay Belize; Pesca Maya-Day Trips from Cancun/Riveria Maya; Anglers Abroad, Cay Caulker Belize; Ricardo Mackey and Glister Wallace, Andros Island Bahamas.**

## VI. Skills to Learn

- a. Casting: Take a double haul lesson from a trusted fly shop and practice your casting 2 weeks before your trip. These have to be quick accurate casts because the fish move fast. It's very wide open and windy on the flats-conditions we're not used to up here.
- b. Spotting fish: these fish blend in well with their surroundings and are not easy to see or find for the neophyte. Learn to look thru the water. Look for wakes and fins on the surface. Invest in good quality polarized sunglasses-they're your underwater eyes.
- c. Communicate with your guide: if you can't see the fish say so, ask for direction on where the fish is in relation to the boat-point your rod. Same with any language-guides have their own lingo. Try to clear up misunderstandings right away, but be polite about it.
- d. Move slowly while wading and stop frequently to observe the water around you for signs of fish.
- e. Your first trip should be a fully guided week of fishing to move up the learning curve quicker. Don't try **DIY** trips without going on a few guide days first-it will just end in disappointment and frustration.