

Jeff Currier *global fly fishing*

Choosing a Saltwater Fly Fishing Destination

by Jeff Currier



Guide spots a bonefish for the angler

Choosing a saltwater fly fishing destination can be an overwhelming decision with so many options available. Whether you are new to the salt or a seasoned veteran, destination selection can be tricky. The best decisions are based on sound information from

experienced anglers, so contact us at the Jack Dennis Outdoor Shop and we will answer any questions you might have. In addition, we can provide you with the Frontiers Saltwater Fishing Newsletter that highlights over twenty locations with accommodations from around the world. The photos are stunning and you will find the descriptions are absolutely mouth watering.

With a taste of various saltwater destinations, you might inquire about specific recommendations. Naturally, we will have advice, but first we need to answer the basic questions. Is this your first crack at the sport? Do you want to catch a particular species? What time of year can you go? Do you want to do more than

just fish? How far can you travel and how much can you spend?

First Time in the Salt

Let's assume this is your first time fly fishing in saltwater, you are flexible with departure time and trip length and willing to spend up to \$4,000 for an all-inclusive trip. The primary goal is to enter this sport you've heard so much about, go somewhere fun and catch a few fish.

Although a variety of species are available to catch, we recommend a bonefishing trip to start. Bonefish live throughout the tropical waters of the world and are the perfect fish to make the transition from fresh to saltwater with a fly rod. On many levels bonefishing is much like trout fishing; each involves locating and stalking the fish by either boat or wading, and presenting the fly with an accurate and delicate cast. Best of all, bonefish can be taken on 7 to 9-weight rods, a rod many freshwater anglers already have.



Bonefish release

Now that we have decided upon a species to catch it will be necessary to find a suitable destination. Bonefish thrive in many places across the globe: the Florida Keys, Mexico, Belize, Honduras, Venezuela, Bahamas, Christmas Island and the Seychelles all provide great bonefishing opportunities. For a beginner, a place where bonefish are abundant and where guides speak English makes good sense. With these two criteria in mind, Belize is an excellent choice.

Belize is a small Central American country nestled south of Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula along the Caribbean Sea. The largest influence of the local economy

is tourism, and English is the national language. From the United States it is only a days flight away and home to fantastic weeklong fishing packages. Huge schools of bonefish thrive along the coastal waters and you can also cast to permit, tarpon, snook, barracuda, jack crevalle, snapper and grouper any time of year. Although Belize is a year round fishery, April through May and September through November provide the best fly fishing opportunities. The two leading outfits in Belize are the Turneffe Flats Lodge and the Belize River Lodge, both of which we highly recommend. Each furnishes superb accommodations and helpful guides, making either an excellent choice.



The Jack Crevalle is one of the most aggressive fish of the flats

Belize is a great place to start saltwater fly fishing outside the United States, but you can get started right here in the states. Whether you go for a couple days or a full week, our coasts offer great first-time saltwater fly fishing opportunities. For example, the Gulf Coast has excellent

redfishing from the Florida Everglades to south Texas. Redfish scour grassy flats and canal bottoms much like bonefish and have converted many freshwater anglers into saltwater enthusiasts.

The West Coast provides thousands of miles of surf, which harbors species like rock bass, surf perch, lingcod and many more that can be taken on a fly. Summer in the Northeast is prime time to cast to striped bass and bluefish and November in the Southeast provides the best false albacore fly fishing imaginable! The Florida Keys remain the most popular fishery, but it's not easy with a fly rod. However, excellent guides that cater to all skill levels can make

even a tough day on the flats an enjoyable learning experience.

Targeting Specific Fish

The ocean offers countless types of fish, so if you've already spent some time in the salt, then perhaps it's time to seek a particular species or maybe a trophy fish. Destination choices can be critical under these circumstances. For instance, do not travel to Venezuela to catch a roosterfish off the beach, or expect to hook a white marlin in Baja Mexico, they simply are not there. Although Belize is one of the finest places in the world for bonefish, if you're in search of a trophy, the Bahamas or the Florida Keys is a better choice.



An angler casts for Roosterfish in the Baja surf

The following list compiles ten popular saltwater fly rod species and some prime places to catch them. In some cases, a good place to catch a trophy is suggested.

Bonefish – Bonefish can be taken throughout the tropical flats of the world. Large numbers of bonefish are found in Belize, Yucatan Peninsula Mexico, Los Roques Venezuela, Bahamas, Christmas Island and the Seychelles. The Florida Keys produce more record size catches on the fly than anywhere else.

Permit – Permit flourish on the tropical flats of the Atlantic Ocean. Some favorite locations to fish are the Florida Keys, Belize, Yucatan Peninsula Mexico and the Bahamas. It's possible to catch a monster at any of these locations.

Tarpon – Tarpon are one of the ultimate fly rod gamefish. Homosassa Florida is a great place to fish for giants, but top action is found in the Florida Keys, Belize, Yucatan Peninsula Mexico, Venezuela and Costa Rica.

Snook – Snook are found along the Atlantic Coast from Florida to Brazil as well as random stretches along the Pacific Coast from Baja Mexico to Panama. The top locations to catch snook are the Florida Everglades, Belize, Yucatan Peninsula Mexico, Costa Rica, Honduras and Venezuela. Costa Rica has produced many true hawgs!



One of the many beautiful sunsets found in the tropics

Barracuda – The barracuda can be taken throughout the tropical waters of the world. Two excellent places to fish would be Belize or the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico.

Roosterfish – Roosterfish are plentiful in Baja Mexico, Costa Rica and

Panama. A trophy can be taken at any of these locations, though a trip to Cabo San Lucas in Baja Mexico will result in the ultimate roosterfish experience.

Dorado – Dorado are taken throughout the warm waters of the world. Baja Mexico, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Panama, Bahamas and even Florida are prime locations. Baja Mexico is hard to beat for fly rod success.

Pacific Sailfish – Pacific Sailfish of Central America are excellent fly rod quarry within close reach of the United States. Favorite destinations are Guatemala,

Costa Rica and Panama.

Redfish – The best redfishing is found here in the United States. Favorite spots are the Florida Everglades and Padre Island, Texas.

Striped Bass – Striped Bass are found seasonally along the East Coast. It's hard to beat fishing the surf off the New England Coast between the months of May and October.

Picking a Time to Go



A tailing Bonefish

Going south during the heart of winter to fish is a wonderful thing. All of our international saltwater destinations are tropical and fishable year round, but there are times of year that are better than others. For instance, although rainy seasons

and windy seasons may not affect fish, they can make it hard for guides to locate them, or in the case of wind, hinder your ability to cast. Believe it or not, you can also experience cold fronts during winter months at a tropical location. If eighties are normal temperatures, a drop to the sixties will change feeding habits of fish, pushing them off the flats and into deeper water. The last thing anybody wants is for poor weather conditions to turn an enjoyable fishing vacation into a frustrating nightmare. Following is a list of destinations and suggestions when and when not to go.

The Bahamas, Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, Belize and Los Roques Venezuela

During December through March, clear skies and abundant sunshine are normal at these destinations, but strong winds are prevalent too. It's also possible to meet up with a cold front, especially in the Bahamas. Although a slight hindrance to a fishing trip, a little wind should not deter a visit. For most of us, getting out of cold climates in January is a dream come true. Trips to Belize and the Yucatan during all three wintry months can result in some excellent fishing. Remember to be realistic, as you can whack yourself in the back of the head with a heavy crab pattern because of wind while wearing a fleece jacket because of the cold. April, May and June are the optimum months to fish. Although the wind blows some, it's no problem coping during these months. Expect all local species to be available at this time as well.

Expect a few rain showers anytime you visit the Caribbean, but in general, spring months provide mostly sunny days. June through September is the official rainy season of the Caribbean. Abundant rain doesn't sound like much fun, but if you feel the need to hook some tarpon, the rainy season is the time to go. A great time to travel to the Caribbean is October and November because it is the calmest time of year and the fish have seen little pressure since May. It is hurricane season however, and there's always a chance one could hit during your week, so check weather patterns well ahead of your departure time.

Guatemala, Costa Rica and Panama

If bluewater fishing the Pacific for tuna, dorado or billfish is what you're after, Guatemala, Costa Rica and Panama will send you spinning. Although some of these species are more prolific during particular months, all are available year round. For sailfish, May is prime at Panama's Tropic Star Lodge, while November in Guatemala can produce 30 sailfish in a day. If you're in search of a specific species, be sure to check in with us, but if catching fish is the main goal of your trip, simply pick a time that works for you.

Costa Rica offers incredible fishing for tarpon and snook along its Caribbean Coast. Both species can be taken all year, but January through June is best. Both Guatemala and Panama have tarpon and snook too, but Costa Rica has proven over time to be the best.

Baja Peninsula Mexico



The Bar Jack is one of the common catches of the flats

If fishing the surf is your main objective and any species is fair game, then you'll be delighted with fishing in southern Baja's Sea of Cortez where sierra mackerel, Pacific jack crevalle, snapper, grouper and roosterfish are abundant. Many anglers have caught their first roosterfish in Baja. Rocky points on the Pacific side are great places to hook up with California yellowtail, but be prepared for a good fight and good luck!

If tackling the bluewater is your goal, target April through November. December through March can be windy and cold fronts are not uncommon pushing pelagic fish south. If it's a specific species you're after, contact us about the best times to go.

Distant Waters

Christmas Island

No matter where international travel takes you, it's always exotic, but some are

more so than others. For example, Christmas Island, which is located 1200 miles south of Hawaii. Christmas is one of the worlds few destinations that has consistent great fishing every day of the year. The bonefishing is some of the worlds finest, offering plenty of fish between 2- and 6-pounds. All bonefishing is done by wading some of the most vast and beautiful flats in the world.

Trevally, the most ferocious members of the jack family, also patrol the flats. Bluefin trevally, which average 8lbs, make for some of the most exciting popper fishing of all. Giant white and black trevally up to 90lbs can appear at any time and are known to smash poppers and steal entire reel spools of fly line and backing.

Seychelles

The Seychelles, a recently discovered vacation spot has topped the conversation list among seasoned saltwater anglers. This island nation is located in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Africa and being



Jeff poses with a 120 pound Sailfish from Guatemala

new on the long list of destinations, few anglers

have been. Those that have, claim they have experienced the standard by which all other bonefish destinations should be judged. Not only is the bonefishing spectacular, but hordes of trevally cruise the flats along with one of the most prized flats quarry: the milkfish. Add in fabulous bluewater fishing for tuna, wahoo and billfish and this could be saltwater fly fishing Mecca!

Mixing Fishing with Other Activities

A common inquiry in the early stages of organizing a saltwater trip is, “If I want to take a day off from fishing, what can I do?” This is an excellent question and an important one to ask because many fishing lodges are on islands or in remote locations, where getting away for the day is impossible. If snorkeling and relaxing on the beach is the alternative, then most places discussed will work fine. For shopping, hiking or sight seeing, being at the right place is a must for a successful vacation. Once again, Belize tops the list.

Belize River Lodge is located on the mainland of Belize and is only fifteen minutes from Belize City. Although close to the city, the lodge is hidden in the jungle outskirts of town on the banks of the Belize River. Day trips to the jungle, Mayan ruins or shopping are within two hours and can be arranged as part of a fishing package. The Belize River Lodge is on a river, so there isn't beach access out the door, but it's just a short run to the ocean and easy to get in some snorkeling for the day.

Turneffe Islands are another great place to fish in Belize. Turneffe Flats Lodge is nestled on the northern end of these remote islands and you can cast to bonefish and permit from the lodge's deck. Once you are there, returning to the mainland is not possible with the exception of an emergency. However, the snorkeling is outstanding and it's literally out the front door of your cabin. Many folks spend the week at Turneffe fishing, and finish their vacation on the mainland of Belize enjoying the sites.

With so many great places and so little time, deciding where to go will always be tough. When you look at it from the outside, it's not a bad problem to have. Fortunately, when you have answers to the questions asked in the beginning, the decision becomes far easier. And remember, there is the age-old way to target a vacation spot, spin a globe and go where your finger lands.

Jeff Currier is the manager of the Jack Dennis Fly Shop and has over twenty years of saltwater fly fishing experience over five continents. He is the author of the best-selling book, 'Currier's Quick and Easy Guide to Saltwater Fly Fishing' that will soon be in its fourth printing.