

PLACES

By Capt. Peter B. Wright

HOT SPOTS
BORN AFTER MARLIN

► **ONE ANGLER'S NEW HOT SPOT IS USUALLY SOME OLD TIMER'S FAVORITE FISHING HOLE.** Rarely does a brand-new, heretofore totally unknown location burst upon the world angling scene and become accessible to large numbers of globe-trotting anglers and their crews.

In my attempt to highlight world-class billfish spots, I stuck to places offering exceptional fishing and fairly easy access — and none of them were well known when the first issue of *Marlin* appeared on the newsstand.

A few great spots opened up during *Marlin's* 30 years and prospered for a while, but then faded away. Most of them for political reasons — Venezuela, for example — rather than lack of fish. This isn't a complete list of good spots, but a partial list of great spots to hit right now — and all of them were barely on any fisherman's radar in 1981.

BOM BOM ISLAND

The little country of São Tomé and Príncipe lies almost exactly at a location that's magical to any seaman and navigator: 0,0. As in zero latitude and zero longitude. It straddles both the equator and the prime meridian. (I had to go there, didn't I?) Oh — and there's good blue marlin action.



Bom Bom itself is a tiny island separated slightly from the larger island of Príncipe by a small cut that dries at low tide. A footbridge connects Bom

Bom to the main resort, a restaurant and a tiny casino on the much larger Príncipe Island.

I was told that South African industrialists built the place as an emergency escape should things become totally crazy on the African mainland. There were a few small, reasonably equipped boats when I visited, and decent to good marlin fishing. Walking the romantically lit footbridge home to my comfortable room made me wish I could show it to my wife.

COSTA RICA - PACIFIC

Pioneering gringos like Rick Defeo first told me about incredible billfish action in C.R. in the '70s, and a few wide-ranging Californians made the trip before any decent boats or infrastructure became available. A handful of locals and expat Yankees were there well before *Marlin* ever hit the presses.

However, over the last 20 or so years, the place exploded, and there are new marinas with first-rate boats, golf courses, hotels, condos and night life that can make you forget that you are not in Florida or California, if that is your cup of tea.

You can also find delightful smaller operations, where you don't have to constantly dodge other boats and you can still hear howler monkeys roaring as the sun rises and sets. Costa Rica provides superb fishing action for multiple species, both inshore and offshore, with winter and spring being the best times to visit when targeting billfish.



GUATEMALA

By now, just about everyone has heard about the sailfish bite off the Pacific coast of Guatemala. Anglers who make the short flight down from the States enjoy ridiculous numbers of sailfish bites, and at times the blue marlin action is exceptional. It's a fabulous place to take new anglers, especially children.



I'd heard stories from locals who came over and fished with me in Cairns, Australia, early on, but Tim Choate made Guatemala famous when he opened up Fins and Feathers lodge around 1992. Another lodge, Casa Vieja, which is owned by Jim Turner, also provides excellent accommodations and top-notch boats and crew, cementing Guatemala as a top-of-the-line fishing destination.

► For Pete's list of charter operators and best seasons for each spot, visit marlinmag.com/30thhotspots. He also has a couple of runners-up for you to check out.

ISLA MUJERES, MEXICO

During the 1970s, several boats from Florida and Texas discovered the tremendous spring sailfish action in the Yucatan Channel. They racked up big numbers of sail releases fishing out of Cozumel, but also got into some very good marlin action as well. Fishing was so good that I traveled there to get lots of bites and get statistically significant data on how soft lures would work.

Now Cozumel caters to cruise ships and divers,

and the buzz is all about Isla Mujeres. A few Texans started going to the tiny island in the early 1980s, and the rest is history. If you want to catch an Atlantic sail on a fly rod or post a huge number of releases, this is the place. The picturesque little village hosts a slew of restaurants and all classes of rooms for hire. Snorkeling, diving and flats-fishing are all excellent as well.



MADEIRA

Even if the fishing runs cold the week you happen to visit Madeira, your wife will still butter you up for a return visit. "If Mama is happy, then Daddy is happy!" was what one of the anglers at our latest Marlin University session told me after we asked him if he would come out to Madeira again — after not seeing a fish for four days.

Madeira is famous for big blue marlin, not huge numbers of smaller marlin. Not all the fish are huge, but most are large. It offers up the best chance you will ever have of catching a 1,000-pound Atlantic blue marlin, and there is a small fleet of good charter operations with some of the world's finest hotels and restaurants. What keeps the girls happy? The island is amazingly clean, and renowned for its flowers, fine wine and stunning natural beauty. Do not miss the sled ride down the cobblestone streets; you are guaranteed to laugh out loud!



NEW ZEALAND - THE THREE KINGS AND WONGANELLA BANKS

Zane Grey and local anglers from the Bay of Islands first pioneered New Zealand waters around 100 years ago, and adventuresome skippers were starting to talk of incredible striped marlin action off the remote and perilous peaks of the Three Kings when *Marlin* was still an unfulfilled idea.

In the last couple of decades, however, swordfish and blue marlin records have become commonplace, and long-range pioneers like the catamaran *Ultimate Lady* catch dozens of striped marlin on sunken banks in mid-ocean water on some days. They've even caught grander blue marlin on the trips to and from New Zealand. Combine the excellent fishing offshore with some of the most beautiful natural scenery on Earth, and you've got a good reason to fly to the other side of the world.



MOZAMBIQUE

I first visited this African country in 1973 just before it gained independence from Portugal. Independence eventually brought peace, but the infrastructure is still a bit sketchy.

My investigations at the time convinced me that it was the only place that might be as good as Cairns, Australia, for big black marlin. The local expert I met wouldn't have taken more granders with his tackle and techniques had he been fishing in



Cairns. Nowadays, you can find several reasonable charter operators along the Bazaruto archipelago. I plan on trying to organize a trip there in the near future.

MAURITIUS

Think Hawaii or Tahiti, only in the Indian Ocean. There is an area right off Mauritius that's a lot like "the Grounds" in Kona, Hawaii, where lures and live bait both produce marlin. As a bonus, anglers here have caught several fish over the 1,000-pound mark over the years.

I first visited in 1973, and the boats were pretty rough. However, I still helped catch a blue marlin that weighed just under 600 pounds on a boat with three forward gears and one reverse on one engine and three reverses and one forward on the other. The marlin fishing was good back then and it still is, especially with the modern and successful fleet of boats fishing there now.

