

Tropical Sportsman



Casa Vieja Lodge gets the nod.

Your Chance at Sailfish on Fly

A mate prepares to bring a sailfish caught on fly rod to the boat in the waters off Guatemala.

The sailfish strike flies close to the transom of the boat, then start to jump and fight, providing visual thrills. Right, outfits ready.

The very best place in the world to catch a sailfish on a fly rod is Casa Vieja Lodge in Guatemala. Yes, that's a pretty bold statement, but it's true. If you want to catch your first sailfish on fly, or if you're an expert who wants to rack up numbers and maybe add a blue marlin to your catch list, Guatemala is the place to go from November through April.

Travel couldn't be easier. Fly into Guatemala City where a van from Casa Vieja will pick you up for a 90-minute ride to the lodge, a gated resort with comfortable rooms, great food, a pool, outstanding pina colodas and every comfort you could possibly want during a fishing vacation.

Each morning the van will take you to the

marina where you will board your charter. Their nine boats range from 35-foot Contenders to Rybovich and Merritt sportfishers. All are in mint condition and equipped with tournament-level tackle and fly rods. The flies are all rigged to IGFA specifications and the mates tie the best knots I've ever seen. If you want to bring your own tackle, I recommend a 13- to 15-weight rod like the Temple Fork Outfitters Blue Water series, a seriously good offshore reel like the Nautilus 12 weights, with lots of backing. I like to use a 600-grain shooting head followed by 100 feet of 50-pound chartreuse monofilament running like. You never have to cast more than the length of the shooting head. The mates will rig your leader for you. The boats run to the fish which can be anywhere from 5 to 30 miles out. Seas are usually

very calm, which is always a plus.

The mates have all been trained in teasing sailfish to a fly by legends like Ron Hamlin and Chris Sheeder, and there are no bad boats or crews. If you are a right handed caster, the right out rigger will stay up. Several hookless ballyhoo will be trolled and when a sail appears, all the non-involved baits will be quickly removed, while a mate slowly teases the sail right up to the transom. When the sail is around 30 feet away, the captain will put the boat in neutral and the mate will pull the tease bait totally out of the water. Simultaneously, the angler will cast directly behind the boat—not at the fish, straight back. You want the fish to come in and be on the starboard side when the bait disappears. The sail will come in a bit closer, then turn around, usually to its left. The next thing

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it will see is the fly which appears to be its lost meal. You want the sail to hit the fly going away—it gives you a much better hookup. If the sail ever positions itself directly behind the fly, pull it away and cast again away from the fish. Emotionally it's hard to do, but the sail really needs to hit the fly at an angle, not from behind. Then hang on.

This is very visual and exciting fishing. The teasing is a rush and the strike is spectacular, but the best part is that the sail starts jumping 30 feet behind the boat. It's perfect for photos. And none of this is difficult. Last January, I brought Bonefish and Tarpon Trust President Harold Brewer and his wife Mona down to Casa Vieja for Jake Jordan's annual tournament. It's actually more like a clam bake with fly rods than a competition, because everyone just has a fun time. Neither Harold or Mona had ever caught a sail on fly before, but they released 27 over three days on the water. That's outstanding fishing but they didn't even place in the tournament. It's not always like that, but it's extremely rare not to catch several sails a day on fly at Casa Vieja, no matter what your level of expertise. **FS**



Entrants at a recent tournament get a little downtime at Casa Vieja's restaurant and bar. The lodge hosts many tournaments.



Guatemala's location in Central America. Left, Casa Vieja's docks are busy in the morning before fishing.



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