

Before *the* Strike

“No matter how many you’ve caught, it never, ever gets old.”

Casa Vieja
LODGE
GUATEMALA

David Salazar

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FISHING, FAMILY AND FLYING

One of the sport's most hard-charging personalities, Capt. David Salazar is fun-loving, boisterous and a magnet for good times. He loves every bit of the sport-fishing lifestyle: the people, the places and above all, the marlin.

BY SAM WHITE

Born and raised in Miami, Capt. David Salazar grew up on the water. He learned to fish from his father, chasing sails from South Beach to Islamorada. Along the way, Salazar earned his captain's license and ran charter boats in South Florida, where his quick smile and outgoing personality earned him a following of loyal clients. Fast-forward through the years and many different fishy destinations, and you'll find Salazar currently operating Casa Vieja Lodge in Guatemala with his wife, Kristen, and 9-month-old daughter, Ava.

M *How did you first get down to Guatemala?*

I met Tim Choate through John Phillips — Tim needed boats for his Fins 'n Feathers Lodge, so in 1998, I took my boat down. After it closed, I ran my own place there until a client bought me out, then I went to Venezuela and opened a lodge. That was going great until the political situation went bad. We went from booking over 200 days a year to maybe 30. I had helped Jim Turner set up Casa Vieja Lodge in Guatemala, and he offered to sell it to me a few years ago.



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ABLE TO FISH IT.**

M *Of all the places you've fished, what are some of your favorite destinations?*

I like places with a lot of variety. Australia was really fun — we did the whole mothership experience. We fished for blacks on the reef and then went snorkeling, and you can also cast big poppers at the [giant trevally]. We had a good trip to Kona in 2008, fishing with Kevin Nakamura. I caught the spearfish that I needed for a royal slam. I asked Kevin to do something different



Craziest days on the water?

In 2000, we were 85 for 128 [on sailfish] out of Fins 'n Feathers. And we had a double grand slam in Venezuela in 2010: nine for 13 on blue marlin, including a quad, two for three on whites and two for six on sails.

RICHARD GIBSON

the next day, so we went deep-dropping, which is completely different from how we do it off Miami. And I like Chub [Cay] in the Bahamas. It's close to home, with all kinds of good fishing: bonefish on the flats, grouper and snapper on the reef. And you can still go out and catch a grand slam in the Pocket.

M *How long have you been flying?*

I've been a pilot for about six years now. I started doing it as a way to get over to the Bahamas quickly and easily. At one point, we were thinking about opening a lodge there, which we might still do at some point in the future. I'm a partner in a little twin-engine Aztec. It takes about four



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How much has fatherhood slowed you down?

Not quite 180 degrees, but close to it! It's been a huge change in my life, but I was ready for it. It's going to be fun watching my daughter, Ava, grow up.

months to get your pilot's license, with another three weeks or so for the multi-engine. It's something I should have done a long time ago.

M *As a Cuban-American, what are your thoughts on the recent changes toward visitors there?*

It's going to be interesting to see what happens to Cuba in the next few years. I fished the Hemingway tournament in the late 1990s with Court Vernon and Frank Johnson, and the whole country was out of whack. I went back there in December to check it out, and it's still out of whack — not much has changed. You still can't run a business there, but the fishing possibilities are definitely exciting. Think about it: Every island in the Caribbean has a bite somewhere. St. Thomas and the British Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, they all have a bite. Cuba's got to be the same way, we just need to be able to fish it.

M *Do marlin still give you goose bumps?*

Yep, every time. No matter how many you've caught, it never, ever gets old. 🐟