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# AnglingMatters

## NEWSLETTER

February 2003

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***This issue:***

### **“Fishing at Golfito Sailfish Rancho in Costa Rica was incredible!”—Stu Apte**

intro and interview by Jim C. Chapralis

**W**hen I first fished in Costa Rica about 40 years ago, there were no fishing lodges along the Pacific Coast of Costa Rica. Several outdoor writers fished the Pacific from tiny hamlets using unseaworthy boats with inexperienced crews, and while these arrangements were unsatisfactory, the writers agreed that the Pacific sailfishing potential here was immense. They also discovered exciting fishing for other

species, including roosterfish, dorado, snapper and jacks. Furthermore, they felt that there could be some good marlin fishing as a bonus.

To my recollection, Jerry Thornhill was the first to offer a “pure” fishing camp on the Pacific coast near Rio Sierpe, but because his boats were not large enough to safely prowl the open seas, his clients concentrated on the coastal waters and some of the rivers that flowed into the Pacific.

Slowly adequate sportfisherman boats began to appear on the Pacific



*Stu Apte*

and soon fishing camps and lodges began to sprout up, one by one, first in the northwest corner of Costa Rica and then progressively south, all the way to the Panamanian border. I believe Henry Norton's Bahia Pez Vela was the first exclusive fishing lodge on the coast, followed by Rick Wallace's magnificent El Ocotal.



It was quickly discovered that the best sailfishing in the northwest part of Costa Rica was from late spring to late fall. Unfortunately, many American fishermen look to Central America for winter vacations, so that they can get away from the frigid climates of the north. From late spring through early fall, their interest is in fishing in Alaska, Canada and other northern regions.

While at first this appeared to be a major problem, the sailfishing turned out to be so incredible that many anglers fished Costa Rican waters during the summer months in addition to booking their northern fishing trips.

Soon it was discovered that the southern waters (e.g., Quepos and Golfito) provided incredible sailfishing during the winter months, so exquisite lodges began to open up closer to the Panamanian border. They filled the demand for those anglers who preferred to fish Costa Rica during the winter months.

One of the best was Golfito Sailfish Rancho.

In January 2003, Stu and Jeannine Apte escorted a group of anglers to Golfito Sailfish Rancho.

*I (Jim Chapralis, **JC**) recently interviewed Stu Apte (**SA**) about his trip to Golfito. Here is a portion of the interview:*

**JC:** Stu, I heard you had a very good trip to Golfito Sailfish Rancho.

**SA:** I'll say. It was superb! Let me tell you about the fishing...

**JC:** Before you do. Give me the dates and who went on the trip?

**SA:** Our dates for the trip were January 17 to January 25. We had 23 participants,

which included my wife, Jeannine, and myself. There were five ladies on the trip including two who never fly fished for sails before and they did quite well.



**JC:** Whoa! That's quite a group. Were there enough boats and captains?

**SA:** Absolutely. We used 12 boats. The fishing boats are 27-ft. Ocean Master, 300-hp, diesel powered.

**JC:** Do the captains know about fly fishing for sails? I suppose there were communication problems. Right?

**SA:** No, we didn't have any problems because the captains and mates are knowledgeable in fly fishing for sails and also they also spoke English. Actually, I think the crews enjoy the challenge of targeting sailfish with fly-fishing gear.

**JC:** Okay. Now the important question. Were there any sails around?

**SA:** You bet there were! The waters were loaded with sails. Our twelve boats raised 826 sailfish during the week.



**JC:** That's a lot of sails! How many were hooked? Landed?

**SA:** According to our records, of the 826 raised, our group hooked 577 sails, of which 249 were billed and released.

**JC:** That's amazing. Amazing even if conventional tackle were used, but again your group was mostly fly fishing for them: Raising the fish on teasers and then have the angler cast a fly to them.

**SA:** Again, some of our group never did

this before. Then, too, you hook a sail on a fly rod and it can take a long time before it can be billed.

I should add that some of the sails were hooked on light spinning gear (20-pound test), but that can take a long time, too. Two anglers caught 22 sailfish in one day using 20-pound spin tackle.

**JC:** I know what you mean. Numbers don't always indicate the quality of fishing. A number of years ago, I was fishing at Quepos. The place was alive with



sails. During the day I landed three sails, but my partner and I were fighting sails most of the day. Sometimes we'd lose them at boatside after a long fight.

**What was the average size of the sails on your trip?**

**SA:** Most of the sails were 80 to 100 pounds; heavier than normal. I landed one sail that I know was considerably more than 150 pounds. Lucky for her that I am no longer interested in killing a fish for a world record.

I believe that everyone in our group experienced unusually large sailfish that were hooked but not landed.

**JC:** I know that there are marlin in these waters. Did any of the boats tease any up?

**SA:** Yes. We had three blue marlin hooked on fly. One was approximately 500 pounds; the other two were probably catchable, weighing less than 250 pounds.

Baker Bishop caught a 90-pound striped marlin on a fly! Not many anglers have

landed marlin on a fly and this was Baker's first shot at billfishing. He also landed 24 sails during the week! Not bad for a 30-year old first attempt!

**JC:** I'll say. Sometimes it's a matter of being there at the right time with the right fly and have everything go right, but Baker should feel very proud of his accomplishments. What about other species?

**SA:** Well, we were targeting sails on a fly for the most part but we caught about 10 dorado, a dozen tuna, four roosterfish and four pompano ...all on flies.

**JC:** What was the weather like?

**SA:** Fantastic! We had for the most part, fairly calm seas, sunny weather and usually a light breeze. Close to perfect.

**JC:** And the lodge? Quite a comfortable place. Right?

**SA:** It sure is! The lodge is set right on the beach right next to the jungle, with a waterfall tumbling down a cliff which then flows into a dipping pool. Rooms are spacious with two or three beds, two ceiling fans, safe for valuables, rod holders, modern bathroom with a walk-in shower and a dressing area with a second sink. The lodge



also does your laundry so you don't need to bring a lot of clothes. Meals were excellent. Olympia, who looks after the kitchen is always in a great mood, always singing. Golfito Sailfish Rancho is an incredible place!

**JC:** I assume that you'll be offering a similar trip next year. If so what are the dates and details?

**SA:** Absolutely! The dates for next year's trip are February 20-28, 2004. We will fly into San Jose, Costa Rica on Friday, February 20, overnight there, and then fly to Golfito early Saturday morning for seven full days of fishing! We depart Golfito early Saturday, February 28 for San Jose and then back to the U.S. Anyone who wants to stay in San Jose a day or more can do so. It's a wonderful city for sightseeing.

**JC:** What about the cost of the trip?

**SA:** The rate is: \$3900.00 per person, double occupancy. **Rates include:** Reception at airport in San Jose, ground transportation, first night hotel accommodations in San Jose, the 50-minute flight to Golfito, boat transportation to and from Golfito Sailfish Rancho on day of arrival and departure. All meals, lodging, fishing arrangements (boat and crew), fishing license and all beverages at Golfito Sailfish Rancho. **Rates do not include:** Meals in San Jose, round trip flights between U.S. and San Jose, Costa Rica, airport departure tax and gratuities for your captain, mate and lodge staff and incidentals.

**JC:** If anyone wants to book a trip with your group for 2004, what's the best way of getting in touch with you?

**SA:** Because I travel and fish a lot, I'd suggest that they drop me a line with their phone number at my email address which is [stuwho2@msn.com](mailto:stuwho2@msn.com)

