

## 999 Ways NOT to catch a Permit

### First week at Espiritu Santo Bay Lodge - May 2017

This was a trip I had been anticipating for 20 years. Finally, I was going to get to spend an entire week fishing Espiritu Santo Bay, THE last frontier of Caribbean fly fishing. I had fished the bay several times in the past, first with the former owner and late Tom Woodward of Paradise Lodge and more recent a few time out of the now closed Paradise Lodge with my friend Alejandro de Tomaso. But this was a full week, every single fishing minute on Esb from the new Espiritu Santo Bay Lodge, owners Dane and Chiara Emerson. And after Esb, I was headed to Belize for a week at Tarpon Cay Lodge. And finally, I would be travelling and fishing with Brian O'Keefe. To say I was jacked to get out of town, after a very rainy and dreary winter - is an understatement...

#### 05 MAY 17 - Friday:

As most trips start for us folks that live in Redding, CA, I drove down to Sacramento and overnighed at a airport hotel in order to catch an early flight to Houston with a connection to Cancun.

#### 06 MAY 17 - Saturday:

Travel was easy, made one connection and clearing immigration and customs in Cancun was quick and simple. I caught the free shuttle to the Courtyard Marriott Cancun Airport and checked into my room, O'Keefe was still in transit, but on his way to the hotel.

Everyone has made it to the hotel and we have a nice dinner at the hotel restaurant. Back to the room, it's been a long day, starting at 3:45 am.

#### 07 MAY 17 - Sunday:

Brian and I have a 6:00 am wake up, pretty good night sleep, shower enjoy a great buffet breakfast (included in room rate) and down in the lobby @ 7:30 am. Everyone is excited for the flight and the start of our first ESB Adventure. Manny arrives early and we load up his van and head to the FBO, maybe 5 minutes. The pilot arrives, Danie, and things start to happen fast. We pass security; gear is loaded on a cart and wheeled out with to a brand new Cessna Caravan "Kodak". The luggage is loaded, and we are off. The weather is beautiful and the flight is terrific, down the Mayan Coast, to the east of the coastline, affording aerial views Boca Pailia, Punta Allen, Punta Pajaros, Casa Blanca, Playa Blanca, Esb, Punta Herrero and finally the autopilot is turned off and Daniel takes the yoke and we start approach to the strip. We made the flight in 50 minutes, with a top speed of 175 knots. Dane and Chiara are there to meet us as well as the outgoing group, and after exchanging pleasantries, getting a great fishing report our gear is loaded up into two Suburbans and we are off to the lodge. There are cold drinks for the guests; the vehicles are clean and good running condition. The drive takes just under an hour. We get a quick tour of the property, our bags are taken to our rooms, and we sit down to a beautiful lunch of fish sandwiches, salad, with avocado and tomatoes. After lunch, Dane gives a GOOD orientation to the property and fishing program, addresses safety issues, and answer questions, and we are free the rest of the afternoon to unpack rig rods, drink some beers and hang out. Everyone receives a free esb hat and logoed water bottle. Brian and I go for a quick snorkel, other guys hang out and relax, or beach hunt for fish. Happy Hour starts at 5:30 pm, with a fresh guacamole and chips a couple of pitchers of margaritas and cold beers. Dinner is served at 7:30 pm and starts off with a shrimp cocktail followed by a traditional Mexican beef stew with beans, guacamole, rice and tortillas finished with coconut flan with dulce de leche – nice presentation and very tasty.





*The private charter flight to the lodge via a brand new Cessna Caravan “Kodiak” takes 50 minutes*

**08 MAY 17 – Monday:**

We wake up at 6:00 am, coffee on @ 6:30 am. Breakfast @ 7:00 and departure at 7:30 am @ boats @ 7:40 am, 30 minute boat ride to the fishing area. The drive to the flats skiffs takes less than 10 minutes. Dane and I fish with Luis – it’s a permit day. I get three eats; hook one, Squimp #6 and the hook breaks – REALLY? Dane gets some chases, but no hookups. We have north by north east wind 15 knots at the strongest. Fish were off in the afternoon. We take lunch at 1:00 pm, great sandwich, potato salad, chips, cookies, water, Gatorade, sodas and beers if you want some. Afternoon is a bit slow until close to the end of the day where find some really nice size permit big ones, straight into the wind, hard casts, trying to turn over big shrimp, one follower no takes, blown shots by me, UGH! Appetizers are buffalo wings, margaritas, and beer. Dinner of salad, pargo “fish” Veracruz and key lime pie – excellent and good portions. Tracy got two small permit today and Ted one nice one, some bonefish, and jacks. Great first day at Esb Lodge



**09 MAY 17 – Tuesday:**

Our second day is tough. We battle a constantly changing wind first from the east wind, and then switched to north east and then again to South East. There are lots of clouds playing cat and mouse with sun all day. Another full day on the water, expect 9 hours of guided fishing. Dane and I arrive late to Punta Herrero and the other guys are at the cantina having some beers. Tracy landed a nice permit with Ted guided by Alejandro. We enjoy another great dinner of ceviche, followed by lobster and chocolate mousse. Nando says it will rain big time tonight.



*Esb Lodge runs four 18 foot Hells Bay Waterman Flats Skiffs*

**10 MAY 17 – Wednesday:**

We fish with Nando, start off polling in some back country for bonefish, all sight fishing from boat to singles, doubles and schools, in skinny water, no more than 18 inches. We hook at least a dozen or better fish, some nice ones right around 2 pounds or a bit better. We pole out of the backcountry and fish some inside flats for bones, until lunch, then pole around to a shoal and pocket (permit bucket) and cast to a school of permit, but only catch bones and small jacks.

Then we make a long run back towards Punta Herrero and try for some tarpon on the outside of mangroves to no avail, and then head on in a tunnel and check out a small lagoon, no pesca... We come on out of the laguna, and start running again paralleling a long shoreline of thin mangroves with water behind it. Nando says he has never fished it, but has seen tarpon rolling there in the past, so we make our way to a slight opening and we push, pull and break our way through the mangroves into a back bay that is a mile or better long and hundreds of yards wide. Immediately we see blow ups and nervous water as fish are being hunted. I make some casts and hook some giant mangrove snapper. We continue to see blow ups and chasers but don't see the fish or hook any – poor light. I finally see a really nice snook, Nando says it would go 15 pounds, and I get some great shots but it won't look at the fly. We pole up and down the bay, get a couple more snook shots, but the wind is howling, and light horrible. Nando and I agree it will take days to fully explore this bay. We get the boat back in the bay, motor to Punta Herrero, the guys are at the Cantina “Maridor” having beers and conch ceviche. Tonight is Mexican Fiesta Night, buffet style, nice food, good tastes.







*The guest rooms at Esb are plenty big and the a/c will freeze you out if you want*



*The Palapa and bar are a double-haul away from the Caribbean*



*Dane Emerson with a tarpon – typical size for Espiritu Santo Bay*



*Brian O'Keefe with a dandy of a permit*





*Ted from Sportsman's Finest in Austin, TX with a nice Snook*



### 11 MAY 17 - Thursday:

Wake up at 6:00 am, as usual. Weather looks rough, blowing at least 15 knots and cloudy. Tracy and Brian decide to stay in and head to Mahual with Chiara to check it out and check email and text. I fish, with Ted GM of Sportsman's Finest, a fishing, fly fishing and hunting store in Austin, TX. We are fishing with Alex and we head way back in the bay toward Cenote 1 and 2 flats. The wind is not too strong, but there are lots of clouds and we play cat and mouse with the sun. We catch a few bonefish on shallow flats, we are fishing shallow water, so we can see permit tails. We don't see any permit, two sharks, first of the trip. Have lunch around noon and then continue to make our way further back in the bay and finally start to see some fish. We get at least a dozen shots through the afternoon, some good ones, follows but no takers. I get a great shot at a super aggressive permit charging around on a shallow flat next to a shoreline, make a great shot on him and he decides to turn toward shore rather than open water and misses seeing my fly, 3 feet from his nose. Ted gets a good follow on a Casa Blanca Crab, but the fish never really commits. We do have some good fun throwing big rip baits for Cuda and get some great takes mid-air and fantastic greyhound leaps. Charlie fishing with Luis has a fun day with bonefish, and some shots at tarpon on the open flats. Ken gets into some good snook fishing, landing 4 up to 10 pounds and loses a really BIG one.



*Guide Staff (left to right) Jorge, Alejandro, Luis and Nando*

### 12 MAY 17 - Friday: (ESB)

Solo day with Jorge, the new guide that used to guide for Grand Slam Lodge. Jorge is 24 years old, a nephew of Fernando and speaks close to perfect English, taught himself. Smart kid. Wind is not bad, 10 knots out of the ESE. We run down to Cenote One and Cenote Two area. We pole for some time without seeing a fish (permit) today. We do get a great shot at a fish, probably 30 shots, switching rods/fly on the fish twice and he will not eat. The fly literally was in his face. We continue on, get some okay, fleeting shots at fish. Then we see a school of nice permit moving our way, I get a good frontal shot, five feet in front with a Casa Blanca Crab, two of the fish move toward the fly, one inhales it and we are on. The fish makes the one of the best

runs I have ever experienced in my life, on any fish, at least an honest 150 - 175 yards. I finally ask Jorge to start poling toward the fish. The fish makes three other strong runs and finally after some nasty down and dirty and keeping the fish off balance, we have him to the boat and tailed - 30 minutes - incredible... 18 pound fish. Lots of high fives, lots of pictures, Jorge and I are jacked! After drinking some water and calming down we continue to pole and hunt permit. We see some fish, nothing that would be considered a good and legitimate shot. Finally we break for lunch at 12:30 pm. Then start again, get some really good looks at singles, pairs and schools, but the fish are spooky, the wind is blowing 15 knots with stronger gusts and Jorge is pooling straight into the wind. We end on the Second Cenote Flat, put up our gear and then head out toward Punta Herrero. We stop at an area called Tabasco Cantos and start our hunt/pursuit. About 20 minutes in Jorge sees a fish close to shore in the lee of the wind.

<http://www.theflyshop.com/pdf/PermitPursuit.pdf>

### 13 MAY 17 - Saturday: (ESB)

Our last day of fishing and Tracey and I are with Jorge today. Slow day, lots of clouds and not much sun. Spent most of the day looking for permit, but they were spooky and moving fast. We got about a dozen good shots. Saw a frigit while eating lunch with a radio transmitter fitted on his back and three inch antenna interesting. Caught a couple Jacks on a surface plugs. Looked for snook in new "Red Lagoon" had a few shots but it had been fished in the morning by Charlie and Ted, they got a dozen a couple BIG snook, lost one over 20 pounds. Great last dinner, and to bed early, Tomorrow we have a full day driving from Esb Lodge to Belize City to start our next flats fishing adventure at Tarpon Caye Lodge.



### In Summary:

As Justin Miller candidly pointed out to us all on his return from Esb last month, **We are on the "X"!** Esb Lodge is perfectly positioned to access Espiritu Santo Bay, a mere 10 minute drive from the skiffs.



Dane and Chiara are doing a great job! The program is super organized well-choreographed and execution seamless. The guides are awesome, hardworking, polite and kind, never a harsh word or any sign of frustration due to a flubbed shot. The boats are great, clean and run well. Breakfast and Lunch and the water cooler in the boat with logoed water bottles for each angler are perfect and environmentally sensitive. Appetizers and Happy Hour is fun and a perfect way to end the fishing day. Dinners are fresh, well prepared and an excellent combination of Mexican and traditional dishes that utilize local ingredients, including fresh fish.

Accommodations are simple, but very comfortable, functional and hanging out on the palapa enjoying an adult beverage, 75 yards from the beach and Caribbean is ideal. The air-conditioning in the rooms will freeze you out and the full bathroom with double sinks, separate toilet room and shower perfect for anglers sharing a room.

The entire program at Esb Lodge is tack-sharp, what I would expect from Dane, a veteran flats fisher and seasoned fly fishing guide.



*Punta Herrero dogs – the Chihuabua is the leader of the pack*

**Here are my observations that make Esb Lodge unique and attractive to serious saltwater fly fishers:**

- Each morning, you'll have a short, 10-minute drive from the lodge to the Bay where the skiffs and guides will be ready, engines warm, and ready to start fishing. Run times in the boats range from a few minutes to a maximum of 40 minutes depending on conditions and target species. This all combines to mean that anglers enjoy more time on the water, and more opportunities for fish on the end of the line.
- Espiritu Santo Bay lies within the Sian Kaan Biosphere Reserve. This vast region is a UNESCO World Heritage site, protecting the unique ecosystem restricting fishing access to just eight permits. This ensures very limited fishing pressure, and fish that aren't used to the slap of a fly line or purr of a motor so they behave like fish are supposed to behave, readily and aggressively taking well-presented flies.
- Esb Lodge utilizes specialized Hell's Bay Skiffs that silently float in inches of water. These boats are ideal for two anglers and their guide to access the seemingly endless flats of Espiritu Santo Bay, enabling anglers even more daily opportunities for tailing bonefish and permit – as well as marauding tarpon and snook – in the farthest reaches of the most remote fishing area in the Mexican Yucatan.
- The lodge is small and intimate, with a maximum occupancy of eight anglers per week. You won't get lost in a crowd here, and it's a perfect destination for a group of friends or family looking for a private fly fishing experience.
- Espiritu Santo Bay has healthy populations of all four of the primary flats species: bonefish, permit, tarpon, and snook. With all of these diverse species, anglers have a daily opportunity to pick their target species, or hunt for them all. Esb is easily one of the world's top locations for you to score your Super Grand Slam!



*Keep 'em wet and put them back alive*

Call or email me if you would like to give Esb Lodge a try. 2018 is quickly filling.

Pat Pendergast

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