

After a successful and enjoyable week at Espiritu Santo Bay Lodge, four of us (Brian O'Keefe, Charles, Ken and I) are headed to Belize and Tarpon Caye Lodge via an all-day auto transfer and short flight to Placencia in southern Belize.

**14 MAY 17 - Sunday:**

We are headed to Belize and Tarpon Cay Lodge this morning. Wake up at 6:00 am. Breakfast @ 6:30 am, and a sharp departure @ 7:00 am with Chiara at the wheel of one of the lodge's Suburbans, headed to Mahujal to meet big Teresa and her driver Carlos @ 9:00 am for the 4 1/2 hour road trip to Belize City.

It's not too long when we reach the border crossing, where we first depart Mexico; pay a \$25 departure fee per person – very easy, with drive up service. We drive a bit further to the port of entry to Belize. Here we get out of the van, take our luggage inside, fill out an entry form, present our passports to an immigration officer (the usual questions) and then take our luggage to the customs officer, she checks Brian's bag, (he was first) and then all the other bags are cleared and they are taken outside to wait for the Carlos and Teresa to clear and get the car into the country. We finally load up in the van and head off.

We drive to Orangetown through RURAL Belize, poor looking and rough, many small towns and LOTS OF SPEED BUMPS. They are in the midst of sugarcane harvest and we have to pass many trucks loaded to the top. We continue our drive, two lane roads, through many small towns until we start to hit more traffic and into Ladyville, which seems to be an extension of Belize City. Total drive with border crossing and a couple stops takes about 5.5 hours close to 6.



*Tropic Air Flight from Belize City to Placencia*

We finally arrive (BZE) Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport, Terminal One "Domestic" and Lil is waiting for us with her assistant. They take our luggage and passports, and get us checked in for our short flight to Placencia via a Cessna Caravan on Tropic Air.

The flight takes about 35 minutes and Sam the taxi driver is at the airport to meet us and takes us through Placencia to a dock to wait for Charles Lesley. 25 minutes later Charlie arrives in a big center console boat. We meet Charles, Merreri (the cook from Honduras) and Christian a lodge staff member and load up in the boat and take off, bottled waters given out to everyone. The ride to the lodge takes 1 hour. On the island (Tarpon Cay) we meet the crew (it is raining lightly) and we are assigned to our cabins. Brian and I room together in "Permit" cabin (yellow), and Ken and Charles get their own, single cabins, a duplex cabin with common center rooms and two bedrooms on each side. We get unpacked and settled in; conch fritters are delivered to our cabin, excellent. Here we are, made the journey safe and sound...a long day...



*Tarpon Cay Lodge is a fish camp and right on the water*

### **15 MAY 17 - Monday:**

Wake up @ 5:00 am, coffee is in the dining room at 5:30 am with breakfast a sweet roll or cake and at the boats @ 6:00 am. We start with tarpon in the lagoon on the back side of the cay, blind and sight casting to feeding frenzy fish, pelicans diving bait balls and rolling fish. The lagoon is loaded with baitfish, a natural occurrence. You fish until 9:00 am or later depending on the tides, then back to the lodge for a full breakfast. Lunch order is taken then back out at 10:30 am up until 1:00 pm depending on tides. In the late morning and afternoon they concentrate on permit. Our guide is Marlon, son of Charles Lesley. Brian and I fish together; Ken and Charlie have their own guides. Brian and I get some great shots at tailing permit but no eats, some looks and follows but that is it. We are fishing out of a nice skiff, 23 feet flat bottom Mexican Panga powered by a 60 hp four stroke Yamaha with Bimini for shade - nice touch. It is really hot and still with very high humidity. We chase some feeding jacks around in the deeper water, birds on them, but only get a follow. The flats are beautiful coral flats, full of life, very cool and interesting. It is BEAUTIFUL!

Brian and I head back to the lodge a little early 3:00 pm for a snorkel. They have good snorkeling gear to loan and we see a lot of fish and coral head right off the lodge, including a school of tarpon (6) that we are able to observe, very cool! We snorkel back into the lagoon, and see 10,000's of baitfish, Brian has a feeding tarpon smash bait right in front of him, scares him to death.

The lodge complex is simple but incorporates a modern solar and battery system that allows for 24 hour power to run the floor fans at night - very nice, there is no A/C. The rooms are simple, spacious and airy with lots of windows to take advantage of the constant ocean breezes, tile floors, sink and vanity, shower and flush toilet, a desk and chair and a large closet pole to hang clothes along with plenty of hooks on all the

walls. There are two floor fans to aim at each bed that can run 24/7. Most of the rooms feature a covered porch with chairs, hammock and table, built out over the water, a great place to work on gear or enjoy a beer. They are simple accommodations but functional, clean and airy. This is a Belizean Fish Camp and it works well and feels right.



*The Tarpon Lagoon is right in the back of the lodge*

The food is really good, tonight we had garlic lobster tails, mash potatoes, steamed vegetables, and plantains. Dessert is a flan, more like a cheese cake, the best I have ever had. It's delicious food, all prepared from scratch, Belizean style. Breakfast was hand squeezed watermelon juice, eggs wrapped in bacon, homemade biscuits, and coffee. Lunch was okay, a sandwich with four choices of meat and watermelon junks. The lunches could use some more love...

### **16 MAY 17 - Tuesday:**

We depart today at 05:30 with a cup of coffee (go cups for coffee to be taken in the boats would be a good idea) and sweet roll and head out to catch the end of the incoming tide for permit. We are with Marlon again. Brian gets several shots at a school of permit and after several good shots from the boat hooks a nice fish. We take him to the deep water and the fight is on, well hooked. Brian has the fly line back on the reel when the permit takes another long run and there is a knot in the backing at the Bimini knot and it hooks on the Nautilus hook keep stud (one in a million) and goes tight! Brian has no choice but dive in the water to lessen the pressure and he does a great shallow dive, well executed! He gains his composure hands me the rod, the fish is still on, but comes running at me full bore and I try stripping line in, but he is off straightened hook on a number six tan rag head. 996 ways how NOT to catch a permit! UGH! Worse thing is, Brian had his iPhone in his pocket in a LifeProof case and it suffered some water damage, but still operating. We try a few more flats but no fish spotted and we head back to tarpon cay to try for tarpon, no luck and we head to the dock for breakfast. We plan to go back out and fish at 10:00 am. We head to the tobacco Cay and the cut in the reef to look for big tarpon. We are fishing 12 weights with heavy sinking lines, find the tarpon rolling on bait and fish for them for 1.5 hours but we always seem to be out of position and just out of range, they are random and moving around a lot. We end up finding a school of horse eye jacks and hook one for a photo opportunity. From there we head toward Thatch Cay and look for permit, it is a slow afternoon. On our way south toward home, we fish and patrol many flats and finally find a school of tailing permit. I am up on the deck and get at least 20 shots at them, at least a dozen spot-on

shots, even change the fly on them, but no eats - the fly is in the bucket in their face - UGH! 997 ways NOT to catch a permit... We head back to the camp, exhausted, hot and dejected... Charlie did land his first permit of the trip, a nice fish and we celebrate his success with a toast. Dinner is excellent again, smoked snapper, rice, sweet potatoes with mango, a sweet relish with onions and roasted vegetables followed by an amazing flan. We are back in our cabins by 8:00 pm, wake up tomorrow is at 5:00 am, departure at 5:30 am. I think Brian and I are going to split the day with Charles Lesley; Melvin is going to join each of us for a half day.



*Brian O'Keefe trying to save his hooked permit*

### **17 MAY 17 - Wednesday:**

We head out to the south east just as dawn breaks "dawn patrol". Charles is head guide, accompanied by Carlitos a guide and his protégé. The first flat we hit we get out and wade very quietly, stealthy and pragmatic. We see a big school of permit actively feeding over coral and turtle grass and get several great shots and one fish that probably eats my olive Bauer's Fur Crab and I strip set and no hook up. We continue to get another shot on this flat to no avail and then head to another flat, wade fishing and get two close shots at two nice permit, but way to close. We continue our morning poling some deeper flats, the waters is starting to fall on an ebb tide. We get a great shot at two big fish, but Charlie says they are done feeding and heading off the flat. I make a good shot 75 feet, 5 feet in front of them as they surf their way to us. We head back to the lodge and wait for the others, no luck for them, though they got some shots. A quick breakfast and we head back out at 12:00 pm to catch the end of the flooding tide and beginning of the falling for permit. I opt not to fish for tarpon and save myself for permit - Charlie agrees is it's the best course of action. Charlie knows permit and fishing for them, completely different approach and technique then his son Marlon. We are off the cay by 12:15 headed to the fishing grounds I get a great shot the first flat we wade and the fish follows for six feet but does not eat - UGH! We hit 5 more flats both wading and poling and get a couple fleeting shots. I do snag an ocean triggerfish, big bastard but pop him off for a shot at a permit. The second to the last flat we float up onto wade; as soon as I jump out of the boat I see at least 6 NICE permit heads down feeding heavily. We sneak up on them to 50 - 60 feet, downwind shot and I blow it, go to pieces and blow multiple shots at them and can't seem to put the fly in their feeding and visual zone 12 inches and they finally spook off the flat. DAMN, my best shot at feeding fish, they would have jumped on my fly - I feel sick. This after making 90 foot perfect shots, cross wind at a lot of fish - WTF! I was spooked and blew it, 998 ways NOT to catch a permit... Dinner is baked chicken, rice and coleslaw with

Cilantro, excellent. Dessert is a stewed pumpkin, in the rind (I thought the rind was a crust, it was not) not visually appealing but pretty tasty.... Tomorrow we are all going to meet at King Louie's Island, a crazy man's private island in Pirate theme for a beer.

### 18 MAY 17 – Thursday:

It's a slow morning, overcast and wind out of the east. Brian and I are with Marlon again for the day. We fish north of Tarpon Caye and get a few shots, but the fish are not happy and skittish. Back to the lodge at 9:00 am for breakfast., headed back out at 12:30 pm. The tide won't be right until 4:00 pm. We check a couple flats, but zero... We decide to run to the reef to try for an ocean triggerfish, while we wait for the tide to change. – NO triggers, probably too rough, the wind is blowing better than 15 knots and the swells are big. We head back into the bay to see if the permit are ready to come on the flat and eat. Brian is up and makes a great shot into the wind and gets a fish to eat, but the fly got turned around on the leader and the hook never sticks – after a 10 foot run – UGH! We check a couple more flats, one of us on the casting deck and Marlon walking the boat across the flats. I get up on the next flat and about mid-way through, we see some permit and I get some good shots. I finally land the fly about 6 inches in front of the fish, cross wind into the swells and the fish makes a move and I stick him good. He is small but makes some great runs, gets caught on some coral, but we are able to free him and bring to hand. We are super jacked and Brian does his magic with the camera – Marlon is pumped!



*Marlon and I with my permit – hard sought and earned...*

We check four more flats and find no fish, so as planned the night before we head to King Louie's to all meet for a beer. We have a couple Belikins while listening to Bob Marley. The Island is immaculate, super well-constructed with first rate materials and oriented toward adult entertainment – whatever that means. I think it costs \$500 USD a night to stay there. It's fun, they have a loud green parrot and all kinds of pirate motif and life size action figures around the island including Captain Jack Sparrow. Weird but fun...



*What's better than a cold Belikin Beer at the end of the fishing day*

### **19 MAY 17 – Friday:**

Last day here and we get the same start. I am with Marlon single and Brian with Charles. We fish until about 9:00 am and get some great shots and singles, doubles and schools (big schools) but no eaters. We have a nice breakfast and rest then back out at 1:00 pm. Again, we get some good shots, one across a school of 25 fish several times no eats. I say to Marlon, look man, this is the eleventh day of fishing and I am done, let's head back and you go home and see your son Kellen and wife, and I will get my kit together and start packing. It's a deal. The wind is up out the east, seems to come up strong every afternoon, blowing close to 20 knots. Dinner is a fabulous lobster creole, homemade excellent.

### **20 MAY 17 – Saturday:**

Headed home. Up at 5:00 am and motoring to Placentia by 6:00 am. The seas are light and we make it to the dock by 7:00 am. A taxi is waiting, to take us to the airport. We depart at 8:40 am for BZE after making a quick stop in Dangriga. Everyone kind of goes their separate ways on different airlines, Ken and I are on United and Brian and Charles on Delta. We get checked in and wait at the gate for our departing flight to Houston and eventually Sacramento and home.

### **Tarpon Caye Lodge Conclusions:**

The lodge is located right in the heart of the best permit fishing grounds in southern Belize. It's a great location and has the added bonus of having one of the best tarpon lagoons in the Caribbean, right behind the lodge complex. That's 2 +'s! The island is beautiful, remote and well maintained – beautiful setting. The grounds and infrastructure (mostly the buildings) could use to some updating and maintenance – and that is in the works. The food and staff services are excellent.

The fishing program is geared toward serious “permit” anglers, with a split fishing day that is a real treat.



*This is what is all about, tailing permit in skinny water*

The non-fishing (options) at TCL are really amazing and numerous. The snorkeling, diving and watersports are right there, within a stone throw of the lodge, a perfect spot for families and couples – a private island retreat. Birding, reef visits, boat tours, cay exploring, history interpretation of the area, pirates, British, Spaniards, Creoles, Garifunas, etc. TCL is a special place and has a LOT to offer. It is also very affordable.



*This is the view off your cabin porch – amazingly beautiful and alive*



Call or email me if you would like to give Tarpon Caye lodge a try.

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## Why Set the Hook on Tarpon Caye Lodge, Belize?

- The waters around Placencia in Southern Belize are the best in the world for sight-casting to tailing permit in very shallow water. Countless small “pancake” flats pop up out of the deep water between mainland Belize and the Barrier Reef; the deep water provides safety for huge populations of permit, while the proximity to the myriad pancake flats allows these fish to rush onto the flats on every incoming tide to feed in the shallow water. It’s simply amazing how many of these elusive fish you’ll see feeding every day in this area, their distinctive black tails splashing and tantalizing even the most dedicated permit anglers.
- Tarpon Caye Lodge is perched on a private island in the middle of these exquisite permit fishing grounds. Many of the most productive flats are within sight of the colored lodge bungalows, and it’s rare to have more than a 5 minute boat ride to the next flat loaded with tailing permit. You’ll spend less time running in a boat, and more time hunting permit.
- The hard-core fishing program at Tarpon Caye is based on fishing the tides. If that means you’re on the water before the sun comes up, or as it sets...that’s when you’ll be on the water. The close proximity to the lodge allows guides and anglers to fish when the fishing is good, and rest or relax when the tides are flat and the fish are nowhere to be found. You maximize your time on the water during the most productive times.
- The experienced team of guides at Tarpon Caye are some of the best of the business. Not only do they know these flats like the backs of their hands, they are also hard working and passionate about what they do. They’ll do whatever it takes to put you onto permit. They’re also laid back, easy-going by nature, so they aren’t going to yell at you when you make an errant cast or trout-set on a feeding permit. Every day on the water with them is a learning opportunity and a fun day of fishing.
- Tarpon Caye offers more than just great permit fishing. This part of Belize has resident tarpon every month of the year, and several cayes with schools of bonefish. While permit remain the primary target, there are opportunities to cast to other species, and even try for the ultimate saltwater fly fishing prize – the Grand Slam!
- The secluded, private island location is an ideal spot for non-anglers, couples, and families wanting to get away from it all. The snorkeling off the back deck of the cabanas is incredible, and an afternoon sojourn in one of the lodge’s complimentary kayaks is a peaceful island safari complete with diving pelicans, dozens of colorful reef fish, even manatees and dolphins common companions. Everyone at Tarpon Caye will enjoyable a wonderful, private island holiday.



*Horse Eye Jack frm outside of the reef*