

Ersch Yucatan Fam / Hosted trip . August 2017. ESB and Tarpon Cay Lodge

15 AUG

United Airlines 5549, 6am, Redding - San Francisco

United Airlines 1679, 8:35 am, San Francisco - Cancun

Courtyard Marriott Hotel, Cancun overnight

All flights were on time, and customs/immigration process in Cancun was efficient. Hotel shuttle was easy to find, with an english speaking man outside the terminal holding a Marriott sign. He told me that the shuttle would be there soon, arriving every 30 minutes, at the parking stall right behind him. Transfer to the hotel was quick, and the people at the reception desk spoke english. I checked in, exchanged dollars for pesos, and went to my fourth floor room overlooking the pool and courtyard.

The Courtyard Marriott is clean, modern, with hammocks hung from trees in the shade near the pool, ideal for a nap. There is a bar and restaurant serving lunch, dinner, and a breakfast buffet including eggs to order, omelets, etc, starting at 6 am. Room service is available, and the wifi is fast. I ordered shrimp tacos and grilled asparagus for dinner in the restaurant, and was not disappointed.

16 AUG

Transfer Courtyard Marriott Hotel to Tarpon Cay Lodge

In - 16 August

Fishing 17,18

Out - 19 August

I enjoyed the hotel breakfast buffet, checked my work emails, and was met in the lobby at noon by the transfer person for my ride to the town of San Felipe and the Tarpon Cay Lodge. I was the only passenger in the late model sedan, and the 3 hour drive was a "crash course" in speaking spanish with the driver. It had been several years since I'd lived at Paradise Lodge where I lived the language, and my spanish language skills needed a boost.

Upon my arrival at the waterfront hotel I was greeted by my host and hostess, Cecilia and Beto. Beto organizes the fishing day, serves the meals, and speaks enough english to work with the guests. Cecilia made me a welcome margarita, and I sat down with the fishing guests for a ceviche lunch. They had fished the morning session, came in for lunch and a rest, and were excited to fish the afternoon, departing around 4pm. I rigged my gear in preparation for the next day, and enjoyed the view from my air conditioned room overlooking the panga filled harbor and the nearby coastal islands.

Dinner was served family style, featuring a superb fillet of corvina, served "a la veracruzana", one of my favorites.



17 AUG

Breakfast to order is served at 5:30, serving a superb huevos rancheros (breakfast burritos are also available), sliced fresh fruit, fresh squeezed orange juice and coffee.

Guides arrive at the lodge before 6, and are soon ready to depart in the 14' lodge pangas. The pangas have a large front casting deck, no poling platform, and new Yamaha outboards. I fished an 8wt Cortland Crystal Clear floating line, SDS Abel reel, on the Sage X rod, with 6' of 40lb. mono leader tied to a tan/orange Megalopsycle. We ran 15-20 minutes to the east, inside the barrier islands, idling towards shore in the early dawn light. Flamingos flew overhead in V-formation like geese, and a variety of birds were diving into schools of baitfish as tarpon rolled and fed in the melee. We fished along the southern mangrove shoreline in 2-3 foot of water, while another lodge panga fished several hundred yards off the shoreline on a separate bait school. Tarpon Cay has the only permits to sport fish the area, so the only other boats we saw were commercial fishermen heading offshore to fish octopus, speer finfish, and hook lobster.

To say that the fishing was good would be a gross understatement. The fish averaged 5 - 15 lbs, and aggressively took the fly. After the first hour I'd lost count of the number of fish I'd hooked and launched into the air. It was the most juvenile tarpon I'd ever hooked in a morning, easily 30 plus fish. We returned to the lodge for lunch at noon, relaxed in the A/C, and enjoyed a mid-day siesta.



Megalopsycle - the guides fly of choice, courtesy of Umpqua for the trip

As good as our morning fishing was, the afternoon was a bust. The morning high tide allowed the tarpon to feel comfortable with a couple feet of water on the shoreline, providing access to available food. With a new moon on the 21st, the tidal range was extreme, and the afternoon low tide left less than a foot of hyper heated water along the shoreline. The fish had moved a few hundred yards offshore under broken clouds, and the wind was blowing 15-20 mph from the east. I didn't have one decent shot, as the only fish we saw were pushing water nervously as they fled from the boat with water slapping against the hull.

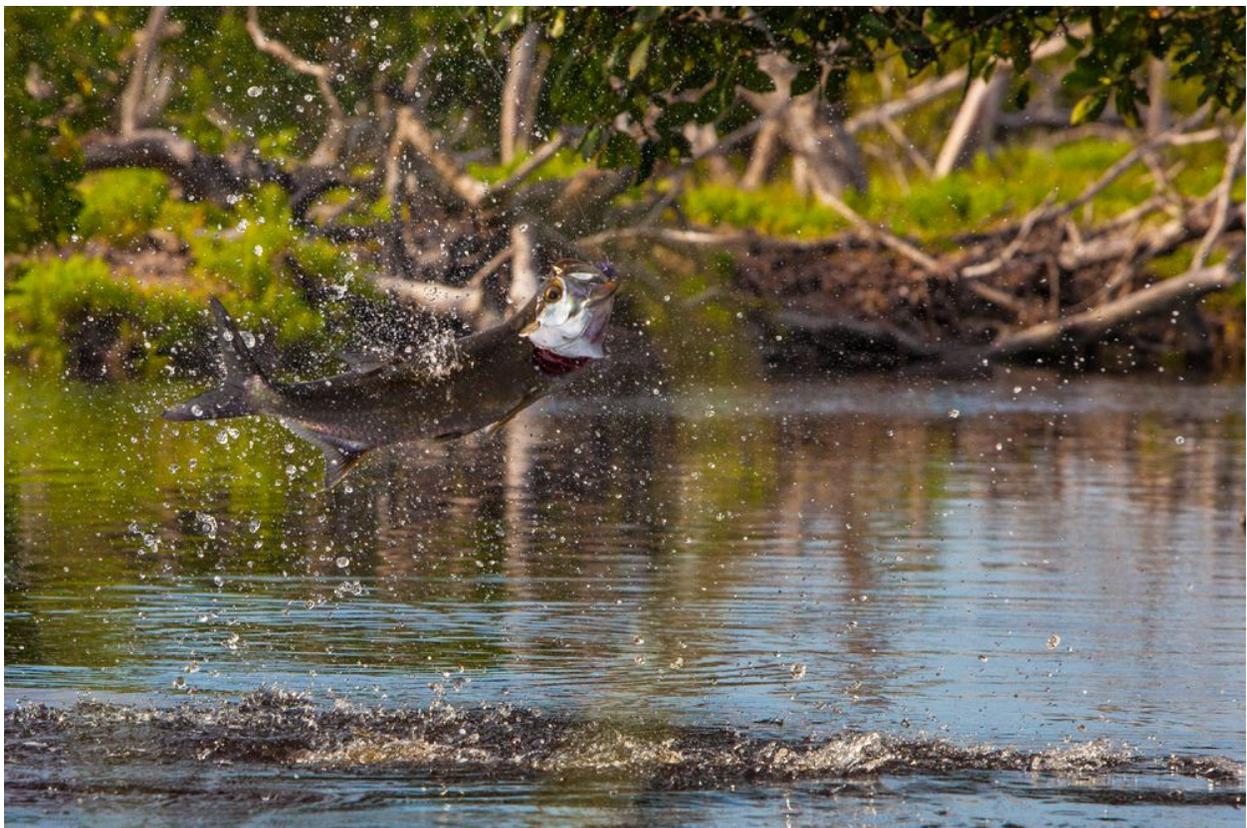
After a quick shower we met in the dining room for cold beer and a feast of regional Mexican food. Fresh tamales, tacos, rice and beans were served along with fresh salsa and tortillas. Dessert was fresh baked flan and vanilla ice cream.

AUG 18

Breakfast was a repeat of the first morning, and I just “had” to order the huevos rancheros again. Killer breakfast!!

The guide ran an hour to the west in the panga, hoping to find some larger tarpon working in a bay that bubbled with springs from the bottom. No tarpon were found, and the guide felt that the concentration of pangas in the area that were fishing octopus were the cause. He had found a concentration of 20 to 40 lb fish there a week ago. We stopped at a couple of bays while running east towards San Felipe, finding a few tarpon and jumping a couple. We ran east past San Felipe, fishing the same shoreline we had fished the previous day. The sun was high with a light wind, and the fish were much more selective than the day before. But, the good factor was that it was super quality sight casting to fish in shallow water. We fished longer, knowing that the low tide would kill the afternoon fishing, completing the day in the early afternoon. Lunch was a delicious batter fried grouper fillet.

Shower, octopus ceviche, cold beers, and good company finished the afternoon. The last supper was multiple grilled lobster tails. Yum!!



Overview of Tarpon Cay Lodge

- 6 rods, great for small groups
- good price point at \$3575.00 for a 7/6
- Flywater Travel exclusive. Contact Dylan for availability
- guide flies are small, slow sinking synthetic streamers, @ # 2 hooks, some with deer hair heads, and shrimp gurglers @ 2 inches long
- mono leader is better than fluoro as the sink rate is slower and you're often fishing shallow water
- best baby tarpon fishery that I know of. - "target rich environment"
- no other outfitters fishing the area
- couples well as an addition to our other Yucatan destinations
- diverse bird life, including flamingos, roseate spoonbills, herons, etc
- guides speak fishing english, and not much more
- fish average 5 - 15 lbs, perfect for 8 or 9 wt rods
- floating lines are best, and the Cortland PE Crystal worked great

19 AUG

Transfer from Tarpon Cay Lodge to Courtyard Marriott Hotel, Cancun

Same breakfast as the previous days and an early AM departure to deliver clients to the airport to meet their flights. I was at the Courtyard Marriot by noon. Time to do emails, call my wife, and meet the incoming ESB guests for dinner at the hotel restaurant.

20 AUG

Transfer Hotel to ESB Lodge

In - 20 August

Fishing - 21,22,23,24,25,26

Out - 27 August

Met ESB guests at the hotel breakfast buffet. Manny arrived on time in a large van for the 5 minute transport to the airport. The private airport was small, clean, and very "high end", serving the private jet visitors to Cancun. The Cessna Caravan, Kodiak model, was piloted by an english speaking man, polite and professional. It was a scenic flight down the coast, giving me the opportunity to see Punta Allen, Ascension Bay, Casa Blanca, Playa Blanca, and Espiritu Santo Bay. Dane and his crew were waiting at the Pulticclub airstrip when we arrived. We quickly transferred our luggage to the van and Suburban, and made the drive up the coast in @ 1 hour to the lodge.



The staff transferred our luggage to our rooms. ESB logo hats, water bottles, and a guest info booklet were on the table. We met Dane and Chiara in the dining room for a lunch of fillet of fish sandwiches and a thorough orientation speech. The afternoon was spent rigging rods, and Greg Vincent helped a client with his casting on the beach. Happy hour served margaritas and iced beers with chips and salsa. Dinner was mexican food, plated, and served individually.





The new lodge, palapa, guest accommodations-

We were the first guests to stay at the newly completed lodge. Everything necessary worked, including A/C in the guest and dining rooms, hot showers, etc. The guest rooms have hardwood floors, two queen beds, two dressers, bedside tables and lamps, chairs, wall mounted clothes hanging rack, with a shower room and toilet room separated by a two sink vanity. Artwork is in the near future.

The dining room and guest lounge will be expanded by removing a couple of walls that house an adjoining separate storage room. This will give the guests a much needed indoor seating area (air conditioned and insect free!), in addition to the outdoor seating in the palapa.

The palapa is large enough for all the guests to enjoy the bar and drinks, hardwood chairs and tables, and is generally insect free when the wind is blowing from the east. We experienced winds that blew from several different directions, allowing the mosquitoes to attack like the vicious blood sucking insects that they are.



Happy hour served margaritas and iced beers with chips and salsa. Dinner was mexican food, plated, and served individually.

21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26

Food-

Coffee is waiting on the palapa bar with cream and sugar at 6, and breakfast is served at 6:30 in the dining room. Breakfast is plated and served individually, featuring french toast, omelets, bacon, along with a buffet of fresh fruit, yogurt, and granola. Overall, breakfast was on the sparse side, and could use a little upgrade. The clients were satisfied, so maybe it is just my opinion as a visiting agent.

Lunches were a variety of sandwiches with a different salad each day. Chips, fresh fruit, and packaged cookies were included, and a jug of cold water is on the skiff to fill the water bottle provided for each guest. Dinners were a mix of seafood, chicken, Mexican dishes, salads, and desserts. One evening a Mexican buffet was served, and it was a hit with the guests. The pulled pork Mayan style was fantastic. All the dinners were good!!



Fishing days-

While you are eating breakfast, the guides arrive and take your color tagged rods off the rack in the palapa and have them at the skiffs when you arrive. After breakfast the guests meet at the palapa with their boat bags, load the van, and make the 10 minute ride to the skiffs in Punta Herrero. The guides have the rods strung and are ready to tie on the flies, load the guests and go fishing. Guides are rotated, and Dane makes the introduction if you are fishing with a new guide.

During my hosted week, the anglers made permit their main focus, fishing tarpon and snook as a second game, and bonefish was an incidental. All the guides were excellent, and our fish results are as follows-

Permit - 9 landed for the week. I didn't fish them at all, giving every permit shot to whoever was in the skiff with me. All the guides are skilled at hunting permit.

Raghead crabs and Supreme Hair Shrimp were successful permit flies. Ron Hagen got 2 permit one day, both on the Supreme Hair Shrimp. One fish took the fly so deep that they had to cut the leader to free the fish.

The fish were distributed throughout the bay, from the Escondito on the north east end, to the rock points in the south end. They were in small schools in deeper water, feeding in 3 ft of water on high tide on rock rubble, and so shallow that David successfully wade fished for one.



Supreme Hair Shrimp - Dane's "go to" fly for permit, and I'm now a believer. They work for tarpon and snook as well. Who doesn't like shrimp for dinner?



Tarpon - The best opportunity we had was poling the beach south of the village of Maria Elena. We fished there the first morning as the wind was light and variable, finding happy schools of 10 - 30 fish, rolling in 4 -6 ft of water. They ate the tan/orange Megalopsicle fly tied to 60lb fluoro shock tippet. We put 8 or 10 into the air, all in the 20 - 30 lb class, and left to go hunt snook.

We tried it a couple other mornings at the same location with strong east wind, and the fish were not happy as the water was rough turbid. A few were seen on the interior of the bay, but it appears that the annual pattern, according to the guides, is that the tarpon favor the interior creek and bay systems during the fall and spring, and move to the exterior of the bay during the summer months.

Snook - 60 lb. monofilament leader needed (fluorocarbon sinks too quickly), as fish over 20lbs were hooked. Greg had a 20 lb class fish wear through his 60 lb tippet during the fight. All the snook during our week were sighted on shallow, sandy shorelines, or around mangrove structure, from the outside beaches of Isla de Techa, all the way to the interior bays on the south west shore. Yellow synthetic streamers, chartreuse toads, Supreme Hair Shrimp,

tan/orange Megalopsicle patterns, tied on @ 1/0 hooks were “money” flies. Any fly that sunk quickly was down in the mud and debris, and unsuccessful. Everybody that fished for snook got shots. Greg and I focused on them for the better part of a day, with more than a dozen shots and @ 8 fish landed. These are an underrated species at ESB, and a strong selling point. Few destinations offer the quality of snook fishing that ESB produces on a regular basis.



This is a 10 lb snook, laid up in 18” of water. The shallow water depth is why you need a neutrally buoyant, slow sinking fly that lands lightly, and a monofilament leader instead of the faster sinking fluorocarbon material. The strike is typically explosive, not unlike the speed that a barracuda achieves on attack. You don’t have time to even think of getting your loose line wound on your reel. If you give this fish a split second without your rod bent to the cork, down and to the side, he will find a way to thread your line through the mangrove roots, and it’s game over. Expect a jump or more, and your guide will be poling the skiff away from the shoreline as you keep all the pressure you can on the fish. Can you imagine hooking a 20 plus pound snook in that terrain? You can do it at ESB ! 60 lb tippet is mandatory, and you will get beat if you play this game.



Bonefish - Everybody that fished them got shots in clear, shallow water. They are available in singles / doubles, small schools, and are perfect for a 7 or 8 wt rod. I fished a # 6, tan Beck's Silli Legs fly with few refusals. Dane said he likes the same fly in chartreuse with orange tipped legs. # 6 Gotchas are a "go to" fly as well. Small shrimpy patterns are always a good suggestion.



Overview of Espiritu Santo Bay Lodge

- Small lodge at 8 rods, ideal for friends or family groups
- Remote location, private beach, with surf fishing available at the lodge
- XLT variety of fish species. "Super Grand Slams" available daily
- Charter flight to the lodge from Cancun is fast and efficient
- Easy access to Cancun with direct flights from many U.S. cities
- Manny handles the Cancun transfers perfectly, speaking english
- Courtyard Marriott Hotel is clean, with english speaking staff
- 9.5 hr fishing days - it's like getting another day added to your week for free
- Skilled and experienced guide staff, working as a team
- Best fleet of flats skiffs in the Yucatan



27 AUG

United Airlines 1118, 5:00pm, Cancun - San Francisco

Double Tree Hilton, San Francisco overnight (650) 344-5500

Easy charter flight back to Cancun, and Manny was there waiting upon our arrival. He dropped the guests off at the commercial flight terminals, and the week was done. I flew direct to S.F., spent the night, and was back in the office before noon on Monday

28 AUG

United Airlines 5766, 8:15 am, San Francisco - Redding

Greg Vincent - an important addition to the trip

I met Greg Vincent, who owns H2O Bonefishing with his partner Jay, while on a fam trip to Grand Bahama last June. Greg is an unassuming guy, with a very easygoing personality. He was a very accommodating host while I was fishing at H2O Bonefishing. During a conversation with one of his guides, I learned that Greg is a very accomplished permit angler, winning the coveted Del Brown Invitational Permit Tournament in 2009, 2011, and 2013. In 2009 and 2013 he also posted the largest permit for the tournament. And Greg never mentioned any of his tournament wins to me. Instead, we talked about what he called the “disciplines” of fishing. He had guided for trout on Chile and Wyoming, captained offshore vessels in the Caymans and Costa Rica for marlin and sails. Inshore, offshore, trout, flats, tarpon, permit, these are the “disciplines” we talked about. Most fly fishers that I meet are one dimensional, feeling that fishing with anything other than a fly rod is “lesser”, and I found Greg’s diverse experience to be quite refreshing. We had a common bond of experience, and began what I hoped would become a friendship.



Greg Vincent with one more permit.

Fast forward to last fall, and our “selling smoke”, and trying to book ESB Lodge for 2017. Dane Emerson surprised me when he said that he knew who Greg was, and that he had watched every flats fishing video that Greg had posted online. I asked Dane if he would be interested in adding Greg to my hosted week in 2017, and we made it happen. Turns out that August is Greg’s off season at H2O, and that he usually fishes Cuba for a few weeks. He accepted our invitation to fish ESB, and a partnership was made.

Dane is new in the saltwater lodge business, and Greg is a veteran of decades. After a week together, and a fishing day on the water with Greg, Dane and myself, the bond was made. Greg has offered to help Dane, sharing his experience, and exchanging visits at his Grand Bahama and Chile destinations. He is impressed by the fishery and ESB Lodge operation, and they agreed to keep working together in the future.

We are furthering our relationship with Greg, and will look at reintroducing his saltwater fly patterns in our retail store. He and I talked about saltwater fly fishing schools with a new and different format. Dane said that the ESB school this spring was a disaster by his standards, so perhaps this partnership will bring fresh ideas to the curriculum and teaching.

We work in a small niche business market, and working together with quality people like Greg Vincent, Dane and Chiara, will only enhance our lives.



