

COSTA RICA

Giant marlin, sailfish beyond number, high-jumping tarpon, record-class snook and a dozen or more hard hitting fresh water species... Costa Rica has them all!

Fishing just doesn't get any better than you will find in friendly, peaceful Costa Rica, and because this is a small nation, it's possible to enjoy it all on a single visit, perhaps with a day of white water rafting and a volcano and rain forest tour thrown in.

On the Pacific, it's common to release a dozen or more sails and even a marlin or two in a single day, and not unusual to release more than 30 sailfish a day. There are also dolphin (including the long-standing International Game Fish Association's all-tackle record 87-pounder), giant yellowfin tuna, wahoo, cubera, roosterfish, a variety of snapper, grouper, blue runners, rainbow runners, snook and much more. And Costa Rica boat operators release all billfish that are not record contenders, so the future of the resource is assured.

The all-time tournament record of 1,691 billfish releases by 120 anglers in four days was established in Costa Rica a few years ago during the International Sailfish Tournament. And all were caught on 20-pound-test line. At last count, there were more than 70 current IGFA world record fish from Costa Rica waters including 17 all-tackle marks.

There's not been a year in recent memory without three or more Super Grand Slams reported on local charter boats, with sailfish, blue, black and striped marlin released on the same day. Grand Slams, with three of the four billfish species released the same day, are routine during peak season.

If hanging a giant billfish on a fly rod is more to your taste, a number of charter operators specialize in big game fly fishing. The first Pacific blue marlin ever caught on a fly was taken in Costa Rica along with eight other marlin and sailfish tip-pet-class IGFA records. The Annual Billy Pate International Sailfish Fly Fishing Tournament consistently posts the highest catch and release records of any similar tournament in the world.

The Caribbean coast offers an entirely different type of fishing, with fine lodges and even a luxury houseboat accommodating anglers and nature lovers in pursuit of tarpon, snook and other species. For many fishermen, there's simply no bigger thrill in the world than having one of those 80- to 100-pound aerial acrobats smash a lure and

Cover Photo by Capt. Rick Ruhlrow

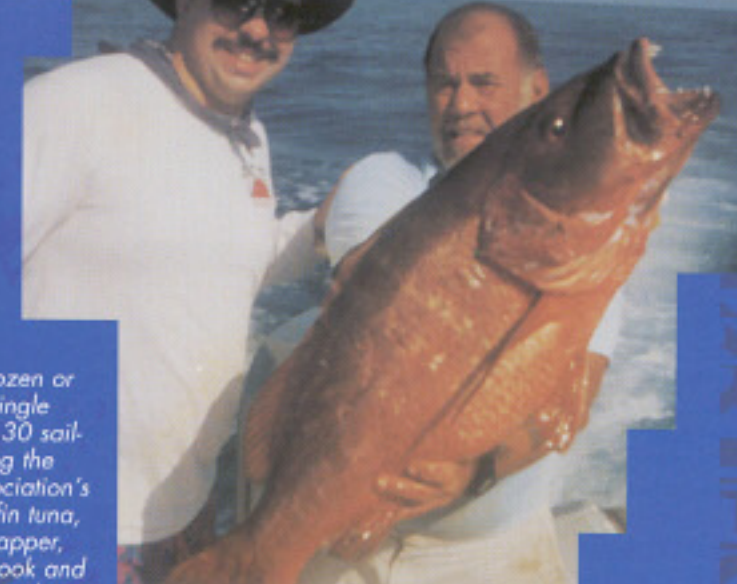


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immediately become airborne, often soaring 12 feet or more out of the water, twisting and turning, only to land and leap again, time after time.

Most operators on the Caribbean have put in bigger and faster boats in recent years, and are now able to get out the river mouths more frequently when the surf is up and where tarpon often spread for acres just offshore. When they are schooled it's not unusual to jump three or more of the Silver Kings on a single cast, as one fish throws the lure and another picks it up the moment it hits the water.

The larger boats are also able to make the longer run to the less frequently fished San Juan River where it forms the border between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. With miles of lagoons and tiny lakes tucked into the jungle, it has been virtually untouched by fishermen for nearly two decades, and represents a new horizon for anglers based in Costa Rica, an easy run by boat from the Barra. The 23- to 25-foot boats now available provide still another option. Tarpon fishermen on the outside have long found barracuda, jacks, kingfish, sierra, tripletail, cubera, grouper, jewfish and other gamesters just outside the river mouths, but with better equipment and some intensive training of the guides, fishermen on the northern Caribbean today regularly catch all of the above along with Atlantic sailfish, dorado, wahoo, tuna to over 100 pounds and even an occasional Atlantic blue marlin. Costa Rica has long been known for the best snook action in the world, with the bigger fish most often caught fishing from shore near the river mouths.



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The all-tackle 53 lb. 10 oz. IGFA snook record was caught at the mouth of the Parismina River and has been in the books since 1978.

Light tackle fishing up river in the back waters and lagoons is unsurpassed, especially when the calba, or fat snook (*Centropomus parallelus*) are running. These are small snook that swarm the Rio Colorado area from about September through November, sometimes overlapping as much as a month either way. They average about five pounds, with eight and nine pounders fairly common.

Rainbow bass (guapote), mojarra, vieja, machaca, catfish, drum, alligator gar and other light tackle species also abound, while sawfish and freshwater sharks are occasionally caught well up the river, usually fishing at night with natural bait.

Guapote are a largemouth bass fishermen's dream, and are fished exactly as you would for bass at home, readily taking spinner baits, jigs and crank baits.

For the dedicated fresh water fisherman, Costa Rica also offers literally hundreds of miles of rivers and some lakes that always provide plenty of sport; Lake Arenal is the most popular inland lake that is home to the largest tarpon you're likely to find in the country. Largest actually weighed-in from there was 205 pounds. It also has snook, drum, guapote and others of those mentioned above. There is rainbow trout fishing in Costa Rica, but access to most of the more productive areas is challenging. Trout eggs from the United States of America were first stocked in many of the country's high elevation rivers and streams more than 20 years ago, and the rainbows now propagate naturally. Access to the trout waters generally is very difficult and requires a guide and a horse, but there are some exceptions including a section of the Savegre River near San Gerardo de Dota. Lake Arenal is open to

large as a softball, displays the shadings of rainbow trout and has the fishing characteristics of a largemouth bass, but is related to neither. During a 1 1/2-day tournament at Lake Arenal not long ago, the winning two-man team weighed in a record 17 fish at 91 lbs. 5 oz. IGFA record for the species, found only in Costa Rica and parts of Nicaragua, is 11 lb. 8 oz., and was caught in Lago Hule (shown as Lago Echandi on some maps), a beautiful postage stamp sized lake near San Miguel, but very difficult to access. Lago Coto, just above Arenal, Caño Negro lagoon in northern Guanacaste, and Lake Nicaragua, located across the border but most easily accessed from Costa Rica are other inland hot spots.

Many rivers also have rainbow bass, along with bobo (a fresh water mullet); mojarra, another colorful cichlid related to the guapote that looks like a giant bluegill with teeth; machaca, often called sabalito, or little tarpon, because of its acrobatic jumps that make it a favorite of fly fishermen; drum and others. Caño Negro is an immense inland lake that is home to the largest tarpon you're likely to find in the country. Largest actually weighed-in from there was 205 pounds. It also has snook, drum, guapote and others of those mentioned above.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF NOELI SPORTSHAW

fishing throughout the year, but there are closed seasons in most inland waters, and a valid Costa Rican fishing license is required for freshwater fishing in the country. Seasons may vary, so it is best to check ahead of time when planning a trip. Most guides and resorts catering to inland fishermen provide the license as part of their packages. Because Costa Rica is a small nation geographically, there's hardly anyplace you can't reach within a few hours drive. The fishing areas on both coasts are serviced by regularly scheduled in-country airlines and charter flights.

There is always plenty of action someplace in the country, but it varies with migratory patterns, seasons and prevailing wind, weather, currents and other natural conditions at any given time. The best time to come fishing in Costa Rica? Whenever you can get here!

Following is a guide to seasons in the key fishing areas, but keep in mind that fish don't always check the calendar.



Pacific Coast	6- Fleming Beach	13- Carrillo Beach	20- Jacó Beach	27- Puerto Jiménez	32- Limón	38- Colorado River	44- Arenal Lake
1*- Santa Elena Cape	7- Vela Cape	14*- Cabo Blanco	21- Damas	28- Golfo	33- Puerto Moín	39- Puerto Viejo	45- Caño Negro
2- Coco's Beach	8- Tamarindo Beach	15- Tambor Beach	22- Quepos	29- Zancudo Beach	34- Parismina	Inland	46- Rio Frio
3- Ocotal Beach	9*- Nasara Beach	16- Nicoya Gulf	23- Dominical Beach	Caribbean Coast	35*- Toroguero Canals	40- San José	47- Las Chiles
4- Santa Catalina Islands	10- Punta Gulones	17- Puntarenas	24- Drake Bay	30- Puerto Viejo	36*- Toroguero	41- San Carlos	
5- Potrero Beach	11- Garza Beach	18- Punta Leona	25*- Caño's Island	31*- Cahuita	37- Barra del Colorado	42- La Fortuna	

Pacific Coast

The Pacific Coastal region is divided roughly into the Northern, Central and Southern fishing areas, with conditions varying with the seasons in each area.

Northern Pacific

Cabo Blanco to the Gulf of Papagayo

Fleming Beach, with a full-service marina, is the major sportfishing center in the northern coastal area, but boats also charter out of nearby Coco's beach, Tamarindo, Ocotal, Potrero, Brasilito and a few points in between. A bit further south, there are boats operating below Cabo Blanco, out of Nasara, Garza, Sámara and Carrillo beach, a region that gets more protection from the winds that normally blow late December into March and April. Some boats from the more northerly areas often base at Carrillo beach from about December through March if the wind is blowing and the main billfish population is moving north from the central coastal area.

Seasons

MARLIN Caught every month of the year, with mid-November to early March exceptional, then slowing a bit from April into early June when it picks up again, peaking in August and September.

SAILFISH Caught throughout the year, with May through August normally the top season. They may begin to thin out in September and the slowest months are from late August through November.

TUNA Peak months are probably August through October, but when all else fails, there are always tuna, anytime of the year you want to look for them, and more often than not when you'd just as soon avoid them to concentrate on billfish. The yellowfin and some bigeye tuna are often found well inside the Santa Catalina Islands, 30 minutes or less running time from the beach, while schools of 12 to 20 pounders are usually abundant on the outside. You frequently find concentrations of 40 to 60 pound tuna, and there are plenty of the 200 to

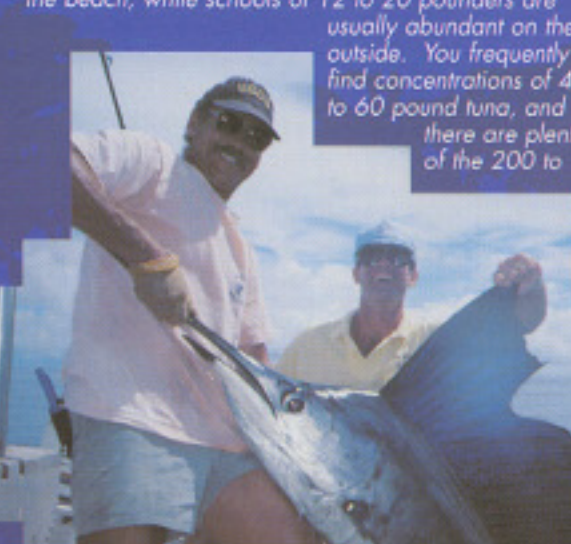


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