

# Travel & Outfitting Guide



**Casa Blanca Fly Fishing Lodge, Playa Blanca Adventure Resort & Casa Redonda Suites**

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## Casa Blanca Blanca, Playa Blanca & Casa Redonda

### Travel & Outfitting Guide:

#### Section 1

#### Casa Blanca Fishing Lodge, Playa Blanca Adventure Resort, Casa Redonda Suites

The area surrounding Casa Blanca is wild, virtually uninhabited and extraordinarily beautiful. There are miles of shallow bays, secluded mangrove-rimmed lagoons, white sand beaches, and dense coastal jungle. Once you have been to Casa Blanca, take the time to explore its vast tropical landscape and experience the exquisite isolation, you will find that it will remain with you long after you have boarded your plane and returned home to civilization. Casa Blanca is truly unforgettable...one of those rare places you will want to return to again and again until you have made it your own.

#### Sian Ka' an...Birthplace of the Sky

The lodge itself is perched on the tip of a narrow coastal island on the southern edge of Ascension Bay. It also happens to be in the center of one of the world's largest protected wild areas...the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve. This pristine reserve covers over 1.3 million acres and completely surrounds Casa Blanca. Sian Ka'an has also been designated by the United Nations as a World Heritage Site.

The Mayan name "Sian Ka'an" literally means "the birthplace of the sky". The local Mayans say that their ancestors believed, that in the beginning of time, the sky was created in the area surrounding Casa Blanca. In fact, you can see evidence of the Mayan temples which once stood where Casa Blanca stands today. Several others dot the island. After spending some time at Casa Blanca, on the bay and on the beaches, with their immense expanse of sky and clouds and turquoise waters, you will see why the Mayans held it so dear.

The reserve contains 22 registered archaeological sites. Two of these are just down the beach from Casa Blanca. Both have small, "late" Mayan temples which are believed to have been built around 600 to 900 A.D. One site is named Chac Mool. It overlooks the beach on the Caribbean side of the island and consists of two temples and several other buildings which appear

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ceremonial in nature. The other temple, Tupak, was built on the water and can only be reached by wading through the mangroves and lagoons which surround it. Its foundation is made of ancient conch shells and coral rock which elevate it just above the water. Other residential sites are scattered throughout the jungle.

The abundance of marine and wildlife in the Sian Ka'an, also, is hard to imagine until you have seen it for yourself. You can find over 325 species of birds, from Hummingbirds to the rare six foot tall Jabiru, the world's largest flighted bird. In the back of the bay are manatee. Four different marine turtles nest on the beaches: Loggerhead, Green Sea Turtle, Hawksbill and Leatherback. The species of fish in Ascension Bay and on the barrier reef are too numerous to name. One visiting writer was so amazed by an afternoon in the bay, that he compared it to wading in knee deep aquarium. The fishing is not bad either.

At the height of the Mayan Empire, there were separate "dynasties" stretching from Yucatan to El Salvador and Honduras. The total population has been estimated as high as 15 million.

Unfortunately, the proliferation of the Mayan culture was to be cut short by the European "discovery" of the New World. The Spanish conquest almost completely destroyed the Mayan communities and for all practical purposes the entire civilization. In their quest for gold, the Spanish ruthlessly killed large numbers of Mayans, but, the real conqueror of the Mayans was not really the Conquistadors. It was the European diseases they carried. Since the Mayans had never before been exposed to European diseases, they had virtually no natural immunity. It has been estimated that some 8 to 10 million Mayans died from plagues of small pox, measles and other infections.

Today, Quintana Roo is home to the last remnants of the Mayan culture. Many locals still speak a dialect which is very similar to that spoken before the Spanish conquest. There is even a local radio station, Radio Maya, which broadcasts in Mayan several days a week.

Since there wasn't a road connecting the Yucatan Peninsula to Mexico City until the 1930's, the area evolved somewhat independently from the rest of the country. The culture is more Caribbean than Mexican. Many of the locals think of themselves as Yucatecas first and Mexicans second. This is not to say that they are not patriotic Mexicans, but rather, that Yucatecas possess an independent point of view. Once, when a well known American writer asked one of Casa Blanca's Mayan guides if he had ever been to the U.S., the guide replied that he "had not" and that, in fact, he had "never even been to Mexico"

## **Ascension Bay and Espiritu Santo Bay**

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Together, Ascension and Espiritu Santo Bay are as close to paradise you will find anywhere. They possess a unique combination of environments which create the ideal habitat for a wide variety of animal life and sea life. In essence, it is great home for game fish.

The vast estuary/ flats system and adjacent reef are the basis of Casa Blanca's pristine, and highly productive fishery. Shallow water coral species demand a very stable environment with precise water temperature and consistent water depth in order to flourish. This is why large barrier reefs, like the Palancar Reef that parallels Casa Blanca's coast, are so rare. Palancar is second only to Australia's Great Barrier Reef in size.

The reef itself supplies food and shelter to a huge variety of baitfish and small crustaceans, which in turn attract larger predators. The reef also protects the shore-side fishery from full ocean swells. The coral heads absorb the brunt of the waves, allowing the flats to remain calm even if the reef is being pounded by a storm swell.

## Section 2

### Travel Planning

Please carefully read the following information well in advance of your departure. It will help answer most questions concerning your stay at Casa Blanca.

### **Flight Scheduling**

All guests should book flights to Cancun, Mexico. From there, Casa Blanca will provide an air charter which will fly you directly to the lodge. Guests making their own flight reservations must plan to arrive in Cancun no later than 2 P.M. and schedule their return flight no earlier than 11 a.m. in order to make connections with the air charter. Any flights that do not fall within this time period must be approved 30 days in advance by the lodge and may result in an air charter surcharge. The charges are listed in the Casa Blanca pricing literature. All airline or private flight itineraries must be supplied to the lodge 30 days in advance of your arrival in Cancun.

### **Required Documents**

You must supply proof of citizenship to obtain a Mexican Tourist Card and to enter the country. The Tourist Card application is issued at the ticket counter by airlines that fly into Mexico. Just fill it out while in flight and present it along with your proof of citizenship to the immigration officials when you arrive in Cancun. For proof of citizenship you can use only a : **1. Valid U.S. passport (check expiration date)**. The tourist card will be checked at your first point of entry.

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The immigration official will retain one copy and give you the other, which you must surrender at the airline ticket counter when you check in for your return flight. Keep your copy (Tourist Card) in your possession during your stay in Mexico. No visas or inoculations are required for U.S. citizens. A Mexican departure tax is payable at the airport when leaving Mexico. Some airlines include this as a prepaid part of your ticket. Please check with your travel agent or carrier to verify this.

## Traveling With Minors

Children 17 years of age or younger entering Mexico accompanied by only one parent must have a notarized letter of consent from the other parent stating the child/children have his/her permission to enter the country. Single parents need a notarized documentation of divorce decree or death certificate of spouse. Minors unaccompanied by either parent require a notarized letter of consent signed by both parents.

## Baggage

If, when you arrive in Cancun, you find that your luggage has been misplaced by the airlines, **you must report it to an airline representative before you leave the baggage claim area. If you do not, it is likely that you will not recover your lost items. Do not surrender your original baggage claim stubs when making a lost baggage claim with an airline. Insist that they make photocopies for their records. After informing the airline, report the loss to the lodge's local representative. He will forward your baggage to the lodge if it is found by the airline.**

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**We strongly encourage guests to pack lightly in soft sided bags We strongly encourage guests to pack lightly in soft sided bags** to facilitate loading in the charter aircraft. If there is too much luggage, it will be transferred by truck and boat to Casa Blanca.

## In Transit Emergencies or Flight Delays

If you are forced to change your travel plans while en route to Cancun, you can contact a Casa Blanca representative at the telephone numbers listed below. In general, you do not need to report flight delays unless they will cause you to arrive in Cancun later than 1:00 p.m. The lodge's staff is in direct contact with the airlines and will be aware of flight time changes. If your

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flight is canceled, or you are forced to change flights, please call one of the numbers listed below to report your new itinerary.

If your delay causes you to arrive in Cancun later than mid afternoon, it is likely that you will miss all the scheduled air charters to Casa Blanca and will be required to spend the night at a hotel in Cancun. If this is the case, please contact Casa Blanca's Cancun office as soon as you check-in to your hotel. Delays that require an overnight stay in Cancun will cause you to incur a substantial air charter surcharge. These charges are listed in the Casa Blanca pricing information.

## **Cancun General Aviation Terminal (Saturdays Only)**

Ask to speak to the Casa Blanca representative.

**From the U.S. 011 52 998 886 0216 From Cancun: 998 886 0216**

## **U.S. Office (800) 533-7299**

Open Monday through Friday, 9 am - 5 p.m., central time. On weekends, tell the answering service that you have an emergency and the operator will contact a representative on call.

## **Casa Blanca Cancun Office From the U.S. 011 52 998-888-8496 phone / 998-840-1194 fax**

ACTIVIDADES CINEGETICAS PANAMERICANAS SA DE CV

Av. Talleres Region 92 Mz 118 Lote 10 , Cancun Quintana Roo CP 77516

## **ANDREA SOLIDORO, FLIGHT COORDINATOR**

Email: [acpoper@prodigy.net.mx](mailto:acpoper@prodigy.net.mx)

Cell: 998-860-0536 (24 HOURS)

## **Emergency Contact with the Lodge**

There is no telephone at the lodge. In case of emergency, call our U.S. office. A message will be relayed to the lodge by radio. Also, our Cancun office can make radio contact with the lodge. Faxes can also be sent to the Cancun office for two day delivery to Casa Blanca. Occasionally, quicker delivery is possible.

## **U.S. Customs Registration**

To certify proof of ownership of cameras, jewelry or any other valuables you should obtain a U.S. Customs registration certificate from a U.S. Customs office before you depart the U.S. This certificate can be especially helpful when reentering the U.S.

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## Arriving in Cancun

Upon arriving in the Cancun airport you will be processed by Immigration. You will then claim your baggage. Next you will clear Customs. After customs, proceed to the Arrival Area outside. If you are scheduled to fly to Casa Blanca or Playa Blanca on your day of arrival, the lodge's local representative will meet you in the Arrival Lobby. The Arrival Lobby will be full of tour operators, arriving passengers and is usually somewhat chaotic. The Casa Blanca or Casa Blanca representative will have a sign printed with "Casa Blanca" and a bonefish. If you do not immediately see him, this means he is transferring other guests to the charter plane and will return shortly. **This is a rare occurrence. Do not leave the Arrival Area and attempt to find him. He will find you.**

The Casa Blanca and Casa Blanca representative will arrange for you and your baggage to be transferred to the General Aviation Terminal by car. The transfer will take less than 5 minutes. You will then board a plane and fly directly to the Casa Blanca airstrip. The flight takes approximately 50 minutes. If more than eight guests arrive in a 2 hour period, the later arriving guests may have a layover of up to two hours in the General Aviation Terminal. The terminal has a very comfortable lounge and small bar which serves drinks and sandwiches.

## Staying in Cancun

If you plan to spend a night or two in Cancun before you go to Casa Blanca, no Casa Blanca representative will meet you when you arrive. You must arrange your own transportation to your hotel. There are a wide range of transportation options available in the airport. Please be sure to supply Outdoor Travel with the name of your hotel 30 days before you arrive in Cancun. The night before you are scheduled to take the air charter to the lodge, you will be contacted at your hotel by a Casa Blanca representative who will tell you what time to arrive at the General

Aviation Terminal to meet your air charter to the lodge. You must take a taxi to the General Aviation Terminal. In Spanish the terminal is referred to as *Aviacion General*. It is located approximately two blocks north of the International Arrival Terminal.

## **Section 3**

### Surface Transportation to Casa Blanca

Should someone elect not to take the air charter, the alternate surface transportation would be a 4 hour drive to Punta Allen. You would then have a 1 hour ride in a wet, open boat.

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## At The Lodge

### **Arrival at Casa Blanca**

When you arrive at Casa Blanca, you will land on the lodge's airstrip, approximately 3 minutes by boat from the main lodge. There is a short walk from the plane to the boat dock, so change into your boat shoes before departing Cancun. Insects can be a problem on the airstrip because it is protected from the wind. Pack your insect repellent where it is handy. Or, when you arrive, walk immediately from the plane to the small pier at the end of the runway where the breeze will alleviate the problem. Your baggage will be transferred by the lodge staff and placed in your room. The boat ride can be wet, so dress accordingly or pack your rain gear on top and put it on before you leave the pier.

When you arrive at the Casa Blanca main dock, lodge staff will greet you and show you to your room. Your baggage will arrive a few minutes later.

### **Lodge Orientation**

There is no guided fishing on the day you arrive, but feel free to wade the flats around the lodge or fish along the beach. Guests have had very good luck in these areas. On the day you arrive, after dinner, lodge staff will provide a general orientation explaining daily schedules and lodge policies. If you are unsure about some aspect of your trip, please be sure to ask questions.

### **On The Flats**

Casa Blanca is known for its fine "bone" and "permit" fishing, but you can take other species as well. If you would like to go after these other species, the fishing coordinator can give you advice on angling methods, availability, and fly or lure selection. You can fish from a skiff or wade. You can walk, pole, troll, fly-fish, spin or bait cast. You have a lot of options; so, it's a good idea to discuss your plans with the fishing coordinator.

The bays offer the light-tackle saltwater fisherman one of the most diverse selections of game fish in the world.

When conditions are right, an angler can cast to bonefish, tarpon, snook, permit, jacks, barracuda, cubera snapper, mutton snapper, sharks, and several different reef species in a single week of fishing. This kind angling opportunity can be found only in a few locations in the world. In the sections that follow, you can find more detailed info regarding each species.

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## Boats

Most boats used by the lodges are 16 foot, Dolphin, flats skiffs that will accommodate two fishermen and a guide. Each is constructed with a forward casting deck, tandem passenger seats, rod racks, and a poling platform.

Before you board the skiffs each day be sure you have reel covers on all your reels. While running, the reels often bounce and can be damaged.

## Guides

The guides are very knowledgeable about angling, but not all are fluent in English. If you have any problems communicating during the day, speak to the fishing coordinator so he can correct the situation immediately.

## Lodge Purchases

All bar charges and purchases at the lodge will be placed on your personal account which you is payable on the day of departure. We accept Dollars or Pesos (no credit cards or checks).

## Valuables

If you have anything you do not wish to leave in your room while you are at the lodge, you can place it in the lodge's safe.

## Water

All drinking water and water for ice is purified using the "reverse osmosis" process. You will find drinking water in your room in a cooler which is filled daily. The water from the tap is from a natural well, or "cenote" The locals drink it, but we recommend that you do not drink it. Also, please help us by conserving the water when possible.

## Electricity

All electricity at Casa Blanca is provided by the lodge's generators. It is 110V AC. The generators operate daily from approximately 3:30 P.M. until 8:00 A.M. This schedule will vary seasonally. In the spring and summer, the generators are operated all night to power the fans.

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## **Fans and Ventilation**

Casa Blanca's rooms are air conditioned. Not all of Playa Blanca rooms are. Rooms without a.c. are very comfortable. Since the guest rooms are on the beach, most of the year, they can be cooled by opening the shutters and allowing the sea breeze to blow through. On especially cool nights, you can adjust the shutters to limit the breeze. Playa Blanca also has large pedestal fans in the rooms and ceiling fans in the common areas.

## **Tipping**

In Mexico, it is the custom to tip the staff and guides for the services they provide. This can sometimes become a confusing proposition, so we would like to suggest the following general guidelines. We recommend tipping your guide \$40 per day, per boat.

If your guide provides you with exceptional service, such as putting you on a grand slam, you might consider a larger tip. You may wish to tip your guide directly each day, but most guests tip at the end of the week.

We suggest a tip for the staff of \$90 per week, per guest. This should be given to the clerk on the day of departure, when you clear your lodge account for distribution to the staff. If any of the lodge staff provides you with service you consider exceptional, you may wish to tip them individually, a bit more.

## **Departure Day**

There is no guided fishing on the day of departure. Each departure day is scheduled differently depending on guests' airline departure times. Generally, you will depart the lodge in the morning. Your schedule will be posted the evening before you depart for your convenience. On the day you depart, please be sure to clear your lodge account and have your bags packed and ready for transfer to the airstrip on hour before you scheduled departure. If you are scheduled to depart on an early flight, you should clear your account the evening before.

## **Problems At The Lodge**

If you encounter any problem at the lodge, please report it to the staff immediately. "No hot water, a missing light bulb, etc.." can be corrected easily, but only if we know about it. Please do not suffer in silence. The staff is there to help.

One of the great things about the island is that it is very isolated...no phones, no curio shops or timeshare condos. But, it also means that all our supplies must be brought in by boat. It is a very

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long trip with a large number of potential delays. Consequently, we will occasionally run short of certain items. We would appreciate your patience should this occur. Any problem will be corrected quickly.

Also, saltwater fishing can be somewhat unpredictable. The weather can play an important part in your fishing success. Unfortunately, the lodge cannot control the weather, but the guides will make every effort to insure the best possible angling under whatever the prevailing water and weather conditions might be.

## Section 4

### Daily Schedule

The daily schedule is flexible, so discuss your plans with the lodge staff every day. Most anglers choose a schedule that takes advantage of the best time to spot bonefish and permit on the flats, generally between 8:00am and 3:30pm. Before 8:00am and after 3:30pm, the angle of the sun produces a glare, making fish more difficult to see.

### **The Bonefish**

The bonefish is a spectacular game fish. For many reasons, bonefish are, perhaps, the ideal flats quarry. They like shallow water in gorgeous places, like Casa Blanca! They are not difficult to catch; even an absolute beginner has a chance of hooking up. Still, they provide sufficient challenge to keep, even seasoned anglers, coming back again and again. And, they fight like demons when hooked! Pound for pound, few fish can compare.

Bonefish like shallow water flats for two reasons. First, the flats hold a huge variety of crabs, shrimp and mollusks which make up the majority of a bonefish's diet. Second, sharks and barracuda both find bonefish particularly tasty, so the bonefish use the shallow water as a form of protection from these larger predators. This same shallow water is, for the angler, part of the allure of bonefishing. White sand flats, covered with calf deep, turquoise water are stunningly beautiful to look at, but even better, you get to wade through them, stalking your wily quarry, or, glide across them in your skiff, casting to schools as they come into range. Either way, it's great!

Because bonefish seem to be at the top of everybody's dinner list, they have evolved to blend into their environment better than most other fish on the flats. Their eyesight is also exceptionally good and the slightest hint of danger will send them flying in the other direction. These natural attributes are a part of what makes bonefishing such a great sport. For a more

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detailed analysis, we suggest you read some of the excellent books about the subject. Some of our favorites are listed at the end of this guide.

## **Trophy Bones**

In the last several years, more and more larger bones have been caught and released by Casa Blanca guests. Fish as large as 33 inches! 33 inches translates to approximately 14 pounds. That is a whopper! If you're after a trophy, tell your guide. The big ones usually frequent different areas than the smaller fish, so they are harder to spot. They are also much more wary than school fish, which is probably the reason they have grown so large. If you are a beginner, don't waste your time exclusively after big ones. They are tough to catch. If you are an experienced bone fisherman, a day stalking bigger fish can be rewarding, but do not expect to catch as many fish as you would otherwise.

One option is to start fishing between 8-8:30am and stay out , at your discretion, until 3:30pm. Guests aren't charged for fishing beyond 7 hours, but bear in mind that poling the boats is physically demanding. The guides can't be expected to fish much more than 7 hours unless they have a midday break, and they should be tipped accordingly.

The second alternative is to start fishing between 8-8:30am and return to the lodge for lunch; take a siesta, go for a swim, or surf cast until 2:00pm, when you can meet the guide at the dock. You can then fish nearby until 4-4:30pm. Please discuss this with the fishing coordinator before you plan to depart so he will not organize a search party to look for you when you do not return with the other guests.

## **Refreshments On The Water**

Each morning your guide will stock a cooler with complimentary soft drinks, beer and water. If you would like more or less of either, tell the fishing coordinator the evening before. Feel free to offer your guide a soft drink, but lodge policy precludes guides drinking alcoholic beverages.

## **Tackle At The Lodge**

The Lodge stocks a limited selection of flies and lures which have proven effective in the area. The lodge also has a few loaner rods in case you break all of your equipment. Rod storage racks are located outside each room.

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## Equipment Planning

Having the right equipment will insure a comfortable and successful fishing adventure. We feel that the fly fishing angler should bring at least two rods: one 9 weight for windy conditions and larger flies, (perfect for permit), and one smaller 6-8 weight for smaller flies and windless days. For the spinning tackle fisherman, a long medium-action rod for bonefish and permit, and a stiff heavy action rod for tarpon and large reef species will suffice. Extra rods are always a plus. There are more detailed recommendations in the sections that follow.

## Fly Casting Technique

For the purpose of this guide, we have assumed that you know how to fly cast. There are also some great books on casting technique which you can usually purchase at your local fly shop. Even if you feel fairly secure about your casting ability, we strongly recommend that you take a few casting lessons to perfect the "double haul" as well as your casting accuracy and technique. Most importantly, practice casting (in the wind if possible) at least 10 minutes per day the week before you arrive.

If you have troubles with your cast while at the lodge, Casa Blanca's fishing coordinator can help you make a few adjustments.

## Tides and The Moon

Most information written about bonefishing says that bones feed exclusively on the rising tide, period. If you are fishing on a reef or seaside flat this may be true. But, we have found that this is not really the case in Ascension Bay. It is much more complex and subtle. The area around Casa Blanca is vast and laced with lagoons and inlets which alter the tidal flow. Water movement is important to fish location but, at any given time, the water may actually be moving in two different directions on opposite sides of the bay. When you leave the dock, it might appear that the tide is low. After a short ride to the mouth of Tres Marias lagoon, you may find that it is still high tide. Often an outgoing tide will produce great fishing if you simply change sides of a flat. Casa Blanca's fishery is filled with an endless variety of these kinds of anomalies and your guide will move around during the day to take advantage of them. Regarding moon phase, we can only report that, after much observation and many discussions, we can find no consistent correlation between the phase of the moon and the quality of the fishing.

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## Clock and Distance Fish Location

On the flats, your guide will spot the bones sooner than you and point them out. He will call out the fish's location using the *clock and distance method*. To locate a fish spotted by the guide, imagine the boat as the face of a clock. The bow would indicate 12 O'clock. As an example, a fish at "12 O'clock, 40 feet." would mean the fish is directly in front of the boat 40 feet away. 9 O'clock would put the fish directly to port; 3 O'clock, directly to starboard.

There are some excellent books which go into great detail on flats fishing technique. We recommend you read one. Some are listed at the end of this booklet. Below is a very brief description of bonefishing technique.

## Bonefish Fly Presentation

Your presentation should always be chosen according to the fish's behavior, but no matter what behavior you encounter, you should always make your cast so that you can retrieve the fly in front of and away from the fish. That might seem fairly simple to do but it is very easy to cast to some cruising or feeding fish and have them swim across the leader in which case you would then be stripping toward the fish. From a fish's point of view, the fly would then appear to be coming after him which is quite unnatural and would spook the fish. A more natural situation would be for the fish to see its prey (fly) trying to escape, that is, being stripped away.

Following is a very brief description of fish behaviors you will encounter on the flats.

1. Tailing - When bonefish (or any fish) is tailing, it has its head down and is somewhat preoccupied with rooting around for food. Its vision is slightly diminished by the angle and it has usually stirred up the bottom. This combination requires you to place a fly fairly close to a school for them to see it. Look closely at the school to locate all the fish and try to cast to the fish closest to you. It is easy to spook the whole school. Tailing fish tend to be very spooky, but even if they do spook, don't get flustered. Let your fly settle to the bottom and wait a few seconds. Because a school of tailing fish are feeding together, they also tend to be very aggressive; probably because of the competition for food. The school will usually regroup quickly in the same spot. When they do your fly will already be in place...a few short strips and bang!...bonefish!

2. Mudding - On the deeper part of the flat, individual or groups of bonefish will often stir up the bottom as they grub for food. This cloud of mud tends to make the bones feel quite secure and often the angler can catch one bone after another without spooking the school. To locate the fish within a mud, look for the telltale flashes of reflected light. Just keep casting to the leading

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edge of the mud where they are feeding. If using lure, cast about 15 feet past the fish, just in front of the leading edge and retrieve it.

3. Cruising - These are generally the most difficult fish to catch because they aren't necessarily interested in feeding. When bones are cruising, they seem to be even more wary than usual, therefore extreme care should be taken in making your presentation. When casting to cruising fish, remember to place your fly or lure well ahead of the fish and let it settle. Wait until the fish is almost on top of it before moving it. Be sure to place it where you will be able to retrieve it in front of and away from the fish school. If the fly or lure lands too close to cruising fish, they will spook and you won't get a second cast.

## Section 5

### Equipment Planning

When planning your outfitting budget, do not skimp on what you invest in your rods and reels. These are items where you will be rewarded many times over for buying the very best saltwater equipment you can find. It will perform exceptionally well, and will last for years. In the long run, you will actually save money by buying the best. You will also derive a great deal of pleasure from owning the best.

### Bonefish Fly Selection

Having the proper flies can make or break a fishing trip. Casa Blanca stocks an excellent selection of bonefish flies. If you would like, you can purchase all your flies when you arrive at the lodge. One advantage of buying your flies at the lodge is that the hot flies change from week to week. Instead of buying every pattern you might possibly need, you can focus on current winners.

### Fly Color

Many people feel that the most important factor in proper fly selection is bottom coloration. Most of the items on the bonefish's menu have evolved to blend into their surroundings, so many experts feel it is important to match the fly's overall color with that of the grass or sand over which you are fishing. Then again, there are days when bright pink is the only color that will attract attention. Many of the guides at Casa Blanca, recommend starting with pink everyday and changing if you get refusal. It is important to ask your guide for recommendations.

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## Fly Size

It has been our experience that big bonefish generally prefer big flies. The bonefish of Ascension Bay prefer patterns in hook sizes 2 through 6, although at times patterns as small as size 8 are necessary. The general rule is: the more shallow the water, the smaller the fly.

## Fly Sink Rate

You should have flies with three sink rates in your box: unweighted, slightly weighted, and heavy. Normally, unweighted, eyeless patterns are used in the shallow water (less than 1 foot) over turtle grass: intermediate, small-eyed flies, like Crazy Charlie with bead-chain eyes are used in on to two-foot water; and heavy flies, like Clouser Minnows, are more effective in 2 to 4 feet water (or deeper). The ideas behind matching your fly's weight to water depth are really pretty simple. In skinny water, the splash of a larger fly tends to be more perceptible. Plus, you don't really need much weight to sink a fly only a few inches. When fishing in deeper water an unweighted fly does not get to the bottom fast enough.

Be sure you have the following basic selection. The Crazy Charlie and the Gotcha are the Casa Blanca bonefish flies of choice. This is not to say that other flies will not work. They will. Almost any shrimp imitation can be productive, but the Charlie and the Gotcha work great and are widely available.

\* The following Charlie or Gotcha variations (including the recommended number of each pattern) will be enough for the entire week.

#4 Charlie with bead chain eyes - 6 each in white/cream, light tan, brown, yellow and pink.

#6 Charlie with bead chain eyes - 3 each in white/cream, pink and light tan.

#6 Eyeless Charlie - 3 each in white/cream, pink and light tan.

\* Flashy Charlie (for flat light), with bead eyes tied on #4 or #6 hook - 6 in pink and pearl (Crystal Flash body over - wrapped in clear Swannundaze or Larva Lace, gold bead eyes and crystal flash wing).

\* Woodstock, #4 - 2 each in tan and cream.

\* Clouser Minnow - 6 each tied on #1 and #4 hooks - chartreuse and white bucktail with red lead eyes; tan and white bucktail with red lead eyes. The sparse patterns seem to work best.

\* Other Productive Patterns : Puff, Grass Shrimp, Bonefish Muddler, Snapping Shrimp, Baited Breath.

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## Fly Rod Selection

In general, the ideal rods for bones are stiff, fast action rods in 7 to 9 weight. The rod and line sizes will effectively handle all fishing conditions and have the power to punch out a line in a fairly stiff breeze. If you're planning fish in an area that holds bonefish and permit, it would be wise to use a 9 wt. rod that can handle the larger, heavier permit flies.

The new high modular graphite rods are very popular among saltwater anglers. With a very stiff butt section and ultra fast tip speed, they enable the fisherman to punch heavy saltwater tapers into a gusty head wind with little effort.

Most saltwater fly rods are 9 feet and over. Here are a few examples of the most popular fly rods. Keep in mind that 4 piece and 3 piece rods are much more convenient than a 2 piece outfit because they can be carried with you on most commercial flights. We recommend that you bring at least two rods in sizes 7wt.to 9wt.

## Fly Reels

Reels should be anodized, corrosion-resistant saltwater models that will hold a full fly line, plus at least 100 yards of 20 lb. backing. Reels with a high quality, smooth, drag are essential to prevent break-offs from the blistering runs of hooked fish.

## Fly Lines

Floating fly lines are all that are necessary. We recommend Scientific Anglers, Mastery Series Saltwater Taper, (in the bright colors) or something with a similar taper construction. Note: We recommend that you carry at least one extra spool/line in case you damage your line.

## Leaders

A tapered leader of nine feet or longer is highly recommended. The most simple solution is to buy the pre-tied bonefish leaders by Climax or Orvis and then use separate spools of 8 (3X), 10 (2X), and 12 (1X) pound tippet for added length. If the fish are leader shy, try using slightly smaller tippet material. If the fish are spooking when the fly line hits the water, try using a longer tippet section.

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## Section 6

### Fishing for Permit

The permit fishing at Casa Blanca may be the very best in the world. As many as 20 permit have been caught on the fly in a single week. Another week guests boated 10 Grand Slams, one permit, one bonefish and a tarpon, all in one day! One guest even boated 9 permit in one week, on fly tackle.

Permit are by far the most difficult fish you'll encounter on the flats. They have superb eyesight and a well developed sense of smell. Aside from their obvious physical differences, permit differ from bonefish in several other ways. Because of their body size, they seem to be much more comfortable in deeper water. Although it is fairly common to see permit with their tail and dorsal fin out of the water, they usually won't remain there for long. They're constantly on the move and never remain in one area for a great deal of time, so quick, accurate casts (and luck) are essential. Don't become discouraged with a few refusals. Permit are difficult but catchable. Anglers at Casa Blanca boat them every week during the season.

### **Permit Flies**

Bonefish can be finicky about the flies they will eat, but permit can be even more difficult. Casa Blanca stocks several flies which work well on the local permit. Permit flies are generally larger than bonefish patterns because permit seem to prefer crabs over shrimp. Because of their larger body size, permit also tend to put more of a strain on a hook, so it is a good idea to use larger/stronger hooks. Although there is much debate over the best permit pattern, the best advice is to stick with one pattern that looks good to the guide and keep trying.

Permit seem particularly fond of small crabs, so the majority of the productive patterns are crab imitators. The most productive patterns at Casa Blanca are the **Casa Blanca Rag Head**, the **McCrab** and the **Del Brown Special**. We have also had good luck with **Clouser Minnows**.

1. The Casa Blanca Rag Head is most effective in a light tan with a slightly greenish tint.
2. When purchasing the McCrab, make sure that the deer hair is clipped very close to the hook shank giving you a wide hook gap, and that the underside of the fly weighted properly. If this pattern is tied incorrectly, it will go belly up when it hits the water or when you start to strip it.
3. The Del Brown should be tied in light tan and cream only. The darker colors which are widely available do not work at Casa Blanca.
4. Clouser Minnows in #2 to 2/0 work well when tied sparsely. Tan or chartreuse are the most effective.

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Before you go to the flats, tie your permit fly on to your line and drop it in about two feet of water. Count how long it takes to hit the bottom. You now know the fly's sink rate. When you cast to a real permit, you will then know how long it takes for your fly to reach the bottom. Remember to adjust the time according to the water depth on the flat when you are fishing.

Tailing permit are most likely to take a fly, but stumbling upon one is somewhat rare. Cruising permit are most commonly encountered, so you must be prepared to place the fly well in front of the fish, allow it to settle to the bottom (count!), and patiently wait for it to swim to the fly. Permit swim more erratically than bones, changing directions often. You might need several casts to get the fly into position. When the permit is several feet from the fly, "walk" the fly along the bottom (about 6") in a slow, deliberate, crab like fashion and then stop the fly completely. All smart crabs know that they cannot outrun a permit and will remain motionless in hope that the permit will overlook them.

If the permit doesn't immediately pounce on your fly (which is about 75% of the time), don't begin stripping away. Think like a crab and slowly manipulate the fly into slowly "removing" itself from the vicinity. (This, of course, is quite difficult with all the adrenaline flowing). The trick is to keep the fish interested, allowing it to look the fly over. Don't be afraid to let the fly remain motionless if the permit is eyeing it - almost always, permit prefer to take a motionless fly. If you are using a Clouser Minnow, just use a normal strip. They are designed to imitate an active prey item.

## Fly Equipment For Permit

Rods should be the same as mentioned in the bonefish recommendations but a bit more stout to handle larger flies and fish. The ideal permit rod is a 9 wt. Those reels discussed in the bonefish section should fare well against permit, but make sure your reel has at least 200 yards of 20 lb. backing. In most cases, a floating line will suffice because most permit flies are heavily weighted. For tippet, follow the bonefish guidelines but use something slightly stronger (10-12 lb.)

## Permit On Spinning Tackle

The spin fisherman has a real advantage when going after permit because of the option of using live crab for bait. Live crabs are a permit's one and only weakness. They will attach them with little hesitation.

As with fly fishing, artificial lures should be fished slowly and patiently. The presentation should "creep" along the bottom with frequent stops and starts. Lures listed in the bonefish section can all be productive. A spinning variety of the McCrab or a Gaines Phillips Wiggle Jig

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1/8 oz. (pink or white/brown) are good choices. Most permit taken of spinning tackle are caught using a 1/8 oz. Wiggle Jig with a hermit crab trailer.

## **Spinning Tackle For Permit**

The same as listed in the bonefish section. Reels must hold at least 200 yards of 8 lb. line. Permit are larger and significantly stronger than bonefish and will strain tackle to the limit. Large permit will often make such long runs that you'll be forced to follow them in the boat, so substantial line capacity is important.

## **Section 7**

### **Fishing For Tarpon**

Tarpon are the largest, strongest and most acrobatic of the flats lineup. Even juvenile fish will put your angling skills to the test. They will also strain your tackle as well. Primarily known for its small mid sized specimens (20 - 70 lbs.), Ascension Bay's tarpon should be considered an added bonus since the numbers found in these waters are fairly limited. These are plenty to cast to in order to complete a Slam, but you should not consider Casa Blanca primarily as a tarpon destination.

A majority of these fish are natives which remain in the area throughout the year. Migratory fish begin to show up in the beginning of April and, there after, numbers will increase significantly through July. On "dead calm" days in June and July, the tarpon fishing on the Caribbean side of the lodge can be excellent. Fish can be taken up to 150 lbs. but most are from 30 - 50 lbs.

Other non migratory tarpon are attracted to the area near Sacrificio because of their affinity for brackish water which is found in the mangrove lagoons. Adult and juvenile fish will often remain in the protected waters because it offers refuge from larger deep water predators. Perch and other small fish provide year round forage.

### **Tarpon Fly Presentation**

Once fish have been spotted, it is important to quickly and accurately place the fly/lure in front of the fish's path. Tarpon are not easily spooked and you can place the fly/lure quite close to the fish. A distance of about three to five feet is perfect. Allow it to sink to the level of the fish and then begin to strip to retrieve it at a moderated pace. If the tarpon is in the dining mood, it will take the presentation. If you get refusal, just continue to cast until you get its attention. If you get refusals from several different fish, change flies.

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Tarpon have concrete lined mouths, so a super sharp hook is an absolute necessity. Correct hook setting will also help put the odds in your favor. If fly fishing, point the rod tip at the fish and firmly set the hook with your stripping hand only. Then keep your rod tip close to the water, to eliminate slack, and pump the rod sideways with short, sharp tugs as you pull on the line and the rod simultaneously. This sounds very nice on paper, but the sight of a tarpon inhaling your fly can cause even the experienced fisherman to lose his cool and occasionally choke.

## **Fly Rods For Tarpon**

For tarpon, it is important to have a rod with enough backbone to actually move the fish during the fight. The ideal rod for the larger sized tarpon is a 10 wt. For fish under 90 lbs. you can get away with a stiff 9 wt., but if you hook a hundred plus pound fish or your guide asks you to cast a 3/0 fly in a 20 knot breeze, you might wish you had the backbone of a heavier rod. The rods listed in the bonefish section in 9 wt. or 10 wt. are ideal. Many of these rods also come in a model with a beefed up butt section for added power.

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## Section 8

### **Barracuda, Jacks, et. al**

There is a wide variety of underrated, under fished species in Ascension Bay which will match the skill of the most sophisticated anglers. Barracuda are at the top of the list. They are perhaps the most exciting fish on the flats. They will take a fly or a lure. They are big and they fight like heck. In addition to Cuda you will also find Jacks, Shark, Snapper. You should definitely consider pursuing a few of these other exciting species.

### **Barracuda Flies**

Deceiver (blue or green/white 2/0), Poppers and Sliders in blue, red. Note: For barracuda and jacks, an extra-fast retrieve will usually provoke more strikes than a slower retrieve. Use a steel leader.

### **Barracuda Lures**

You can take cuda by sighting casting or trolling in shallow water. By far the most productive cuda lure is the Corky (Bring several). Tube lures (green, red, orange) are also especially effective. Zara Spook (see tarpon section), 5 1/4" Rapala Silver 9/16 oz. (Needlefish). Always remember to use a wire leader.

### **Jacks and Sharks**

Lefty's Deceiver (red/white and blue white), Streaker, Gaines Saltwater Popper (red/white and blue/white), Shark Fly. 2/0 - 3/0 hook.

Rod / Reel: Follow tarpon guidelines - 10 wt. rod

Line: Saltwater taper, floating line.

Leader: A wire shock tippet is mandatory. Pre tied Climax Shark / Big Game leaders are perfect.

### **Jacks on Conventional Tackle**

Occasionally, Jacks can be taken off the end of the pier at night after dinner. Top water plugs are the most productive. Light colors are especially effective: Zara Spook (tarpon size), Magnum Rapala (tarpon size), Bombers, Corky.

Rod / reel: The same as listed in tarpon section.

Line: 12-15 lb. test.

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## Section 9

### Flats Fishing Accessories Checklist

Here is a check list of items that you might want to bring with you. We list them because guests sometimes overlook them. Some items are essential; some are not. **Polarized Sunglasses are ESSENTIAL.**

Knot Book	Nail Knot Tool	Sunscreen
Zap A Gap	Leader Material	Lip Balm
Snippers	Fly Line Dressing	Aloe Vera Gel
Reel Mainenance Kit	Fishing Pliers	Insect Repellent
Reel Covers	Needle Nose Pliers	Small Waterproof Bag
Hook Sharpener	Hemostats	Snorkel, Mask, Fins
Reel Lubricant	Extra Rod Tips	Required Medications
Scales	Zip Loc Bags	Reading Materials
Adhesive Tape (for casting blisters)	Lumbar Support Fishing Belt	Small First Aid Kit
Tape Measure	Wade Bag, Backpack	Flashlight
Pocket Knife	Extra Batteries	Camera Gear

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## Sunglasses

Polarized sunglasses are a must for every angler. They are essential for spotting fish. The shape of your face will determine which style you choose. The lenses, though, should be light amber to brown in color. Buy the best you can find. Bring a spare in case you break or lose them.

## Shirts and Pants

There are many brands of clothing which are specifically designed for fishing. Most include extra pockets or other features you will find useful. Unfortunately, many brands are made of synthetic material. We have found cotton shirts to be much more comfortable than the synthetic variety. In spite of manufacturers' claims to the contrary, cotton still appears to be more comfortable and it does not hold the heat from the sun the way synthetics do. Be sure to choose shirts with collars and tightly woven cotton fabric which provides sun protection. If you like knit fabrics, a cotton pique knit is excellent.

Cotton is great for shorts and pants, as well, if you plan to fish exclusively from a boat. If there is a possibility that you might do any wading, synthetic shorts or wading pants are usually more functional than cotton since they will dry faster. Most guests find themselves in the water occasionally, so a good combination might be a cotton shirt with synthetic shorts or pants.

In some areas of Ascension Bay there are sea lice which can be annoying. The number varies from year to year. Some years they are a pest; others they completely disappear. Keep a pair of long, lightweight wading pants in the boat. If the critters bother you, put the pants on; tuck them into your wading shoes and they will completely protect you.

## Foot Gear

Casa Blanca highly recommends that all guests wear neoprene type wading shoes with a rigid sole while in the water. Many guests have been using athletic insoles to improve the arch support of their wading shoes and they report a big improvement in comfort especially after a long day on the flats.

## Fishing Hat

A wide brimmed hat or a hat with front and rear visors and a dark underbill will aid in sighting fish. The dark underbill enhances the polarizing qualities of sunglasses. Forget style. Go for function.

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## Lightweight Rain Gear

Rain is always a possibility in the tropics and the weather can change quickly during the day. A lightweight rain suit is a must. Be sure it is water proof, not water resistant. Please note: many outdoors stores do not recommend Gore-Tex around saltwater.

## Climate

Temperatures can range from the low 70's in January up to the low 90's in July. Isolated afternoon thunder showers are a possibility year round. The weather tends to be relatively calm in June and July.

## Clothing at the Lodge

As you know, the lodge is located on a beach in the tropics. Your clothing should be planned with this in mind. In general, we recommend lightweight, cotton clothing in light colors. During the day, dress for whatever activity you have planned: fishing, beach, etc...In the evening, dress is still relatively casual around the lodge. Shorts are fine at dinner for both men and women, but please, no short athletic attire and no tank tops for men.

Sport Coat - leave it at home

Slacks / shorts - 2 or 3 pair of each in lightweight fabric

Long sleeved shirts (for sun protection) - light color / fabric

Short sleeved shirts / tops - It is difficult to bring too many. For men, polo style knit shirts are very functional. For women any lightweight cotton knit will work. Shirts you plan on wearing in the sun should have a collar.

Cotton Dresses - Ladies will find light weight cotton dresses or shorts, very comfortable.

For ladies - athletic brassiere for choppy boat rides

Cotton sweater, sweatshirt or jacket for cool mornings and evenings (December - April)

Shoes - Bring at least one pair of rubber soled athletic shoes or non slip boat shoes. Tennis shoes and sandals are great around the lodge. Ladies: leave your heels at home.

Swim Suits - Bring whatever you like.

## Laundry Service

Casa Blanca offers a very limited laundry service. You may have articles hand washed, line dried and folded. Please take into consideration the limitations inherent in this process. There is no charge but you should tip your maid about \$1.50 per article of clothing laundered.

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## Clothing For Fishing

Whatever style of fishing attire you plan to wear, it is important that it provide you with excellent protection from the sun. We cannot over emphasize this point. The sun will be very intense and you will often be on the water 7 hours a day. A sunburn can ruin your trip or at very least make it very uncomfortable.

## Section 10

### Suggested Fishing Related Reading

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