

## Belize River Lodge: Serendipity Awaits

Story and photos by Glenn Zinkus

The Belize River flows through 180 miles of twining jungle that is home to jaguars, howler monkeys, iguanas, and hundreds of species of birds—a haven for ecotourists. But as much as we reveled in the abundant wildlife, my fishing buddy, Gary Hickman, and I had traveled to Belize for the incredibly varied and productive piscatorial pursuits available through Belize River Lodge.

Set along a manicured palm-lined bank on the Belize River, just five minutes from Philip S.W. Goldson International Airport, this historic lodge, built in 1961, provides superb fishing and luxurious accommodations amid spectacular settings. The first fishing lodge built in Belize, Belize River Lodge (BRL) provides comfort, charm, sumptuous local cuisine, and outstanding professional guides for anglers seeking tarpon, snook, permit,

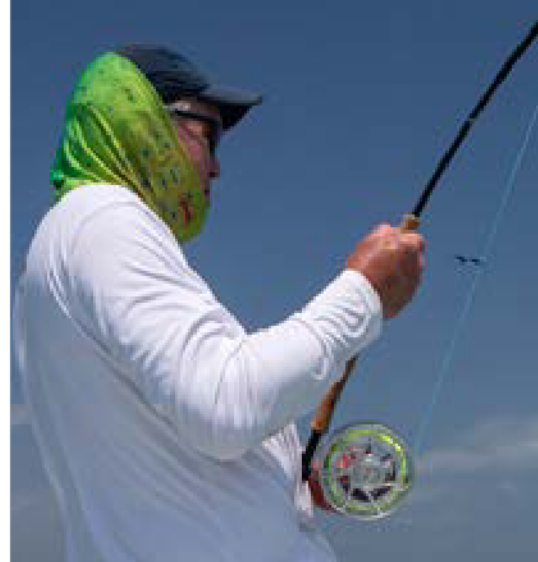
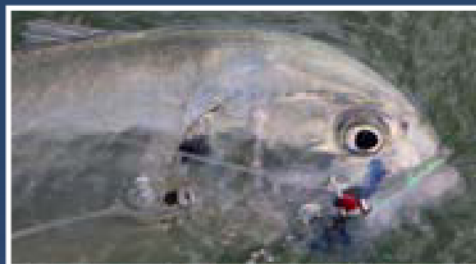
bonefish, and more. The lodge walls are paneled with beautiful local mahogany, and the tables are hewn from slabs of these native trees cut decades ago. The rooms at this riverside paradise feature screened dens, and from ours we could look out over the placid Belize River—home to a renowned fishery for big migratory tarpon.

Mike Heusner and Marguerite Miles have owned BRL since 1986, and they immediately made us feel right at home. Despite the lodge's convenient location, which is easy to reach for traveling anglers, the setting is remarkably pristine and seemingly worlds apart from any hustle and bustle. The mouth of the Belize River is just 3.5 miles downstream, giving anglers at BRL a variety of exciting saltwater fishing options.

The proximity to the Caribbean allows BRL's skilled guides to custom-

ize the fishing based on weather and customer preferences. We tried a little of everything, sometimes heading upstream to search for tarpon, other times fishing the mouth of the river (a great place for giant tarpon), and still other days venturing out amid mangrove islands that protect inshore flats where bonefish, permit, and snook prowl. Some days we headed out to fish reef-protected flats farther offshore, a fertile and beautiful seascape of sand and coral flats amid deeper expanses of mesmerizing turquoise and blue water, and all of it home to abundant bonefish and permit.

In retrospect, I'm not sure what I enjoyed the most, but the angling diversity is amazing. If the wind is blowing hard from the east, fish the inland waterways or the leeward sides of nearby cays; if wind and waves stay down, venture out into the sea and



fish the flats formed by barrier reefs. You can also fish by boat in the river and estuary, and wade the flats for excitement-filled days of sight-casting.

Prepare for serendipity when you visit BRL. Owing to the diversity, each day we carried rods rigged for a variety of species, and each morning we set out with a plan in mind. But in these fertile waters, sometimes opportunity knocks: motor quietly around an island or a bend in the river and, like us, you might find unexpected action, notice gulls diving to the water's surface, and find that schools of hard-fighting jack crevalle are tearing through schools of bait. Run upriver if you hope to see nesting jabiru storks and find rolling tarpon. The many unexpected opportunities make fishing here a nonstop adventure. Testifying to the fecundity of these waters, and to the knowledge and skills of the hardest-working guides I've ever fished with, Hickman scored what the locals call a backcountry grand slam, catching a bonefish, tarpon, and snook all in the same day.

Fly-fishing packages at BRL, (888) 275-4843, [www.belizeriverlodge.com](http://www.belizeriverlodge.com), range from three nights' lodging and two days of fishing for \$1,925 per person to eight nights' lodging and seven days of fishing for \$5,450 per person (based on double occupancy). The lodge offers a wide array of ecotour packages and ecotour/fishing combo packages.

