

Kiritimati (Christmas Island) Bonefish, by Lyall

Call it what you will, Christmas Island, Kiritimati, Gilbert Islands, Line Islands or Kiribati, it is a central Pacific fishing paradise. I first attempted to join a group of Singaporean fly fishermen at Kiritimati in 2013, only to be refused boarding along with 20 other passengers to the Pacific Airways once a week flight from Nadi in Fiji because “too much baggage has been loaded and the plane is overweight and unbalanced”.



The arsenal: 20% Stu Tripney's Superior Flies, 80% Lyall's

October 2014 was to be the reprise, after all, having tied a range of weights and colours of Crazy Charlies and a hand full of shrimps, letting them mature gracefully in the fly box for twelve months, how could I not make the journey to their intended destination of use?

The fishing HQ was Ikari House <http://www.ikarihouse.com/> which I was reliably advised was the best bone fishing outfit on the island ... and it was true.

Accommodation

The accommodation is fishing style, twin rooms with essential air conditioning and clean bathrooms. Each morning there was hot, pre-dawn western breakfast, sandwiches for lunch on the water and a western style buffet dinner. If, as we were, you are accompanied by fishermen more interested in yellow fin tuna than bone fish, an hour before dinner sees everyone seated around a large, long table eating the freshest sashimi with wasabi and soy sauce telling ripping yarns about the one that didn't get away!!!



After dinner, Jenaki, the amazing head guide, assigned “beats” for the next day: destinations named Paris Island, Cook Island, Motu Upou and Motu Tabu. At sunrise we were all in various boats heading to different parts of the atoll, some of us to walk the coral flats and some to fish “outside” in the ocean. Full sun protection is a must and the Stalker Canberra Anglers' Association shirt with pockets big enough for fly boxes was fantastic.

You wouldn't get into Parliament House dressed like this.

The Fishing

The first day of bone fishing was rather slim, getting the knack of sighting the mirror-like bone fish or rather its shadow, stripping to the guide's instruction "striiiiiip, striiiip, strip, strip, STRIP STRIKE!!!" then raising the rod tip and hanging on for dear life and yelling out "backing!!!" as the bone fish runs, gets played in then runs again and again.



From three bones on day one to another day when David the local guide found a bone fish super highway and two particular spots walking the coral had me stop counting bones landed at 33 due to sheer excitement. Towards the end of the trip I scored bones up to 7 lb and plenty of 5 lb, all of which were broad shouldered and strong runners. Despite having fingerless fishing gloves, I had to wrap my stripping fingers with cut up strips of cloth shopping bag bound by rubber bands when my fingers began to bleed.

7 lb bone caught on 8 lb tippet

Between hours walking the flats we had to motor over coral reefs and bommies and had the chance to tease the fish with poppers and bait patterns. The range of fish caught on various flies was unprecedented in my salt water experience: giant trevally, blue fin trevally, coral trout, red snapper, red bass, queen fish – too many to name.

To reduce the blood pressure, nature has provided fantastic wildlife all around the atoll. Almost every day manta rays would pass the boat on their leisurely cruise. Quietly walking the flats we would see black stingrays approaching in foot deep water, turning and running when they saw unfamiliar shapes (me) with fly rods. Frigate birds cruised, dropping down to the boat looking for bait, getting caught in the aerialised fly line before untangling the moment the fly reached their bodies. Thousands of sooty terns inhabited the sanctuaries of Paris Island and elsewhere, creating spectacular clouds of screeching birds.



Soaring frigates



Manta rays cruising past the boat



Sooty terns over Paris Island



An approaching stingray

Gear

Walking the coral flats all day makes rubber soled Simms Flats Wader boots or similar essential. One of our co-fishers lost both soles of his fresh water wading boots on day one. Wear a buff about your face if your skin is easily burnt like mine and a long sleeved CAA Stalker shirt and sun gloves of some description. Take a peaked cap or legionnaire's cap and a spare to replace the one which gets blown off by the wind as you speed home across the

water at the end of the day to Ikari House in London (I kid you not, that is the name of the location).

For bones, a six weight outfit worked well for me (with David my guide carrying my nine weight for cruising GTs) and a floating line such as an aqua blue Rio Bonefish Quick Shooter to keep all but the leader off of the sharp coral. This is not an advertisement for Rio but I used 12 foot, 8 lb Rio Bonefish tapered leaders with 8 lb fluorocarbon tippet. With a good cast into the ever present wind using 16 feet of leader and tippet, you maximise your chance of fooling the very spooky bones.

Two hundred metres of backing on a large arbour reel with a good progressive drag is also essential. Once hooked, the bones run towards Honolulu at the speed of light then turn and run back towards you at the same speed, making fast reeling of the large arbour reel a must. Then ... they turn around and do it three more times!!!

As for bone fish flies, Crazy Charlies in various weights and a rainbow of colours (the bones kept coming back for orange Charlies) and similar Christmas Island Specials worked really well. Be sure to limit the amount of Crystal Flash you tie with (it can scare the bones if used too liberally) and put a small amount of super glue over the thread wraps securing the wing on either of the flies to ensure you can use that successful fly again and again. **THERE ARE NO FISHING TACKLE SHOPS ON KIRITIMATI.** The method for tying the Crazy Charlie was demonstrated at CAA Fly Tying at:

http://www.canberra-anglers.asn.au/newsletter/fly/nov14/crazy_charlie.pdf



Could the view be more relaxing?



Local guide David scanning the beach for GTs.



Lobster lunch in Paris (Island) with fellow bone fisherman Polar from Toowoomba. Note his lucky bow tie.

Tips

Tipping the guide and boatman at the end of each day is customary as is tipping the kitchen ladies at the end of the week. Gavin Hurley's briefing note has suggested amounts. Take plenty of Australian dollars cash (there is one ATM on the island but not to be relied upon). Like our group, you may end up spending more time than you thought on Kiritimati or Nadi as flights are unreliable.

Organising

While there is a second fishing option on Kiritimati, I would only stay and fish with Ikari House and fish with head guide Janaki. Ikari House only takes bookings from tackle shops rather than individuals and I organised my trip with Gavin Hurley Fly Fishing. The price of his stay at Ikari House for one week is very competitive and he is a regular visitor to Kiritimati. Find details at

<http://www.hurleysflyfishing.com.au/christmas>

[-island-guided-adventure.html](#)

Conclusion

The question is whether the experience was worth the money, the time and the effort? Allow me to paint you a picture. Azure blue water covering gleaming white sand, standing knee deep in water in a light breeze. The only sound is the flapping of your CAA fishing shirt in the breeze. Quietly from beside you David the guide says "forty metres, twelve o'clock" then motions without words how to strip, when to stop and when to strike. The next word uttered is me excitedly shouting "BACKING" and I am content that I am in salt water fly fishing heaven enjoying the moment – at that time nothing else matters.

If you get the chance to fish for bones at Kiritimati, do it. Be ready to slow down your pace of life for a week, take your sense of humour and go with the flow when the jet breaks down!



You get the picture ... not a very large bone but at that moment nothing else mattered.

