

A brilliantly colored sailfish is brought to the side of one of the Sailfish Bay Resort boats by one of the talented deck hands.

VELA!

Story by WALTER HODGES





YOU KNOW HOW SUNGLASSES CHANGE

the color of things? As a photographer, I'm cautious of sunglasses because they alter the "real" look of the world and can radically affect my judgment on a scene I might photograph. On a 32-foot fishing boat out of [Sailfish Bay Resort](#), twenty-five miles off the coast of the Guatemalan city of Puerto Iztapa, I wasn't at all sure what I was seeing. My first moments in "Blue Water" simply didn't look real. The water...something about it through the sunglasses didn't fit my definition of how liquid should appear. For a few minutes I took the sunglasses off and just stood there. Those of you who are regulars in the salt might be old hands on this deck. The color was an impossible purple/blue. An iridescent host to my first attempt at sailfish on fly.

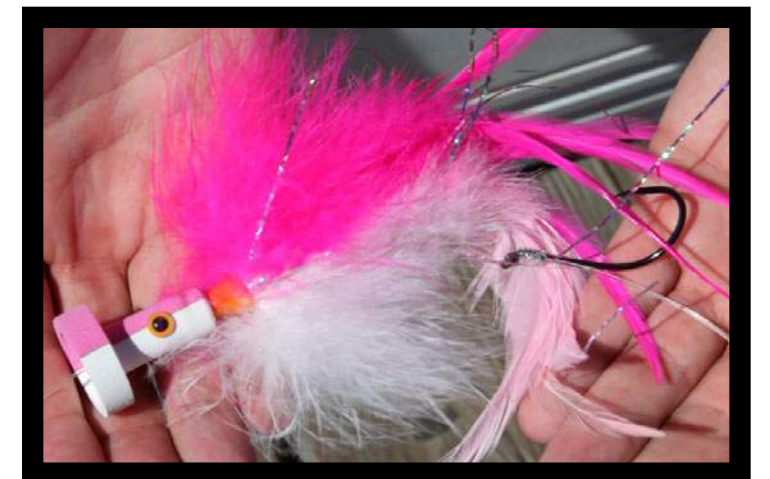
(Top) The Sailfish Bay boat Gypsy heads out to the ocean from Puerto Iztapa in search of sails. (Facing page) Sailfish leap constantly when hooked on the fly.





Mesmerized, I was standing on the transom of the boat holding a 12 or 14-weight “at the ready” alongside the mate. I had been told by the captain that the middle of the stern is considered 12 o’clock on a clock face and to listen for his direction when he spotted a fish – that he would call out the position of the fish based on the “clock”. Earlier at the Lodge, I had been instructed about what to do when a sailfish lights up on a hookless teaser behind the boat. My daze was broken when the captain suddenly yelled Vela! and pointed at 2 o’clock. The iridescence was sliced open by three fins chasing a teaser like a cat would chase a panicked mouse through a house of mirrors. I stood there probably looking like a young kid seeing a Major League baseball park for the first time. The captain yelled at the mate to reel the teaser fast toward the boat ahead of the sailfish. When the fish was close enough, about 25 feet, I cast the fly as the boat was taken out of gear and the teaser yanked out of the water. Synchronized teamwork at its best.

When I first spotted the fish it looked like a long dark shape behind the fly, almost black/purple in color. I’ve heard people talk about a sailfish “lighting up like a neon sign” in the water. And, wow, that’s exactly what then took place. Amazing! A Guatemalan sailfish lit up and charging the fly. Just that quickly the



(Clockwise from left page) A huge sailfish leaps out of the Pacific Ocean with a pink squid fly on its bill. Up close and personal with the eye of a Pacific sailfish. Close up of a Pink Squid fly used almost exclusively for sailfish on the fly.

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A giant pacific sailfish is released unharmed back into the ocean.



(Top) Two clients hook a double on sailfish from the back of the boat Gypsy. Sailfish fight spectacularly taking a ton of line and jumping constantly. (Bottom) Detail views of the food and the facilities at Sailfish Bay Resort—home base for sailfish fly fishing in Guatemala.

fish spotted the fly, turned on it and ate it. I didn't strike the fish with the rod at all. I simply got tight on the fish essentially letting the fish hook itself. It turned to my left with the fly and I swept the rod low to the right stopping the rod at about a 45 degree angle to the fish. Then just as suddenly, I was attached to 100 pounds of arching, flashing, leaping, diving, surging, running, raging power as the line ripped off the reel and I screamed something unintelligible.

Guatemalan sailfish are a gig worth experiencing. If you haven't done it, those

beasts can change your life for the better. If you have, you know you need to do it again. Tossing midge patterns at finicky browns in Catskill tail water it ain't. It's far more of an industrial package. But for pure fun, it's a scream and Guatemala is the perfect place to do it.

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Walter Hodges with his first sailfish on a fly at Sailfish Bay Resort.



Releasing a sailfish unharmed from the deck of the fishing boat Gypsy.