

Surf Fishing Baja's East Cape

By Bill Varney Jr.



As our flight began to descend into the Los Cabos airport I felt as if I could reach out and skip my hand across the brilliant blue Sea of Cortez just below me. The East Cape and my destination of Rancho Leonaro (now closed) was just to the West and as we slipped across the water I could see manta rays in a show of splashes approaching the beach.

Visiting here is always a joy, barren dry desert, dotted with make shift homes and bordered by a contrasting sea, so lovely, so sharp to the eye that it almost doesn't seem real. The stark contrast between life in America and life here is immediately apparent. To the observant eye it is nothing less than a true testament to the nature of the Mexican people. To their goodness, friendship and tolerance for a climate and a lifestyle that might leave others breathless. Americans have so much to learn from the character of the Mexican people.

In Baja folks live with so much less but seem to enjoy life just that much more. It truly is a lesson that happiness has much less to do with

possessions and so much more to do with one's state of mind. That's the Baja state-of-mind and as you land here it descends over you like a net.

Nothing but great and exciting memories have come from over twenty-five years of visiting Baja's East Cape. Over those years I've stayed at the now closed Punta Colorada, San Jose Del Cabo, Rancho Leonaro (now closed) and offshore in my fishing buddies Pacifica 44'. Every time I've gone there I've fished from shore, cruiser or panga.

So having a few days off and hearing the fishing was good, I packed my bags and made haste to Rancho Leonaro on the East Cape. I've flown here quite a few times and it is very easy from Los Angeles, Orange County or San Diego. If you really want to save some cash fly from the beautiful, new and clean Tijuana Airport on Volaris Airlines. Volaris is so much less expensive that you'll now have extra cash for margaritas!

Once you land at the airport a pre arranged van will be waiting for you. The very polite driver will help you with your bags and lead you to the car. After a short forty-five minute ride you'll be pulling up to the resort where the azure Sea of Cortez awaits. If the driver asks you if you wish to stop along the way at the local market, take him up on his offer. Bottled water, snacks and a pint of spirits are good things to have for your room.



The East Cape offers so many things to do but my two favorites are panga and shore fishing. Panga fishing is done just offshore and along the coast. You'll have to pay extra for bait but most boats do included rods, reels and terminal tackle. If you have a favorite rod or tackle be sure to bring it as there is no place here to stock up.



For shore fishing there are two great alternatives--walking and quad rental. Walking exposes you to some great places to fish but the quad will allow you to cover a much larger slice of the beach. Quads also provide a great platform, just like a crow's nest, to search for boilers and hungry roosterfish. Quads can be arrange right at the front desk and brought to the sand just below the resort for your quick get away.

For surf fishing the correct choice of a rod and reel combination is probably the difference between catching fish and standing on the shore with stories.

I use a medium action-spinning rod matched with a 4000 size spinning reel loaded with fresh 12lb mono.

When rigging for reef fishing I use two setups. A bobber floated rig and direct tie to a lure. It's that simple. For bait fishing I use sand crabs and a bobber and leader set up.



Most reef fish in the East Cape hang around the rocks and don't venture often into the sandy areas. Because of the possibility of a snag, I use a technique I learned in Hawaii while fishing Kauai's Kapaa shore.

Find a large slip bobber that can be loaded with water for weight. Fill the bobber about 3/4th of the way, run your main line through it and tie a #10 swivel below the float. Attach a leader about one foot shorter than your rod below the swivel. On the end you'll need a very sharp hook so tie on an Owner Mosquito Light or Gamakatsu split shot/drop shot hook, size 2.



Pin on a sand crab or a strip (like the shape of a pencil) of squid and cast out over the reef as far as you can. Reel in slowly to keep the line tight and *hang the Frank on!*

When straight-tie rigging, lures work great from the beach in the East Cape. You probably could catch fish on just about any lure as was proved to me when a buddy used a bottle top to catch a dorado. The most productive lures are Krocodiles, Ranger, Lucky Craft, Rapalla Xrap, bobber and feather, Heddon Zara Spook poppers, etc. The two go-to-colors include red (pelagic crabs) and white (squid). Rubber baits work great in Baja but because the fish are so toothy you'll need an entire suitcase just to last a week.



Don't forget that surf fishing here is not just for roosterfish. Reef fishing is spectacular but don't ignore spots like Punta Arena (the lighthouse, just South of Punta Colorada) where you can catch yellowfin tuna and dorado too! Yes, I'm talking from the beach. You may not land them all but you'll sure have a shot at it. If you hope to hook and land one of these fish you should rig up with fresh twelve-twenty pound mono or braid with a short topshot. I fish a Zara Spook popper or a hardbait like a BattleStar, Lucky Craft or Xrap Rapalla.

It is mostly in the evening that tuna and other pelagic fish come close to shore at the lighthouse. They are there as the shadows stretch across the bottom looking for bait fish that use the shore for safety during the day. So while everyone else is enjoying dinner you will be on the point waiting for

the biggest bite of your life. That bite may not come the first day, but a day will come when fish crash the shore, line peels against the drag of your reel and you wish you suddenly had a boat!