

Surf Fishing Tips

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Corbina use suction to inhale their food

Tip: After reaching the beach, the best place to find fish is in rip currents, wave triangle patterns, troughs, holes and in eddy patterns created around rock jetties. Each of these areas will be characterized by swirling, foaming off-colored water. Fish hide in these areas and forage on clams, crabs, worms and other live baits that are churned up in the surf.

Tip: When replacing monofilament on a spinning reel be sure to place the spool on a flat surface with its label side up. Load the line onto the reel in the direction that it uncoils from the spool. This will reduce line twist and allow the line to explode off the reel. Always wet your line when filling a new spool and also before fishing so as to reduce friction, increase spin off the spool and to eliminate tangles. Many reels come with a second spool.

To keep your line fresh, reel it onto your extra spool and use it a second time. Now the line that was closest to the spindle is on top and the old line is closest to the spindle.

Tip: When building your Carolina Rig in the winter try this small variation: Place a small 2mm red, orange or yellow bead on your leader just above the hook and below the swivel. This bead slides up and down the leader just above the hook eye and acts as an attractant for various surfperch and yellowfin croaker.

Tip: A corbina's keen eyesight requires that you use a hook that is small enough to be hidden from sight with the tip just slightly protruding from your bait. The most important part of your surf rig is the hook. More fish are lost or just not hooked because too large or dull of a hook is used. The correct hook is one that is very thin and sharp. Octopus, mosquito and split shot hooks in sizes #1, #2 and #4 work very well in the surf. Remember, surf fish are out in front of you with the hook parallel to the angler; Unlike pier or boat fishing where the hook is mainly perpendicular to the angler and much easier to get a hookset.

Tip: When corbina fishing try to use tackle that looks as natural as possible. Shiny brass or chrome sinkers and swivels will spook most fish. I like to use black swivels and hooks and always pick the older egg sinker to better blend into the sand. When using the Carolina Rig replace your colored bead (between the swivel and sinker) with a clear bead so it looks more like a grain of sand. Remember, it's your sinker, bead, swivel and hook with a sand crab, competing against a million sand crabs without a hook and rigging.

Tip: Catch hard-shell sand crabs in late summer and freeze them for use during the winter months. Save the larger crabs and be sure they are as hard as possible when you collect them. Place a dozen

in small snack zip-top bags and freeze them for later use. In several, add a piece of mussel before freezing. Once defrosted, the sand crabs will be soft and covered in mussel juice and color that surf fish find irresistible!

Tip: Hooks are one of the most important parts of your surf fishing arsenal. Use very sharp, thin, black hooks (ie. Split shot, mosquito, sproat or octopus) in sizes #1, #2, #4. Corbina, croaker and perch all crush their bait so make sure your hook's point is exposed outside the bait in order to get a strong hookset. Sharpen or change your hook if you are getting bites but not hooking fish.

Tip: Scents work very well on plastic baits in the surf. Most scents contain oil and vinegar. Oil helps hold the scent of vinegar and other "spices" to the lure. Start by roughing up your plastic lures with a bit of sand paper. This will help hold the scent in place. Next, dunk your bait into the scent every five casts or so. Place your scent in a small snack-size zip-top bag so you can carry it in your pocket. I like to use hot sauce from my local taco stand (I hear you laughing!) but seriously, you'd be amazed at how well it works!

Tip: When fishing from rocks remember that most surf fish are between rocks or very close to where the rocks meet sand. Cast only a few feet from where the rock jetty meets the ocean and allow the current to push your bait toward and away from the rocks. An excellent rig to use is the Carolina Rig. To keep from snagging shorten your leader to ten inches and lighten your sliding sinker to one-eighth or one-quarter ounce. If you do get snagged don't pull your bait farther into the rocks but instead shake your rod lightly and then relax your line as your rig will many times come free.

Tip: When fishing from the rocks always start out by looking for an "escape" route that allows you to take a large fish to a safe

landing spot like a sandy beach or a wave protected area. This is important for both landing a fish and your safety. There is nothing worse than hooking a huge fish and *then* trying to find a way that you can safely bring it to shore.

Tip: During the winter months of December, January and February you can weed out the small surfperch by using “sidewinder” crabs collected from the rocks. Any place you find a marine environment with shoebox-sized rocks along the shore is a good place to collect these crabs. Only the largest perch will eat these crabs—as witnessed by the enviable fact that both of the last state record barred surfperch were caught on one!

Tip: When fishing for spotfin croaker remember that these fish feed nose down in the sand and mud. Be sure to keep your bait in touch with the bottom at all times and match your bait to what you find living on the rocks and sand in the area. Spotfin, like most surf fish, feed seasonally on several baits. I’ve found that clams work best in Fall, ghost shrimp in Winter and sand crabs in Spring and Summer. Unlike corbina, these fish swim in large schools so when you catch one don’t be surprised to find even more fish in the same area!

Tip: When halibut fishing from shore try to schedule your trip to the beach just after a grunion run. In Spring and Summer halibut follow giant schools of grunion as they make their way to shore. For several weeks after the run halibut can be found in the general area where the grunion came ashore. Although you can go at night during a run to find where they came in, it is also a good idea to become friends with the lifeguard or ranger as they many time know the location of their landing. You can find more information on grunion and their scheduled runs by going to the DFW website: <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/grunionschedule>

Tip: Tides play a big part in surf fishing for halibut. Peak high and peak low tides seem to be the best time to target halibut as this is their most active period of the day. Lazy by nature, halibut lie in the sand (most times buried) or on top of rocks and wait for forage to pass by. Unlike most other fish, they spend much more time waiting for food than searching for it. Their shape also makes it difficult for them to navigate strong currents. So when surf fishing for halibut remember to fish about one hour before until one hour after low *and* high tide.

Tip: My three favorite spots for fishing halibut in the surf are: Estuaries and harbor entrances, beach jetties and open beach troughs. When fishing these areas I like to use hard baits from several manufacturers. The most effective hard baits are those that represent anchovy, sardine and grunion colors and sizes. When fishing these lures I like to use a fan-casting pattern to cover as much water as possible. Try various retrieves including a slow, fast and stop/wait/start retrieve to find the action that makes fish bite.

Tip: Some of the best surf fishing is in and around rip currents. When fishing a rip current you'll notice it's usually shaped like a mushroom. Use a fan casting motion to find fish. Cast along its sides and through the middle and pull your bait slowly toward shore. Fish like to hide and forage in the turbid water because it provides both protection and a source of freshly churned up food.

Tip: When fishing a new beach look for bait that occurs naturally at that beach. Try to replicate the baits that you find (sand crabs, mussel, sidewinder crabs, etc.) both in size and color. "Matching the hatch" always works because fish forage on what occurs naturally in the area where they live. It's equally important when using artificial lures to match your lures to the size and color of bait that lives in the area you fish. This way, your lure appears to

be just what the fish have been eating from the sand and rocks around your favorite beach.

Tip: If you are fishing a beach for the first time, try this: After reaching the beach begin by fan casting a grub, Gulp! or lure. Fan casting to your left, straight out and to your right will allow you to cover more ground. If you don't get a bite after five casts move another one-hundred feet down the beach and try again. Once you find the fish switch to a larger lure or live bait to try to entice the biggest fish in the school to bite. If the fish move on, you should move on too by trying a cast every 100 feet until you find the school again.

Tip: Clams seem to work their best in the months of October through March. As a clue to what fish are eating I look for beds of tiny brightly colored clams that form at low tide and appear as ripples of sand near the inshore trough. Coquina clams can usually be found in beds beginning in October. Although these clams are too small to use as bait, their beds let us know they are now foraging on clams and we better use some for bait!

Tip: *Don't Spin Out.* Make sure your bait is correctly positioned upon the hook so your bait and hook do not spin. Don't use a curved hook but rather a "J" hook. Check your bait frequently and adjust it when necessary.

Tip: *Match The Catch.* Match your bait in both size and color to what is currently living in the area you fish. This will help your bait to resemble natural forage. If the crabs in the area are green and brown or the clams orange and red, try those colors.

Tip: *Fan Cast.* Cast straight, cast right and cast to the left at multiple angles to cover the largest area as you search for fish. Remember: It's easier for your bait to find the fish than it is for

the fish to find your bait. Try to cover as much area as possible until you find biting fish.

Tip: *Sharp is Best* Use the sharpest thin wire black hook possible. Always be sure you are using the sharpest hook possible. I said that twice because it's soooooo important! (*Warning: unpaid plug*) My favorite hooks are Gamakatsu Split shot/drop shot hooks in size 1, 2 and 4. This is a very thin wire sharp hook. There, I said SHARP three times! Owner mosquito and Mustad ultra point hooks also work well.

Tip: *Upright Line*. After casting out, always be sure to *keep your line tight* to your sinker by reeling up any slack. This will help you feel the bite and catch more fish. It will also help prevent your line from fouling in the surf.

Tip: *Vary Your Speed*. When using lures vary your presentation by adjusting the speed of your retrieval. Once you've cast out, try reeling the bait in several different ways: slowly, quickly, and by using a stop and start motion with your reel. When fishing with live bait always be tight to your sinker and retrieve your bait slowly, stopping when the current or fish pull back.

Tip: *Keep it in Front of You*. You will always catch more fish if your line is tight and straight in front of you. If there is a long-shore current pulling your line up or down the beach try this technique: Cast your bait up into the current and let the drift push your bait down the beach. As your bait moves down the beach walk along and reel up the slack to keep the line in front of you. Once the bait comes too close to shore, reel in, walk up the beach and repeat. Be aware that fish will frequently be foraging in the inshore trough that may be just a few feet in front of you—So don't give up on your retrieval until you see your bait on the sand in front of you.

Tip: *Keep Moving.* If, after fan casting an area you don't find fish, move down the beach. I usually move about 100 yards, observing the water as I go for indications of fish, structure or eddy currents. I try fan casting and moving until I find biting fish. Remember, fish move frequently and many congregate in schools to feed; just like fish, you'll need to move too for improved success.

Tip: *Damage Control.* Check your main line and leader frequently for damage that may occur from contact with rocks or structure as well as the abrasion that catching fish produces. Just as important is to always inspect your leader for knots that have formed. These knots will become the weak point of the leader and must be replaced. There is nothing more disappointing than hooking into the fish of a lifetime only to lose it due to a line or knot failure.

Tip: *Pay Attention.* Be continuously observant about exactly what you were doing when the fish took your bait. How far out, what angle, speed of retrieve, any currents present, is there a trough, sandbar or structure, color of water, moon phase, tide, etc. By treating every outing as a learning experience you are certain to become a more proficient angler while all the while increasing your enjoyment.

Tip: *Carry a small notepad* and pencil to make notes about your day surf fishing. Once information is compiled about tides, moon phase, catch, bait and ocean conditions you can go back over several years and make plans for each upcoming month. The notepad is also a great place to enter ideas about what works and what might work so when you go back next time you're ready for the beach. Also, use a camera every time you reach the beach to capture the tide, sky, crowd and the great fish you catch. You can go back next year at the beginning of each month and see what you were catching, using for bait, conditions, etc. so as to be a more successful angler at the beach.

