

Rompin; Swimming with Sails

December 9, 2010

Written by Jay Furniss from Hocking Stuart Rye

Three years ago I came across an article featuring Sail Fishing with 'Hook on C Adventures' in Malaysia. Unfortunately, I had just started a new job and the chance to scratch the Sail Fish itch was not likely anytime in the foreseeable future. Even so I kept the article in that pile of hope-to-one-day destinations, that most fishos like myself would have.



Swimming with Sails.

Fortunately, I live in a small coastal town located on the Mornington Peninsula which provides great fishing on my doorstep, but when the opportunity arose to escape the 10 degree temperatures that winter had set upon us, it was an easy decision to pack the bags and head off chasing my dream.

On short notice, a family trip to Sri-Lanka had been planned and I knew this would be my chance to hit the Sails in Rompin, so straight to the magazine stash I went. A quick e-mail was sent to the charter operator Charles and within a few days the plan had been set and my five day family trip to Sri-Lanka had been extended.



The Rompin River.

From the moment I arrived at the Rompin River Chalets, a soothing calm came over me. Whether this was the relief of stepping out of the F1 style white knuckle taxi ride from Johor Bahru or just part of the Malaysian ambiance, I am not sure.

Set on the banks of the Rompin River the village is a typical fishing village. There is the choice to stay at plusher accommodations down the road, but if you want a bit of cultural charm with your fishing holiday, there is no need to look any further. With comfortable air-conditioned twin rooms a stone's throw from the water (one could cast a line whilst sitting in the room) this place is perfect!



Tom, one of the locals.

Having arrived a couple hours prior to the fishing crews coming home I was free to poke my nose around and start to familiarize myself with this wonderful new setting. Soon enough I was hit by the aroma of chilly and garlic - so first thing firsts I got stuck into a local restaurant with the aid of a cool Tiger beer. Could this setting get any better? I doubt it.

Finally, the wait was over. I woke the next morning after hearing evening stories from the previous days fishing. To say I was over excited would be an understatement - and we hadn't even left the dock yet. Charles asked me to stop pacing a couple of times.



A very happy Campbell!



Caught mid flight!



But first things first – bait collection. As is often the case with any good fishing, fresh and live bait is best. We fished for a mix of scads, slimmies and red bream which were soon brought on board and kept swimming in the massive live tanks. From there we headed out to the sail grounds; tell tale signs started to appear -with birds circling the time came to set the baits. Setting a live bait 4 – 5 meters below a balloon and drifting it out anywhere between 30 – 80 meters behind the boat was the chosen method. A very light or free spool drag is essential as the sails will quickly drop bait should they feel any tension early in a take. After an initial 6-10 second run the bail arm is flicked over or the drag is set. All things 4/0 – 5/0 circle hooks will set themselves without striking the rod. The use of circles hooks for releasing fish is essential and a very well practiced method on the sails.



What a beauty!

As day one drew to an end I was still a sail virgin, we only took two fish for the day and dropped six. As it was early in the season, it was not unexpected that the fish were a bit finicky and mouthed the bait as opposed to smashing it.

That night there was a storm which gave me hope; with a rising barometer I could feel it was going to be the day - the one to pop my cherry, as they say. As it turned out, the early morning sky parting and radiant sun saw us set off for the sail grounds. There was a lot more bird activity that morning and within 10mins of leaving the bait grounds there they were; sails everywhere. Excited crew pointed with screams of, "one here, one there! Another one!" It was a sight to behold, they were everywhere, surface cruising in the morning sun.



A high flyer a good 300m off the boat!



The author trying a spot of sight popping from the roof of the boat.

With four live baits quickly set, I decided to try my luck at some sight popping off the front of the boat. Joined by AJ on his fly gear we quickly had a line up of sails following both popper and fly but unfortunately they just wouldn't hit them. About five minutes in and just at the point when they were starting to look more likely to strike the call came, "guy's your on!"

It was a double hook up on our ballooned rigs and you have never seen two guys move so fast from one end of the boat to the other. This was it, my time to land a sail! Ten minutes later, hugely disappointed, I was still a virgin. Not all was lost however, as AJ was still battling his fish.



Smiles all round, one of many double hook ups for the trip.

As we re-set the baits, I was thrilled to hear the reel scream. Bang I was on again and this time the result would be different! A solid scream of the reel, then out she came, dancing and tail walking a solid 300 meters away. In and out, off she went for another 150mtrs with the aerial show continuing. After a forty five minute fight my first sail was traced, put in the boat for a quick photo and back in the water for the revival process. Essential for the survival of this fishery is the release process. Ensuring the fish swim off in the best condition possible. It can take up to 15-20 minutes but once you catch one of these magnificent animals you will understand why.



Nervous moments before the trace!



The author finally popping his cherry!



Jay Furniss reviving a sail.

The rest of the day fired up with the captain A-Ping deciding to mix up the methods a bit as the sails were still being finicky. Trolling live baits was the call and in no time we had a double hook up with both fish landed immediately. A-Ping asked for the balloons to go out and bang, another double hook-up. We then went back on the troll, a four way strike had us all excited with two of the fish finally being boated.



What a shot! Almost snake-like rising from the water.

Calling it a day, we started heading back to the river when we come across a couple of sails on the surface. A-Ping ordered us to cast poppers. Within two casts of the popper I had the sail at the back of the boat and AJ pitched a live bait out. We were on again, what a way to finish the day!



AJ with a lovely sail.

It was an amazing days fishing to say the least. Sometimes it's not just about the fish; to me the adventure, hunt and culture is all part of the grand experience.

Two things can be said when visiting Rompin fishing. You will never go short on amazing food. It has some of the best local cuisine in Malaysia. The local restaurant was one thing but the road house open restaurant, a short

drive, was to die for. Over the 3 nights, I was astounded at what they could do with our left over bait, no joke! The selection of food was brilliant, I think we had around 8-12 courses each night of meats and seafood.



Breakfast of champs, malay style!

Finally, Charles is yet to leave a virgin sail fisher unfulfilled. Kuala Rompin is a hidden gem and I hope it stays that way. Sail fishing is some of the most explosive fishing you will ever come across, package that with a great cultural experience and it really makes for an ideal fishing holiday. I'm already planning my return. Thanks to Charles Lee of Hook On C Adventures

Feel free to drop me a line at jfurniss@hockingstuart.com.au for any additional information your after.



A dream realised.



Sensational boat side release.



Feasts like this each night, among friends, were well deserved!