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♣ Pictures by Simon Siow

Hurray, the monsoon is over! I could not wait to wet my lines and to fight against the unpredictable monsters which love to hang around here during this time, especially the powerful good-sized Ebek (Diamond Trevallies)...

01



“ Kuala Rompin Offshore Gala

post monsoon bonanza

I must confess that I had booked this long-awaited trip a few months ahead for fear of 'kia soo' (meaning 'afraid to lose'). In fact I had also been calling the boat charters for update on the monsoon situation along the east coast, especially, Kuala Rompin, my regular departure point for deep-sea fishing in South China Sea.

This time around, the monsoon started a little early, in mid-November last year. It was rather mild compared to other years when the winds and the waves coupled with

continual rain would turn the sea upside down for days without end!

Many people might not know it, but the fact is that during the monsoon period, some die-hard opportunists would 'camp' at the Rompin River Resort, ready to catch the windows of opportunity (i.e. the calm periods in between the strong winds) to go out to sea for some fantastic catches. I was told that the harvests were often most rewarding, as the fishes were hungry and would just wallop anything thrown at them.





new arsenal

I had booked my 2-day fishing trip with my regular Charterer, Master Janggut, and was also lucky to secure the services of master guide, Ah Keen. Once the greenlight was on, I just could not wait for the moment of truth and action. I prepared my rods and reels and double checked my lures, hooks, weights and lines. I was also keen to try out my new casting rods, which I had newly bought. These are specially crafted seven and a half feet long rods suitable for long casts for lures of up to 150 grams. One of them is manufactured by Major Craft, Model Giant Killing 7'6"; a Japanese-made Barlette Oceano Offshore saltwater series 7'7" and another light Tenryu rod for micro and light jigging with a PE rating of 0.8-1.5. As these are specially crafted rods, which are light and strong, it is comfortable to cast or jig them the whole day with least fatigue. For bottom fishing I had an Xzoga PE 2/5 coupled with a Shimano 4500 reel spooled with 50 pound braided lines.

On the Friday afternoon on 6 March, my wife Susan, Uncle Happy John and I fetched new retiree Simon from his house and then headed for our regular lunch at 'Qui Po' fish head restaurant in Ulu Tiram, en route to Kuala Rompin. We had our regular fish ball soup, curry fish head and

vegetables fried with giant prawns. What a lovely feed. I really like the curry fish head because of its fragrant coconut milk that makes it so smooth to the taste. And the amount of chillies in the curry is just right, not too hot to burn our tongue. Even at this moment of writing the thought of it makes me salivate!

We arrived at the Rompin River Resort at about 1700 hours and settled down to prepare our gear. The reels were fixed onto the rods. Swivels were also attached to the end of the braided terminals. All the rods were set and we just need to hook the final piece of lure or Apollo jig to finalise the fishing equipment. We can set up the rods in advance as our boat would come right up to the jetty to pick us up the next morning.

With the physical preparation done, we set out to get some local information about the daily catches and to wait for the groups that had ventured out on the day to return to the jetty to assess their catches. The species caught were interesting but it's also a little disappointing as the amount of catches was far from satisfaction, only half of what we caught last year. What happened? I was beginning to worry about our trip.



01. Idyllic morning jetty scene of Kuala Rompin. **02.** This size of tuna is getting rare in Malaysian water nowadays. **03.** Ah Hee with a small mackerel on lure. **04.** Skipper Ah Kin's expertise is crucial to our bumper harvest. **05.** Not every fish is landed whole. The sea has its own version of GST too. **1**

Day 1

warm up exercise

Our charter with Mr Janggut at the helm and our guide Ah Keen met us at the jetty on time at 0745 hours for our day's trip. The aim was to leave straight to the fishing ground that Mr Janggut knows best. Usually we would go to the FAD (unjam) to get live baits for the day's fishing need but not today. We had come prepared with live prawns to entice the bottom dwellers of snappers and groupers. Soon we were out of the river mouth and heading South East towards the Islands off Penyabong. This journey took more than one hour.

Meanwhile the deckie, Ah Long, a local aborigine assisted us with the rigs. Despite his small size he was strong and very helpful in every way during our two-day trip. He would assist in hooking live prawns and dislodge the hook from the fishes landed. Uncle John and I found that that his services were most handy indeed as we just had to call 'Ah Long' and he would be there to do the needful, either hook on a live prawn or to dislodge the hooked fish.



At the first fishing spot after anchoring Mr Janggut yelled 'Ok, Lei See Ha', meaning, ok let's try out. We threw out our live prawns and they were immediately attacked by the fishes below. We landed table fishes of one to three kilos, mainly grouper, red snapper and silver grunter. A few fingermark snappers were also hooked.

By noon we had finished the 100 prawns that we brought for the day. We had no choice but to switch to dead prawns and other smaller fishes that we had just landed.

The prawns were cut into smaller one or two pieces while the baits fishes were filleted for their meat. These baits were equally good to entice the bites.

As usual, whenever there is action and excitement time passes really fast. Soon it was time to return to base. We were happy to have landed sufficient quantities of fishes for our dinner that night and also to take some home. Back at base we handed a few of the fishes to James, the owner of the River Resort Restaurant, to be cooked for our dinner. As usual, nothing beats your own catch fresh from the sea!



06. Uncle John with good-size Cobia, nearly 30 kilos. **07.** Simon stretched for two solid hours in the arduous battle. **08.** Simon with 32-kg Cobia, the champion of the day. **09.** Double hook-up! This size of cobia tend to hang in group.



Mr Long Hair with one of the first Cobia.

Day 2 feeding mania

My friend Mr Long Hair, and his friends Ah Hee and Allan, decided to join us the next day. They travelled through the night to meet us at 0700 hours at our regular breakfast restaurant, Rompin Baru Restaurant. I know that Long Hair and Ah Hee are die-hards and are expert fishermen. Their speciality is in casting lures and their excellent physiques allow them to cast the whole day long. I did not know about Mr Allan as he was new to me.



The different styles of fishing required us to do some planning. It was suggested that the trio would concentrate to cast from the bow section and we the old school comprising Uncle John, Simon and myself, would occupy the stern section. We were happy that way as it allowed us to stay within the shades provided by the canopy. Exposing to the sun for the whole day can be quite taxing nowadays, given the 'holes' in the ozone layer in the sky.

Our skipper today was Ah Keen. He took the boat out and sped eastward. It must be about two hours when he announced that we had arrived at an FAD to fish for tambans (herrings) as baits. We used pre-rigged Apollos and were able to land strings of these lively fishes. It was fun having whole bunch of wriggling bait fishes hooked on the Apollos.

As usual, Ah Long was busy helping both Uncle John and myself to unhook these fishes from our lines.

The skipper then moved to another spot for more bait fishes. We landed other types such as slimy mackerel (kembong), yellowtails (sela) and baby pink snappers (kerisi). All these bait fishes are superb baits for the fishes that we were targeting, mainly Spanish Mackerel.

'Lines up!' the skipper commanded and we were skipping over the water to our first destination. He would drive around the selected spot (way point), and using his fish finder to check out the fishes below.

Surprisingly, many of the spots were found to be empty, probably just trawled by the trawler boats.

Finally he managed to get a good spot to park for fishing. ●

The three fishermen in front started to work on their hard lures, while I cast my 20 grams Koika Storm jig from the stern. Uncle John and Simon used live tamban for bait fishing. After three cranks of the reel, I had a fish. It seemed that fishes were everywhere and it was mayhem of sort. I heard 'Ayak! Ayak!' from Uncle John and others at the bow. I turned around to see what was happening. Yes, all six of us had hooked onto something!

Two more cranks and I was the first to lose the fish. A little tug and that's all. A little disappointed, I reeled my slack line back and notice that the jig hooks had been bitten off! This must be the job of the toothy critters like of Spanish mackerel.

Meanwhile, Uncle John also lost his fish and so were the others except Ah Hee. He landed a juvenile striped mackerel of about one kilo. We knew we have found a good spot and it's time for actions.



Lots of groupers and snapper were landed.



cobia frenzy

Soon it was double hook-up time, not mackerel but cobia. Yes, we were stretched with reels screaming before the leaders snapped. Ridiculous I thought. The leaders were of 40-80 pounds yet they just snapped when we put on too much pressure. The fishes must be 'bloody' big.

At about noon Simon's rod bent double and the reel screamed like hell. Simon, who is solidly built, lifted the rod straight away to engage the fish. I believe this epic fight must be one of the toughest in his lifetime. The fish took him around the boat three times without letting up. Whenever he cranked to gain an inch, the fish at the other end would pull off a few more inches. It was a stalemate. In the end, we took turns to fight the fish. Despite more than one hour the fish continued to run around and just refused to bulge. Finally we seek the services of skipper Ah Keen, as he was the strongest amongst us.

The fight was furious with the rod bent fully into a beautiful 'C' curve. Inch by inch the fish was brought closer to the boat. Then it dived again and the whole sequence of reeling and pumping started all over again. Finally

after one and a half hours the brute was brought close to the transom for Ah Keen to gaff it up. It was a strong Cobia that trashed non-stop when it landed in the boat. Simon was all smiles when he posed with the fish.

'Wah, so big!' Simon exclaimed. After using so much of his strength, he had enough fishing for the day. It was the biggest catch to date, estimated at around 32 kilos. Why was it so difficult to land this cobia? On close inspection I noticed that the hook was hooked on the lip thus giving it an advantage in the fight.

At the bow the casters, using 'Pin Tail' lures managed to land more mackerels. Surprisingly, there were no big ones other than the juveniles of one to three kilos. It was fun though. A total of 13 mackerels were landed that day.

The cobias continued to hang around the boat. We landed another seven of about ten kilos before Uncle John had a good tug on his rod. He was calling for help but we all just laughed at him to let him yell and continue his fight. It was a tug-of-war with his reel screaming for a while and then stopped for him to reel the fish in, before the whole process started all



over again. It took half an hour before the cobia surfaced. With precision, Ah Keen cleanly gaffed this fish and pulled it into the boat. It was big, almost as big as the one that Simon landed earlier. That's one Happy John!

We continued to fish until the evening with enthusiasm. It was fun and exciting. Happy John managed to land a hard-fighting parrotfish of about two kilos, the only one on this trip.

It's hard to call it a day but when it's time to go we had to pack up our gear. Ah Keen pointed the boat

towards land for our return journey which was expected to last for more than one hour. I took back about 20 kilos of filleted cobia meat and a box of table fishes. What a treat!

With so much fun fishing, I have booked our next trip come 1 and 2 May.

Do not wait any longer if you are an angler. It is time to wet your lines and to test your skill. Come to Kuala Rompin, one of the best fishing destinations of Malaysia! 🍷



Author's Note:

This article is the personal view of the writer. All equipment, rods, lines, lures are all purchased for personal use. No sponsorship is involved.

There are many good and inexpensive rods, lines, reels and lures available in the market. I believe that each equipment is as good as it costs. Buy the best that you can afford. Look after them well especially after every outing, and they will last a long time.

10. Part of the contributions to my family dinner table. 11. Yummy snapper. 12. Red coral trout, the most delicious reward. 13. Part of our haul.



Kuala Rompin Fishing Info:

Fishing charters in Kuala Rompin, refer to occasional listings in Rod & Line

Boats:

About 30 speedboats operating at Kuala Rompin

Accommodation:

Rompin River Resort has good and simple rooms with bathrooms attached. Rate about RM150 per night. The restaurant is next to this resort. It serves fresh seafood and vegetables at reasonable prices.

Weather:

Normally hot above 30degrees C

Rods and Lines:

Bring your own to suit your type of fishing.

Spares and fishing accessories:

Can purchase in Kuala Rompin. There are two tackle shops which stock up a fair amount of fishing gear, lures, rods and lines.

Rods used by author:

Xzoga, Tenryu, Barlette and Major craft.

Reels used:

Shimano Stella and Daiwa Certate.

Lines used:

Power Pro and Gosen. PE 3 to 5.