



The resort fleet at Hotel Palmas de Cortez returns after a busy day offshore.

# Escape to the East Cape

BY JEFF MERRILL

Mexico's reputation as one of the world's premier big game fishing destinations is well documented. From Isla Mujeres to Zihuatanejo, the country offers a bounty of big game fishing opportunities on both coasts for most pelagic species with many available year-round. While many of the popular destinations on both coasts continue to expand and become even more commercialized, there are several areas where crowds are limited and the lifestyle is more laid-back yet beautiful resorts with exceptional service can be found and the fishing can be lights out. One such paradise is the East Cape region which is located about 700 miles south of United States border in the Sierra de la Laguna mountain range on the Baja California Sur. Here, roughly 60 miles north of Cabo San Lucas on the Sea of Cortez you'll find the tiny village of Los Barriles where it is believed early explorers buried barrels of gold and jewels among the hills

which overlook the Bahía de Las Palmas or Bay of Palms. It is also where, some four centuries later, the gamefish potential of the Sea of Cortez was discovered by a World War II Air Force veteran and one of the pioneers of sportfishing in the region, Bobby Van Wormer.

Today, Van Wormer, together with his wife and three sons operate four resorts, three in Los Barriles and one in La Ribera, about 25 miles south of Los Barriles, where accommodations range from simple yet comfortable hotel rooms to luxurious hotel and multi-bedroom and bath condominiums. These all-inclusive resorts offer extraordinary personal service and exceptional dining while also offering angling possibilities that range from surf and near-shore encounters with roosterfish, jack crevalle, ladyfish, pompano, sierra and needlefish to offshore species including striped, black and blue marlin, swordfish, sailfish, yellowfin tuna,



## Getting There

Most major airlines service Los Cabos and La Paz International airports where travel is very safe. Keep in mind a passport is required to enter and leave Mexico and be sure connecting flights allow enough time to clear customs in the first U.S. arrival city when returning home. Our hour-long drive from the airport to Los Barriles was scenic and easy thanks to T.T. Cabo Del Este our driver was waiting for us when we arrived. For more information on all the Van Wormer properties including rates, seasons and specials visit their extensive web site at [www.vanwormerresorts.com](http://www.vanwormerresorts.com) or call 877-777-TUNA.



**Clockwise, from top:** Big dorado fill the gaps between billfish bites along the East Cape; The calm waters of the Sea of Cortez and short runs to the fish makes the East Cape a great destination to introduce kids to big game fishing. The release of all billfish is encouraged to help the East Cape maintain healthy population of marlin and sailfish.

Here, roughly 60 miles north of Cabo San Lucas on the Sea of Cortez you'll find the tiny village of Los Barriles where it is believed early explorers buried barrels gold and jewels among the hills which overlooks the Bahía de Las Palmas or Bay of Palms.

dorado and wahoo. The years of hard work have paid off as the Van Wormer properties were voted one of the Top 25 Fishing Destinations in North America in 2006 by *Field and Stream*.

Offshore fanatics will enjoy the short run to productive billfish water from any of the Van Wormer resorts in and around Los Barriles. Late fall and winter bring windy conditions to the region and offshore action slows considerably. However, you can expect to find glass-calm conditions offshore during the prime months of May to early November when you'll have the best chance at catching blue marlin, striped marlin, black marlin, sailfish, dorado, wahoo and yellowfin tuna. Striped marlin in the 175 to 200-pound range are quite abundant as are blacks and blues ranging from 200 to 800 pounds. Pacific sailfish of 100 pounds and up will test your light-tackle skill during the same months as the marlin. And with swordfish available 12 months a year, the East Cape is one of the few spots on the globe where a Super Grand Slam is a real possibility. Large schools of yellowfin tuna begin to show in late spring while wahoo and dorado fill the gaps between billfish and tuna bites most of the season. Coastal anglers will enjoy tangling with amber-

jack, grouper, jack crevalle, roosterfish, snapper and sierra which can be found from spring through fall. Here too, some species are less abundant from December through March though grouper, roosterfish, snapper, yellowtail and cabrilla can make for a pleasant day of inshore action.

Fishing arrangements are handled through the resort where a fleet of nearly 100 resort-operated boats ranging from 25-foot pangas to large super cruisers is available. All tackle is provided aboard the boats though some anglers prefer to bring their own gear. We timed our visit last April for the start of the striped marlin season and brought along Shimano Torsa 20 reels filled with 30-pound test monofilament which we paired with Shimano Tallus TLT-SDH66L rods which was plenty of firepower for the striped marlin and Pacific sailfish we caught. We saw 20-25 billfish a day including surface tailing fish and free-jumpers. High-speed trolling lures caught large dorado up to 40 pounds while pitching live baits to tailing billfish which we spotted did the trick on stripes and sails. That night during dinner at Hotel Palmas de Cortez we enjoyed dorado as sushi, ceviche and grilled. A fitting end to a great escape to Mexico's East Cape! ❖

## PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT *Old Harbor Outfitters Beneath the Surface Sunglasses*

Old Harbor Outfitters sunglasses utilizes their revolutionary, triple polarized, Beneath the Surface lens technology which allows anglers to see deeper into the water than ever before. Designed to withstand the harsh elements experienced by serious offshore anglers, these sunglasses include the latest advancements in ultra-violet protection, anti-reflective, anti-fog, water repellency, oil repellency, and frame material technologies. Lenses come in both Glass and NXT and each pair comes with a patented OHO hard case, non-slip cleaning cloth and lens cleaner. For more information visit [www.oldharboroutfitters.com](http://www.oldharboroutfitters.com). (JEFF MERRILL)

