



THE CAYMAN ISLANDS INTERNATIONAL FISHING TOURNAMENT

by Frank Thompson Photography by Captain Jimmy Nelson

The premier sport fishing event in the Northwestern Caribbean is hosted every spring in the Cayman Islands, it is, The Cayman Islands International Fishing Tournament. This tournament offers prizes in excess of US\$200,000 including cash, trophies, art work, a truck and other sport fishing merchandise. In 2017 we will kick the tournament off with registration and the Captains meeting on April 25th followed by four days of fishing, 27th to 30th April, the tournament will conclude with an Awards Ceremony on May 2nd. Although the headquarters for the tournament is The Barcadere Marina in Grand Cayman, teams also participate in our Sister Islands of Cayman Brac and Little Cayman.

There are a variety of prizes that cater to a wide range of participants and this tournament attracts an average of 50 teams annually. Anglers competing in the tournament are both local and international. International anglers visit from the USA, Canada, Europe, Jamaica and other Caribbean countries, some fly into Cayman to fish on private or charter boats while others travel by sea to compete with their own sport fishers.

In the meatfish categories, teams fish for Dolphin, Wahoo, Yellowfin Tuna and Swordfish. Blue Marlin, White Marlin, Sailfish, Swordfish and Spearfish are eligible for points in the release category. The two boat categories are boats over 26 feet and boats 26 feet and under. Additionally there are categories for Lady, Overseas and Junior anglers.



IGFA rules are the principle rules of our tournament. We are focused on conservation and responsible angling practices, we enforce minimum weights of 20 pounds for Dolphin and Wahoo, 30 pounds for Yellowfin Tuna, 587 pounds for Blue Marlin and a minimum length of 48 inches for Swordfish. All other Billfish must be released. Our tournament is also a qualifying event for the Offshore World Championships.



Base entry for the tournament is only US\$500. Teams can also buy into meatpots for Dolphin, Wahoo and Yellowfin Tuna for an additional US\$500 per specie. The meatpots are paid out to the first and second heaviest fish each day, first place is awarded 2/3 of the daily pot and second place receives 1/3 the daily pot. Avid Billfish teams can enter the Billfish Release Jackpot for US\$5,000, this Jackpot pays 100% of the pot to the team with the most release points at the end of the four fishing days. Second and third place winners in the Billfish Release Jackpot win sponsored cash prizes of US\$7,000 and US\$5,000. In 2016 the Jackpot winner was awarded US\$65,000 and the 2015 winner was awarded US\$80,000.

Captains target Dolphin in the weed lines a few miles off the North or South coasts of each island trolling a mixture of lures and Ballyhoo. Frigate birds also lead boats to schools of Dolphin feeding on Flying fish giving anglers the opportunity to toss a popper or naked Ballyhoo in front of a hungry bull. April is the high season for Dolphin in Cayman and year after year the winning Dolphin is in the 40-50 pound range.

High speed trolling is a common method employed by the smaller boats for targeting Wahoo near the drop off around the islands and on the Cayman Bank, 12 miles West of Grand Cayman. Larger boats tend to slow troll for Wahoo using skirted Ballyhoo or Blackfin strips at 6-9 knots on 50-80 pound reels. Wahoo's in the 50-70 pound range typically claim the prizes during this time of year.

Hot spots for Yellowfin Tunas are the West End of Cayman Brac, the East End of Grand Cayman, the Cayman Bank, 60 Mile Bank (60 miles Northwest of Grand Cayman) and Pickle Bank (80 miles Northeast of Grand Cayman). Chunking is the preferred method to catch Yellowfins in Cayman. Captains start their drifts up current of the bank in a depth of around 1800 feet and will drift into 200 feet before starting another drift. Crews chum with Barracuda, Blackfin or Skipjack, hooks can be baited with cut bait however live Flying fish, Goggle eyes or Blackfin's seem to attract the larger Yellowfins. Winning Yellowfin Tunas typically weigh 75-95 pounds during this tournament.

Day dropping for Swordfish East of Cayman Brac has in recent years consistently delivered Swords in the 150-250 pound range to the scales. Teams can win prizes in this tournament for the heaviest Swordfish or Heaviest Super Grand Slam (combined weight of Dolphin, Wahoo, Yellowfin Tuna & Swordfish). This is a relatively new category in the tournament that is growing quickly and creates extra excitement at the weigh stations.

Blue Marlin are by far my favorite species to target in this tournament. Blues can also be found along the weed lines feeding on younger Dolphins and crews will troll for both Marlin and Dolphin at the same time. A typical Marlin spread will consist of 4-8 lines with a mixture of lures and rigged horse Ballyhoo, teasers and dredges are also used to attract the Blues into the spread.

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Most Captains target the Blues North of Grand Cayman between the drop and 10 miles off as well as between the Cayman Bank and the Northwest point of the island. Blues in the spring range from 100-250 pounds and it's not uncommon for teams to raise multiple Blues each day.



There are lots of other activities to keep you busy when not fishing, Cayman is well known for its world class scuba diving. One of the most recent additions to our diving product is the USS Kittiwake, which makes an easy dive in a mere 50 feet of water. If you don't scuba you can still experience the underwater realm aboard Atlantis submarine, a ride on this sub will take you to depths of 120 feet. For those that just want to relax and soak up the sun there's lots of space on seven mile beach for that., alternatively you can seek more privacy in one of the secluded coves in the more remote areas of the islands. Nights are filled with entertainment from live bands in small lounges to DJs in night clubs. This can all be taken in after dinner at one of the many fine restaurants that offer a large variety of cuisines.



All 3 islands are extremely safe and family friendly so feel free to bring your spouse and kids. If they choose not to fish with you they can take in some of our land based attractions such as the Cayman Turtle Centre, The Botanic Park or Crystal Caves.

Getting here is easy, our national airline, Cayman Airways operates regular flights from Miami, Tampa, New York, Chicago, Dallas, Kingston, Montego Bay and Rotan. Other carriers operate regular flights from Charlotte, Atlanta, London and Fort Lauderdale will be added later this year.

Accommodation options include private condo rentals, Sunset House Dive Lodge, Southern Cross Club, Carib Sands Resort, Comfort Suites, The Grand Cayman Marriott, The Westin Casuarina, The Ritz Carlton and Kimpton Seafire.

I look forward to welcoming you to our islands and to your participation in the Cayman Islands International Fishing Tournament. For further information on this and other tournaments visit www.fishcayman.com for more information on our islands visit www.caymanislands.com for flight schedules and pricing visit www.caymanairways.com.

