



Matt Harris is a professional photographer whose fly-fishing images from all over the world have won numerous awards. His first book, featuring some of the world's great fly-fishing destinations, is due out soon.



The spot where the Lilyok stream meets the mighty Yokanga is one of the world's great salmon pools.

Top ten overseas holidays

Travelling fly-fisher **Matt Harris** reveals his favourite locations for fabulous fishing in both saltwater and freshwater

I'VE BEEN lucky. I've travelled to waters from the Arctic Circle to the Amazon jungle with my cameras and fly-rods, and have fished in some magical spots, where fish beyond my wildest dreams have provided a million thrills and spills. Trying to pick ten favourites is almost impossible, but at the editor's request, that's what I've tried to do here. There are any number of glaring omissions - the stunningly beautiful salmon rivers of Northern Norway, the big tigerfish of the Zambezi River, the huge tarpon of the Florida Keys and the gin-clear waters of Iceland and the Bahamas to name but a few, but you can't squeeze everything in... or can you?

RUSSIA, Yokanga River, Kola Peninsula

AFTER FORTY nail-biting minutes, the great gleaming salmon finally rolled over, its vast tail slicing through the Yokanga's icy waters in a magical moment that defined the end of our epic battle. I held my breath and felt my heart hammering in my chest as Vova, my brave and brilliant guide, unceremoniously swept the beaten fish into his outside net.

It was done: we spluttered with laughter and clapped each other on the back in an outburst of uninhibited joy and relief. I left Vova to gently revive the fish in the shallows as I scrambled the long yards back upstream for my camera. As Vova battled to hold the mighty salmon, I finally got a proper look at the proportions of this great silver colossus. It wasn't faded and sepia-brown, like those long-dead leviathans from the golden age of long ago. This fish was wild and alive and it sparkled a pure iridescent silver in the livid grey light of the north. As I struggled to focus, all the long hours of "cast and step" melted in a suffusion of elation and awe. I was looking at an Atlantic salmon from the farthest shores of my wildest fly-fishing dreams. Thirty-five pounds: more than I ever dared to hope for. I will remember that fish until the day I die.

Every year, the salmon of my dreams charge up the mighty Yokanga. They are the most magnificent fish I've ever seen. The fish I describe was one of three over 30 lb that I caught in one fantastic week. Fish of 30 lb are caught most weeks, and fish of 40 lb and even 50 lb are possible. The fish are titanicly strong, and the vast boulders and powerful currents of this unique river have accounted for many a heartbreak. Be lucky.

CONTACT:

■ Peter Rippin or Roddy Hall via the website: www.flyfishyokanga.com



Matt Harris cradles one of the Yokanga's huge salmon.

PHOTOGRAPHS: MATT HARRIS

BRAZIL

Agua Boa Lodge



Dawn is a great time to hunt the peacock bass of Rio Agua Boa.

PEACOCK BASS are the hoodlums of the jungle – crammed full of violence and spattered in fabulous vivid colours. Most live in dirty, mud-stained waters, but the fish of the Rio Agua Boa can be spotted and sight-fished in waters that are as clear as a Hampshire chalkstream. These fish are some of the very biggest peacocks anywhere in the Amazon's vast basin, and they fight with a savage power that few fish can match. Be warned: a 20 lb peacock is a hell of a handful. Broken rods and fly-lines are common, but keep your rod low and pull hard and you will wrestle some of these big flamboyant specimens out of the tree roots and into the boat. Numbers can be a deceptive and crude way to judge a week's sport, but to give an idea of the quality of the fishing, in just six days I landed peacocks of 20½ lb, 20 lb, 19½ lb, 18½ lb, 18 lb, 17 lb, 17 lb and 17 lb, and reckon to have caught more than 80 fish of 10 lb or over. The fishing action is relentless, but the fun doesn't stop there: expect to spot a treasure trove of butterflies, parrots, monkeys, cayman and giant otters as you glide under the creepers in search of your next hornets' nest of peacocks. After another bruising day, relax on the porch with an icy caiparinha, and watch the sun sink into the vast forest. Get a good night's sleep – you're going to need it – tomorrow's plan is another adrenaline-laced "rumble in the jungle"!

Agua Boa is one of the most magical fisheries on the planet. If you're lucky enough to get low, clear water, the sight-fishing for these staggeringly strong and beautiful fish is relentlessly exciting and utterly exhausting.

CONTACT

■ Websites: www.frontierstrvl.co.uk, www.aguaboamazonlodge.com



Matt's guide with a big peacock bass taken on a 10 in streamer fly.

GUATEMALA

Casa Vieja Lodge



Sailfish are extraordinary and acrobatic fighters on a fly-rod.

OUT OF nowhere, a huge bill comes spearing up through the aquamarine. The two deckhands leap into action, retrieving the teasers that are *not* under attack, and casting a hookless ballyhoo bait to draw the fish close to the boat. Suddenly, I am looking at a sailfish nine feet long, lighting up in a riot of enraged electric neon. I send my cast off to the side of my quarry and watch in awe as it turns side-on, affording me a glimpse of its great sail and those vast flanks, shot through with a wild palette of psychedelic colours. Then, suddenly, the huge fish shoots forward and unceremoniously demolishes my fly. I set the hook, and the next few moments are surely one of the wildest experiences in fly-fishing. One hundred pounds and more of fabulous flying rage, clambering effortlessly into the wide Pacific skies. My giant reel is singing and my backing is sizzling out into the blue, as the vast fish goes dancing across the waves. There are few thrills to match targeting the big Pacific sailfish that infest the deep-blue waters off the Western coast of Guatemala, and there is only one place to even consider going: Casa Vieja.

Casa Vieja is without doubt the best place anywhere in the world to catch sailfish on fly. Pacific sails are the biggest and the most obliging in the world, and the waters around the fabulous five-star lodge are stiff with them. Casa Vieja's hugely experienced captains average nearly ten fish a day to the boat on fly. If you run into a small blue marlin, be ready for the ride of your life. Not for nothing are these things considered the kings of the ocean, and they really do make even the high-flying sails look tame.

CONTACT

■ Website: www.casaviejalodge.com



Casa Vieja is the place to go for sailfish like this one.



A big dorado is one of the most spectacular fish on earth.

BOLIVIA

Secure, Pluma, Itirisama and Agua Negra rivers

EVERY SCHOOLBOY will tell you about the conquistadors and their murderous quest for the golden treasures of El Dorado in the wilds of the South American interior. Pizarro and Cortés may have failed in their search, but trust me, Eldorado is there, all right. In the far south-western corner of the Amazon's vast watershed, a tiny frair-fed river comes tumbling down out of the Bolivian Andes. Its clear, clean waters rush over smooth bedrock and bounce into one tiny pool after another, and it is full of gold.

It is Eldorado.

The river is the Agua Negra, a tributary of the Secure. Its gold is alive, and it is surely more beautiful and more precious than anything that the conquistadors ever dreamt of.

Salminus brasiliensis – the freshwater dorado – is a solid-gold killing machine and one of the most astonishing quarryies in the fly-fishing world. These savage brutes hunt their quarry – the luckless sabalo baitfish – with a merciless ferocity that would have made Pizarro himself blush. Once hooked, these flashing treasures invariably come flying out of the crystal waters to light up the emerald forest, before taking off on a blistering, knuckle-busting sprint for the nearest sunken log or tree-root. Do up that drag and don't give an inch. If you can bring that first fish to the bank, it really will take your breath away.

There's plenty more to see: other species, like the fruit-eating pacu and the tricky but catchable surubi catfish, will also do their best to pull your arms out of their sockets, while the local Tsimane tribe are a slice of prehistory – a tribe of hunter-gatherers that still use bow and arrow to hunt fish and wild boar and who, apart from wearing the odd LA Lakers t-shirt, are still living just as they did long before the Spaniards came thrashing their bloodthirsty way through the jungle 500 years ago. Wild rides in small planes, jeeps and hollowed-out log canoes, a blizzard of stunningly beautiful birds, monkeys and caymen and a constantly unfurling panoply of exquisite jungle landscapes add up to one of the most remote and exhilarating fly-fishing adventures on earth.

Tsimane is a must-do.

CONTACT

■ Tarquin Millington Drake at Frontiers Travel UK. Website: www.frontierstrvl.co.uk
 ■ Rodrigo Salles at Untamed Angling, who run Tsimane. Websites: www.tsimanelodge.com; www.untamedangling.com



Fishing a likely looking run on the Secure River, deep in the rainforest.