

Research your charter options well as some operators specialise in targeting fish, such as Epic Adventures in Whitianga who take clients to catch kingfish.

# GETTING THE MOST OUT OF CHARTER FISHING

Charter fishing is a great option for people looking to experience new areas, good fishing and targeting species they want to catch. We are fortunate to have many experienced operators here in Godzone, experienced writer Scott Cushman looks at ways to get the most from your trip both here and when abroad.

BY SCOTT CUSHMAN / PHOTOS: SCOTT CUSHMAN & MATHEW HEWETSON







You may have a style of fishing you want to try but it may not suit the skipper's plans, always ask before you leave port.

**T**he American captain laughed at my suggestion of trolling off his game boat with my short spinning rod used for kahawai. "We'll see if we don't have a lure that won't break the tip off your rod". He seemed to think it was the funniest thing a passenger had ever requested. Still a teenager, I was somewhat naive and still unaccustomed to the world of charter trips, especially since this was my first big game fishing charter and it was in Hawaii. A little deflated from this reaction, I had a lot to learn about what were reasonable expectations for a charter trip. I also had to learn the meaning of the term 'Caveat emptor' - let the buyer beware.

Although I managed to catch my one and only marlin on that trip, I still made plenty of mistakes. When it was my turn on the starboard inside rod and it started screaming, the captain could see me literally eyeing up a jump off the fly bridge into the cockpit to get my hands on the rod. Clamping a hand on my shoulder he gave some firm instructions on using the ladder.

Fast forward a few decades and I have figured out there is a diverse range of charter operations with differing etiquette. To get the most out of a charter trip, here are some tips to help you figure out what to expect and have reasonable expectations of the day ahead.

#### BEFORE YOU BOOK

First, ask lots of questions before you hand over your money. A charter operator's

website or Facebook page should give you a heads up about what kind of fishing they do. Depending on what you are looking for, ask the operator what a typical trip looks like. If you are booking within a few days they should have a loose plan already of where to fish, what they are targeting and how they will target those fish. Don't assume that just because you know the species, that the charter will target those fish the same way.

Some charter operators are ex-commercial fishermen so they know where and how to catch fish, but they may also lack a few people skills one may expect on a fishing trip. Bad abusive language aimed your way may surface if you're not doing things that the captain expects, even though you paid good money to go fishing with them. So, rule number one: don't assume, ask questions.



## FEATURE Charter Fishing



*Charter operators know their stuff but will also have their way of doing things, understanding how to work with your skipper will help make the day a good one.*

I remember fishing on a charter boat out of Tauranga in the 80's and we were all bottom fishing for snapper, tarakihi and whatever else would hit a bait on our heavy ledger rigs. The captain didn't mind people trolling a line out the back on the way out or way in. But that didn't mean he was going to stop if someone hooked up. One passenger was trolling and hooked a decent fish. He quickly asked me to request the captain to slow down so he could pull it in because it was taking line. I ran to the wheelhouse and passed on the request which was met with stony silence. Whilst he didn't mind people trolling, he wasn't going to stop, and anglers had to handline in their catch whilst underway.

The guy was lucky though because we were almost at our destination and a few minutes later, with two turns of line left on his reel, we stopped, and he managed to secure a keeper sized kingfish. The same boat expected all passengers to use a minimum weight of 10oz for their sinkers and have 2-3 hooks on a ledger rig. Strayline anglers were confined to the rear of the boat and treated a little bit better than lepers.

*William Brittain is congratulated by Epic's skipper Ryan Church after releasing a good kingfish to fight another day. Build a good rapport with your skipper on the day as they enjoy putting their customers onto fish.*





**TACKLE TO SUIT**

For anglers who have their own gear, make sure your approach/gear fits how the captain likes to fish. You may like to deploy 1oz softbaits on 2kg braid, however that may not suit a boat of 6-10 fishos bottom fishing at anchor. If you want to bring your stickbait gear and stop if you see top water action, don't assume the skipper is on the same page. If six or more paying clients are onboard, with only one-person fishing, it may not be very fair. You may only get 15 minutes of casting, if you see activity and a reason to stop on the way to a fishing spot.

It's important to remember that just because you are paying money, it doesn't mean you get a lot of say regarding how the charter operator chooses to fish. This is where communication is key and asking the right questions to understand how they like to run their operation will

help you understand what to expect and whether you will be disappointed or not. This up-front discussion will also give you a good indicator of the people skills of the person looking after you. The skipper may also agree to doing something they normally wouldn't, and this is more likely if you negotiate upfront. Trying to negotiate after you've paid money and you're out on the water often is less successful.

Here are some questions worth asking; what time is departure and return and where is the departure point? The website may state these details but check in case. What is provided; gear, food/drink? Is there a toilet on board? What would be the basic plan for catching fish; species and techniques. Can you bring your own gear and what gear is most appropriate? Are ice and bins provided onboard (this is standard but ask anyway). Are there any 'boat rules'? E.g. limits that are different from the legal rules i.e. one kingfish per person.

Some skippers are very conservation minded and may ask you to keep any legal snapper caught (even the 30cm ones). The reason is that if you have to catch four snapper before you catch a 35cm+ fish, the chances of harming those fish and causing mortality is higher and you do more damage on the fishery.

*Party boat charters must accommodate for many anglers. They may have extra facilities on board like BBQs, so taking some sausages for lunch to feed your crew is a good idea.*



## FEATURE Charter Fishing



*When fishing overseas, don't assume any fish caught belongs to you. Ask before you pay your money and if you catch something delicious like this yellowfin, you may be able to negotiate a fillet as part of the deal.*

tasty dinner rather than walking away empty handed at the end of the day. Many charter operators offset their prices by selling any fish caught to local restaurants or markets. It's good to understand the local culture before stepping on board.

On one of my international trips fishing in Asia, it was obvious the local captain had a dogmatic approach and deviation was not very welcome. We were targeting sailfish and just like work-ups in the Hauraki Gulf, any cluster of birds signalled predators below. Every time we saw birds, sailfish could be seen underneath. The captain wasn't keen to get too close to the action or chase the birds and wanted to drift in the general vicinity instead. It was somewhat frustrating, but we had to roll with the punches, even though we couldn't quite understand the rationale.

Lastly, it is in your best interests to stay on the skipper's good side. Be respectful and helpful rather than acting like you're entitled to silver service. Chartering is not an easy business and the more you can build a rapport with the crew and work with them, the more likely you are to have a great time. These guys also have a wealth of knowledge so humbly asking their opinion of the fishery and targeting fish will no doubt pay off with some real nuggets of information.

Charter fishing can sometimes be hit and miss but being smart about how you approach an operator can yield a lot more than a bag of fish at the end of the day. I continue to talk fishing with one operator I befriended in the Far North some 15 years ago, long after he stopped chartering. It's good to catch up with him and he's still very generous with info on where the fish are biting locally. **FIGZ**

What happens in the event of bad weather or a cancelled trip? In what conditions will the trip go ahead? Some skippers will go out even when the passengers would prefer not to. Does the boat have adequate cover if it rains or is the ride home especially wet? The cabin may not fit 10 wet people, so it's good to ask. If you're a coffee person, is it best to bring a Thermos or do they have coffee available? Many operators will also have BBQ/grill facilities onboard so some hot sausages may be an option for lunch if you bring them.

### OVERSEAS CHARTERS

If you are fishing abroad and targeting game fish, ask what happens to the fish once landed? In many Pacific island nations, the fish belongs to the boat, not the paying passenger. Asking if you can take a fillet of yellowfin back to your hotel BEFORE you pay your money, may secure you a piece of



*Fishing overseas for game fish in places such as Hawaii, skippers expect a tip for putting anglers onto a fish.*