

Sport Fishing In and Around Colombo

Posted on



Fishing or angling is an interesting and absorbing pastime, with the added attraction of having fresh fish at table for your next meal.

Though a busy commercial centre, Colombo's coastline is still relatively unpolluted and there are more than a dozen species of fish to be caught on a sportsman's line. With its seaboard and several estuaries of the Kelani River and other fresh waterways which open out into the ocean, Colombo offers plenty of opportunity to cast hook and line and come nearer to bagging that big fish which dreams are made of for the angler. Fishing off the south-west breakwater of the Port of Colombo or at the Kelaniya estuary during the high season is rich with such opportunity.

Sri Lanka is watered by two distinct monsoons. The western seaboard, including Colombo, is calm from November to April during the north-east monsoon period, and the eastern coastline calm from May to October during the south-west monsoon. This allows the keen angler ample occasion to spend much of his leisure time pleasurably and profitably by the sea.

Casting with rod and reel or handline from the seashore produces varied results depending on the area. On the open shore, casting over the waves in the early morning with a feather or small spoon at the end of a light rod might hook you a trevally (paraw) darting in and out of the reef and surf before you at last land)Our to-pound silver catch on the beach. Trevally, which is an inshore fish, is found in abundance around rock outcrops and reefs, and the smaller ones generally run in schools. These can be caught with artificial or with dead or live bait, and fish weighing up to 50 kg have been reeled in from the estuary of the Kelani River. A fighter, as the angler aptly describes this fish, a trevally hooked at the end of a light fishing line can be an exhilarating experience giving you many anxious moments before the fish parts with the line and gets away.

Fishing possibilities are many as paraw, katta (queenfish), jeela (barracuda) and koduwas (estuary perch) break the surface chasing after bait-fish which scamper in every direction to avoid being devoured by hungry predators. The sudden whining

sound of a reel as it unwinds to the strain of a hard pull signals a strike and a fish on the line. Other anglers reel in their lines quickly to avoid snagging them with the one which has hooked the fish as it rushes out into the deep and the fight is on. Everyone is eager to guess what is at the end of the line, with more than 150 metre of it having already been paid out as the wary angler begins playing the fish. Suddenly there is a flash in the distance as an estuary perch jumps out of the water in a series of bounces in an attempt to unhook itself from the lure that is well lodged in its mouth. Minutes go by as the fish is allowed to tire itself at the end of a tight line while it is steadily reeled in. The fish makes a final dash for freedom taking a good length of line out, but it soon gives up and is reeled in and landed on the beach. This estuary perch weighs over 12 kg and the anglers gather to congratulate the victor.

In the meantime, another angler hooks a barracuda which is subsequently safely beached in a few minutes. This one weighs a mere 3 g and causes little excitement among the fishermen. The evening lingers on as the sun sets beneath the horizon painting the sky with brilliant hues of orange and red'. The anglers finally reel in their lines, hoping for better luck tomorrow.

Fishing off the south-west breakwater of the Port of Colombo can be very productive and exciting. Additional varieties of deep-water gamefish such as Spanish mackerel or seer (thora), skipjack, ribbon fish and more add to the number and chances of making a catch. Entry into the breakwater is by permit which is normally issued by the Ports Authority for a small fee. The breaker cuts into deep water around the port and the long, high wall makes it ideal for casting. All types of lures and bait are used and most varieties of fish can be landed throughout the season. Anglers are on the wall well before daybreak and the business of fishing continues late on into the morning until the day's catch lies shining on its final landing. In the evening, it's good fishing again and the anglers add to their catch, weighing from only single kilo to a possible 50kg.

Suddenly heavy downpours are not uncommon during the season. When these occur, the alert angler makes straight for the Galle Face Spill beside the Old Parliament Building where after a heavy shower, the overflow from Beira Lake runs out to the ocean which causes bait fish to enter the sea at this point, attracting large predators from the open waters. Casting from shoreline over the reef into deeper waters rewards the enterprising angler with prize catches of trevally, queenfish, barracuda and sometimes even mora (shark). While the morning rush of office workers proceed on their way to work in the Fort, it is not unusual to see

hopeful anglers in their tropical briefs still casting their lines into the sea even at eight in the morning at this unique fishing spot in town.

Still and bottom fishing are for those with plenty of patience, and a few hours spent in the morning or evening can be most interesting to the avid angler. Estuaries, rock outcrops, breakwaters or the calm shoreline can yield a variety of mullet, grouper, sardines and other inshore fish that thrive on an abundance of seaweed, algae, plankton and other food matter of the shallow reef. The bait used mostly is dead prawn or cuttlefish and dead sardines if you are looking for a grouper for lunch. Look out, though, or the moray eel which is an unwelcome quarry at the end of your line.

Offshore trolling for gamefish is the dream of every angler, though there is not much facility for such sport in Sri Lanka as yet. Nevertheless, it is possible to attempt it if the angler is game enough to hang onto a gunwhale or deckrail in a choppy sea trying to boatland a fish. The boats, if available, are only commercial ones with no rigging facilities nor fighting chair for a sports fisherman. The total ignorance of sports fishing on the part of commercial boatmen can add to the misery of such an adventure. Trying to bag a big fish on a flimsy line wound around a funny-looking reel often makes the sports angler seem like some kind of fool attempting the impossible to the boatman who uses the heaviest lines and nets devoid of any sport.

In any case, for those who would venture offshore there is good sport to be had with all types of gamefish including tuna, marlin, sailfish and bonito all waiting to snap at your bait. If you go out in the early morning on a motorized fishing craft and troll along the many reefs and over sunken rocks and ships, it is possible to bag an impressive assortment of fish. Heavy casting reels or light trolling gear filled with ample line and short rods, an assortment of lures with matching long trace wires, a trolling lead for use with spinners and a gaff with which to boat your fish should comprise your tackle. Ample water sand: ""iches and coffee would fill the rest of you; requirements for a good morning's troll.

Most artificial baits available locally are ideal for this type of fishing, given the limitations of speed in commercial craft and it is reasonable to assume that you could boat-land at least a 10kg barracuda. However, in season, catches of four to six fish weighing over 50kg are often made by persistent anglers.

The Anglers' Club of Sri Lanka, situated at Chaitya Road near the Lighthouse, offers

visitor facilities such as temporary permits to enter the breakwater, friendly advice and guidance for successful angling, and a great place to relax over a cool beer after a hard day's fishing.



The South-west Breakwater of the Port of Colombo