

Getting Started in Saltwater Flyfishing



Gavin Platz has been a saltwater angler since before he could walk. His grandmother was born on the Grassy Hill Lighthouse in North Queensland's Cooktown, and his grandfather was related to the first Lighthouse Keeper, Captain Thomas George Rookesby, who manned the light from 1865.

Leaving school at an early age, Gavin became a commercial fisherman and with love for the ocean and angling, he progressed to flyfishing. He now specialises in catching Tuna on a fly rod.

What is saltwater flyfishing?

Saltwater Flyfishing is like freshwater flyfishing; it's the active art of presenting an artificial copy of particular baits that predator fish are most likely going to want to eat. It's a craft, and your success relies on the knowledge you have learned, and your proficiency to use that knowledge. It's a game for thinkers.

A successful flyfisher will use their knowledge in the planning before they start. The type of fish that live where you are heading, what they eat, and how deep they swim is some things to take into consideration.

Gavin owns and runs Tie'n'Fly Outfitters, (flyfishing supplies and guided flyfishing tours) and has been guiding for saltwater flyfishers from all over the world for the last 20yrs.

Where to go?

Gavin's favourite place to flyfish is Buchanan Bank (near Islamorada Key, Florida), a world famous Atlantic Tarpon (aka poon) bank.

"So I'm at home planning... well, dreaming is probably closer, and I sit at my Fly Tying Vice, tie some Tarpon Patterns that I have previously tested at Buchanan Bank, and they're beautiful. They have to be; or I will not tie them on my leader. I'm now the apex predator, so my tools must be perfect to work. My flies are tied, I've made my leaders, my rods and reels are serviced and I'm ready to hunt".

Guided by the flyfishing famous Billy Pate and his wife Jodi, they soon arrive at the bank, ready to be the next Apex Poon Predator.

"We're not there long before Billy points to the pocket, and mentions really quietly that there is Poon coming. He points out a faint shadow of one swimming down the flat towards me. I'm shaking in anticipation. Thoughts shoot through my brain. Is the fly right? Is the leader long enough so as not to spook the Tarpon? "Billy calls ever so softly "90FT ... 2 o'clock ... left to right". I drop the fly and make my cast. He's so close now how could I miss? This Tarpon is MINE for the taking".

And just as he thought he had locked the Tarpon into his sights, the wind changed slightly and he caught the fly in the back of his head. Time and again Billy and Jodi pointed out Big Tarpon well within casting range... but each time; Gavin's fly was either blown off target or hit him.

Tie 'N' Fly Outfitters



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What makes a good flyfisher?

To become a good flyfisher, a change of mind set needs to happen. As a flyfisher you need to be a predator. You need to study and know what your prey eats.

"That day, fishing the Buchanan Bank, a simple change in the way I was thinking was in order. Firstly my casting was ok, I was making the cast but only just, so my accuracy was not flash. Secondly I needed to present the fly so the tarpon could see it, but more importantly I'd realised the fly was pulled away from the tarpon, not into him."

Think about it this way ... If you were a bait fish no larger than 4 inches long; and a 6 foot long tarpon with a mouth the size of a bucket was swimming towards you, would you swim a) toward death or b) away from it? Natural instinct shows what a real fish would do, but mimicking this takes concentration, knowledge and practise. Presenting a perfect fly to a large predator, and having him think it's real enough to eat is what Flyfishing is all about.

How to get started

Flyfishing can be a lot of fun. Learning to cast, tying the flies and especially the first catch on your own tied fly is an excellent feeling.

To get started you need a decent rod. In Freshwater flyfishing the demands on the rod are not as high as in Saltwater Flyfishing, so get the best you can afford. The size of the rod will depend on the fish you intend to chase. A good reel with a decent drag that will hold at least 200 metres of backing is equally as important as the rod. Your choice of flyline is the most important part of the whole outfit however.

Flylines are made not only for a purpose, but also for temperature. A flyline made for the tropics will be like a piece of barbed wire in a cold water trout stream and a cold water fly line in the tropics will probably melt, or at least get sticky & not cast properly.

It's great to have all the right gear, but you also need to know how to use it properly.

A true predator knows everything there is to now about his gear. Like a lot of disciplines, it's only a matter of learning the physics of the cast.

Here's the basic physics of casting terminology:

Power Stroke - the path the "Rod Hand" takes while casting. Your Power Stroke must be straight, horizontally and vertically. The Length of the Power Stroke is directly proportionate to how much fly line is in the air (this means if you only have a small amount of line in the air the distance the hand move is only short).

False Casting - the act of moving the flyline in the air (this is what sets flyfishing apart from other forms of fishing).

Loop - The shape made by the flyline in the air when false casting correctly

Pausing - opposite to what you would do in cracking a whip

Once you have your rod ready to go, thread the flyline through the rod so that you have about 20 foot of line laid on the ground in front of you. Use the hands of a clock to show where you need to stop the rod on both the back stroke and the fore stroke of the cast. 12 o'clock is 90 degrees to the ground; 3 o'clock is horizontal to the ground.

From a position with the flyline on the ground, accelerate the rod back to a position beside your ear, stopping the rod near the vertical position (11 o'clock position).

Pause the rod in this position until the flyline lays out straight in the air behind you. From this position you need to accelerate the rod forward and stop the rod at a position in front that is about 1/2 way between 3 o'clock & 12 o'clock.

A good tip from Gavin is once you have your flyline run, head to a local park & play with your new setup, and do some research on the fish you hope to catch soon.

Fly fishing, like most other fishing styles, is a great way to release stress. Whether you are hitting the local streams, rivers, on the open ocean or waterways, picking the right fly for the job can be the real stress reliever you need.

Tie 'N' Fly Outfitters are the first saltwater fly fishing shop in Australia and are currently the only specialist Salt Water Fly Fishing Outfitter in Australia. If you want to learn some of the finer points of fly fishing in the surf Gavin and his team run workshops, which is a great way to sharpen your skills for the coming beach and rock fishing season.