








GAMEFISH	SEASON	LOCATION	BAIT/ LURES	FLY FISHING
 <i>Albula vulpes</i> Bonefish*	All year, best late March through September	Near shore, shallow seagrass and sand flats, mangroves	Live shrimp, small jigs often baited with shrimp or crab	Various small flies tied to imitate shrimp, crabs, and worms
 <i>Trachinotus falcatus</i> Permit	All year, best April through October	Shallow seagrass, sand flats and back reefs	Small live crabs, pieces of crab, small sea urchins	Crab patterns
 <i>Megalops atlanticus</i> Tarpon*	All year, best March through October	Mangrove lagoons, bays, harbors, deeper water adjacent to shallow flats, around offshore cays	Silver spoons, white jigs, live baitfish	Large streamers, Seaducers, various "tarpon" flies
 <i>Centropomus undecimalis</i> Snook	All year	Mangrove lagoons, bays, harbors, along beaches with sharp drop-offs and submerged structures	Live shrimp, small fish, baitfish imitation lures	Baitfish imitations
 <i>Sphyaena barracuda</i> Barracuda	All year	Around reefs, channels adjacent to shallow water, mangrove lagoons and bays	Live fish, baitfish imitations, silver spoons, feathers	Baitfish imitations, needlefish imitations
 Carangidae Jacks	All year	Around reefs, channels adjacent to shallow water, mangrove lagoons and bays, back reef flats	Squid, shrimp, cut bait, small spoons, spinners, jigs	Small streamers, clousers, shrimp imitations
 <i>Lutjanus mahogoni</i> Mahogany Snapper	All year	Around reefs, channels adjacent to shallow water.	Baitfish (squid, fry) or cut bait, squid	

* Only Catch and Release Allowed

HELPFUL HINTS:

1. Use barbless hooks – barbless hooks reduce the time needed to handle a fish before releasing and may be removed from you should you get hooked.
2. Use stainless steel hooks – stainless steel hooks left in fish will not rust and will likely be thrown, while steel hooks that rust can cause a toxic shock response in some fishes.
3. Use artificial lures – natural baits are more likely to be swallowed, causing extreme damage to the fish.
4. Reduce fight time – energetic fish recover faster.
5. Keep the fish in the water – try to remove the hook and release the fish without removing the fish from the water.
6. Use a 'dehooking device' – try not to handle the fish, use a dehooking device instead.
7. Be gentle – if you handle the fish, wet your hand first to minimize the amount of protective coating of 'slime' removed from the fish by handling.
8. Help the fish – when releasing a fish, hold the fish in the water in an upright (swimming) position. Hold the fish loosely by the base of the tail and under the stomach until it is strong enough to swim away.

ETHICAL ANGLING

Help fish stocks increase through catch and release.
Limit your take, don't always take your limit.
Observe regulations and report violations.
Bring all garbage in, don't teach it to swim.
Captain your boat. practice safetv afloat.

For more information on Recreational Sportfishing contact:
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Shallow Water Game Fish RECREATIONAL FISHING IN THE U.S VIRGIN ISLANDS



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THE HISTORY OF GAME FISHING

Shallow water game fishing became popular in the Virgin Islands in the 1950s. The primary target then was the bonefish, locally known as “ten-pounders”. Bonefish are not as abundant in the Virgin Islands as they once were, but they can still be caught by anglers who take the time to search the flats. Permit and tarpon are now at the top of the list for shallow water gamefish enthusiasts in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Catching a bonefish, permit and tarpon is the flats version of the “Grand Slam”. Barracuda and jacks are the most common shallow water gamefish and provide great sport. Snook are caught occasionally.

Shallow water game fish can only be caught in unrestricted areas. They can not be caught in areas, such as marine reserves, which are restricted.

FISHING THE FLATS

The most popular method for pursuing shallow water gamefish is “sight-fishing”. When fishing around reefs or offshore, anglers will often cast, troll, or drift baits without seeing the fish prior to hooking a fish. When sight-fishing, no baits, lures or flies are cast until a fish is spotted. Once a fish is spotted the chosen bait, lure or fly is then cast to the fish. Accurate casting and correct presentation of the bait are essential.

Fish can also be attracted by chumming with pieces of fish, shrimp, squid, etc. Casting in “fishy” water may yield a tarpon, snook, barracuda or jack. Anglers often troll for barracuda and jacks, and occasionally tarpon. Other anglers fish baits on the bottom for bonefish and permit, or near the surface for tarpon, snook, barracuda, and jacks.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

As bonefish and permit dig their mouths into the bottom rooting for food, their tails often come out of the water. Occasionally, bonefish and permit pass through water so shallow that their dorsal fins and backs are exposed. Trails of mud or other bottom sediments may indicate bonefish digging in the bottom in search of prey. Bonefish can be spotted in water just a few inches deep, while permit prefer water deeper than 16 inches.

Tarpon can be seen at the water surface gulping air; they are able to utilize oxygen from the air via a lung-like bladder. They can be spotted rolling on the surface as they feed on smaller fish. Tarpon occasionally swim just below the water surface with their dorsal fin exposed. An experienced angler with polarized sunglasses may be able to spot tarpon in the shade of mangrove branches during the middle of the day.

Snook can be seen swimming just below the water surface, often with their dorsal fin exposed. They spend a lot of time among the prop roots of the mangroves, waiting for prey to pass within striking distance. Their dark shapes can be spotted in the shadows of submerged structures such as rocks, coral or mangrove roots. Snook can often be found close to sandy shorelines that have a trough or deep area close to shore especially when the water is turbid.

Barracuda are often seen suspended motionless in the water, waiting for the chance to attack unsuspecting prey. Smaller fish can be found in water just a few inches deep. Larger fish can be found just about anywhere it is deep enough for them to pass.

Although large barracuda prefer the deeper waters around reefs and in lagoons, they can also be spotted cruising the flats in search of prey. A school of baitfish jumping from the water as they flee a predator may indicate a feeding barracuda.

Jacks can be seen cruising the fore-reef and back reef in search of food. They also feed in lagoons, over seagrass beds, along beaches, and even on shallow seagrasses and sand flats. Small jacks may be seen in small groups while feeding. Larger jacks become more solitary. Jacks can be seen feeding on schooling baitfish at the surface when in deeper water. When on the flats, jacks often leave a wake as they pass through the shallow water in search of food, and can be seen splashing as they chase prey.

MOON AND TIDES

In general, fishing the shallow water flats is best during the few days before and during the full moon. This is a period when the highest tides of the month allow the fish to access areas which are normally too shallow in search of food. The last half of the incoming tide, high tide, and the first of the outgoing tide are best. This is especially true for bonefish and permit. Even in deeper water, such as fore-reefs and lagoons, feeding activity appears to increase during this time of the month.

CATCH AND RELEASE

Fishing the saltwater flats in the Caribbean provides a unique experience for both experienced and inexperienced anglers. Because these fish are limited in numbers due to their dependence on a limited habitat they are especially susceptible to overfishing. When practiced

properly, catch and release fishing helps to provide a sustainable source of enjoyment for anglers.

ACCESSING THE SHALLOWS

Many of the shallow water fishing areas can be accessed from land. However, much of this land is privately owned. Please secure the permission of the land owner prior to accessing their land, and respect the rights of the landowners. Always close all fences and gates behind you and leave only footprints.

When fishing the shallow areas by boat watch for coral and shallow areas. Use a push-pole or paddles to move through the flats rather than the motor; prop damage can cause permanent destruction of seagrass beds and coral reefs.

POTENTIAL HAZARDS

WATCH YOUR STEP!

Stingrays often cruise the shallows looking for food (clams, crabs, shrimp, etc.) and often lie motionless on the bottom. Although they will swim away if they see you coming, if stepped on they can inflict a very painful wound with the bony spine located at the base of their tail.

Sea urchins graze on the seagrass and algae found in the shallows, and their spines can cause painful injuries.

Scorpion fish are able to camouflage themselves perfectly in almost any surroundings and often lie motionless on the rocks and coral. Their dorsal spine contains venom which can cause severe pain and swelling.