

Feasting in Anegada

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 Tuesday, 05 December 2006
 Last Updated Friday, 05 October 2012

If you're looking for the freshest fish in the Virgin Islands, October offers a fun and (slightly) competitive way to find that fish. Head to Anegada for the St Ursula's Day holiday weekend, and experience the adrenaline rush of catching your own fish during the annual Lowell Wheatley Memorial Fishing Tournament. My husband Matt and I have a particular affinity for this event. It was both of our introductions to sport fishing in the Virgin Islands and our first trip to Anegada, an island that we instantly fell in love with.

A few years ago, Matt and I were new BVI residents and also proud new owners of a sport fishing boat. While sipping cocktails at the Royal BVI Yacht Club, we saw a poster announcing a fishing tournament in Anegada. We couldn't resist the opportunity to spend a weekend fishing around Anegada, one of the Caribbean's top-notch fishing areas. After one too many rum cocktails at the Yacht Club, we boldly decided to sign up for the tournament, despite never having attempted any type of offshore fishing. Fortunately, we received some first-rate coaching from a Tortola-based couple with extensive knowledge of local fishing grounds. They gave us advice about lures and other equipment, and even shared a few of their GPS waypoints marked for favourable fishing.

Still, upon pulling up to the dock at the Anegada Reef Hotel, Matt and I were quickly reminded that we were out of our league. The other teams were far more experienced than we were, and our pristine and clean boat practically screamed "newbies." In fact, at sundown the night before the competition started, a friendly fisherman from St. Thomas stopped by our boat to help us. In a hushed voice, he took Matt aside and shared one of his prized lures for catching tuna. We were grateful for the advice and found the rest of the competitors to be just as collegial.

As we headed to the North Drop on Saturday morning, Matt and I decided that our weekend would be a success regardless of what happened. All the participating boats contribute fish for a cookout at the end of the day Sunday. Even if we got "skunked" and caught no fish, we'd still enjoy a meal of the best and freshest fish in the Virgin Islands. Plus, we like to think that any day is a good day on the water, especially in gorgeous Caribbean waters.

To our delight, we caught five fish over the course of the weekend: three wahoo, one mahi mahi and one blackfin tuna. I won the prize for "best lady angler," complete with a lovely necklace. (Full disclosure: There were only two women participants, and the best lady anglers in the BVI were unable to attend the tournament that particular year.) Matt and I were proudest of the fact that we could contribute a nearly 20 pound wahoo for Sunday's barbeque—a feast that lived up to our expectations.

We returned to Tortola with a cooler full of fresh fish, and we continued feasting. We were in food heaven—a seemingly endless supply of just-caught fish. I had packed plenty of recipes when I moved to Tortola, but this time my cookbooks stayed on the kitchen shelves. The fish was so fresh that cooking it was unnecessary. Few foods are as fabulous as sashimi from a fish you just caught, served only with a little soy sauce and wasabi. No recipe required.

This year's Lowell Wheatley Memorial Fishing tournament is October 20-21. Contact the Anegada Reef Hotel at 284-495-8002 for more details. A limited number of local fishing boats may be available for charter.