

The destination for those in the know... Los Roques is becoming a firm favourite for those who love to stalk bonefish.

# Bonefish Central

## Los Roques – Venezuela

GAIA instructor Andy Smith travels to Los Roques, where the bonefish test the gearing on your fly reels to the absolute limits.

Out of all the fishing trips I've been on in recent years, this one was the one I most looked forward to. Venezuela is a destination I had heard stories about for years because it seems to have been a long-standing favourite destination of those in the know. Mention the words Los Roques in any good fly fishing shop and just watch the ear-to-ear smiles

from the senior staff. This was also the destination for Hardy and Greys to test out its latest product line-up recently.

I had regularly heard anglers say how fantastic the fishing had been in Cuba, but that they somehow still preferred Venezuela! So having already done trips to Cuba and the like, I couldn't wait to cross this destination off my bucket list.

Venezuela as a destination for European anglers has lost out in recent years where it had become the hotspot for the Americans unable to get access into Cuba. However, with USA/Cuba relationships relaxed there's been a total turnaround, leaving the waters off the mainland of Venezuela deserted as USA anglers rush to get to new Cuba locations.



## Hassle-Free Travel

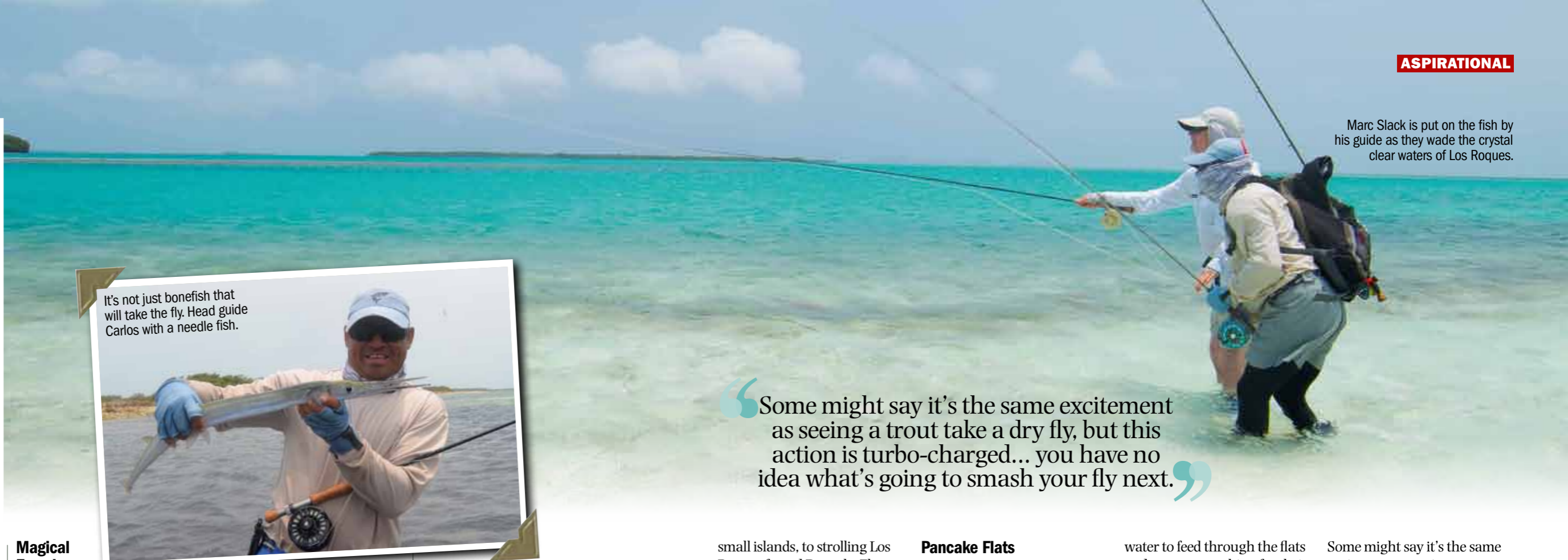
The trip begins with the standard transatlantic 10-hour flight and a stopover in Caracas, staying in a five-star hotel right by the airport and nowhere near Caracas itself and all of its reported troubles. It's then up early the next day for a 30-minute flight in an eight-seater plane to the islands of Los Roques.

It's fair to say that getting to this fishing destination is as hassle free as it comes. Fly out from the UK one day and you're fishing by 10am the next, which is a far cry from some of the places I've been to, where flights, taxis, buses and hours on a boat eat into at least three days of the trip and you arrive exhausted.

Situated just a 30-minute flight from Caracas, the Los Roques destination has arguably the finest bone fishing action to be had anywhere. It has been one of the world's top game fishing destinations for more than three decades and truly offers the most explosive bonefishing experience you can imagine. The location has everything on offer – tarpon, permit, horse-eyed jacks, triggerfish, snapper and big barracuda.

However, Los Roques is famed for its hard-fighting bonefish, which are such powerful fighters that it's easy to forget the other fish on offer.

"Toro," the guides joked to me. Bonefish fight like bulls and there were times in the week where I thought I had a bull on my line. I even had the gearing on one saltwater reel completely stripped out by a fish that wasn't stopping for anyone.



Marc Slack is put on the fish by his guide as they wade the crystal clear waters of Los Roques.



It's not just bonefish that will take the fly. Head guide Carlos with a needle fish.

“Some might say it's the same excitement as seeing a trout take a dry fly, but this action is turbo-charged... you have no idea what's going to smash your fly next.”

### Magical Experience

From the moment of landing on the main island of Grand Roques and on to what you could loosely call passport control (a Portakabin and gazebo), the whole experience is magical and totally stress free. It's a mere five-minute walk from the runway along sandy streets to the hotel and then less than a minute to walk each day onto the beach, where your boat and guides are ready and waiting for you.

We were encouraged to arrive ready, dressed for fishing, because no sooner had we got to the hotel than a

hot breakfast was served and we were then ushered along to the beach for our first of six days of amazing fishing. There were eight of us fishing from the hotel, paired up in four boats. Not only did we not see each other during the day, other than an occasional lunch meet-up, there was no-one else fishing anywhere. This is fishing that's truly all to yourself, with a horizon line that stretches out uninterrupted for miles.

### Bonefishing At Its Very Best

The great attraction of Los Roques is its wealth of

opportunity for classic bonefish wading and this is the ultimate challenge of stalking fish in crystal-clear water. It is fair to point out that the predominance of wading should not put off the less mobile among us because it's very easy wading and completely set to an individual's pace and walking ability. I say walking ability because the water is lovely and warm and rarely gets above your knees, so it's hardly wading as we would expect on a river with a strong current.

Fishing from the sandy beach shorelines off idyllic

small islands, to strolling Los Roques famed Pancake Flats, this is all about spotting fish, seeing the take and watching your reel spool empty at a rate of knots. This is bonefishing at its very best. The fishing really does suit all levels of expertise and whether you are a stillwater trout fisher in saltwater for the first time or someone with years of experience, this destination thrills all.

Again, don't be put off by the thought of all that wading because the guides have many locations where you can fish from the boat. Added to that, you are basically in charge of your day and can break off and rest whenever suits and contemplate the day as a whole or enjoy the welcoming cocktails back at the hotel at the end of the day.

### Pancake Flats

The Pancake Flats are the unique feature of Los Roques, and any other destination for that matter, and offer a fantastic fishing experience as well as a stunning landscape that will become one of your all-time memories of any destination trip. The flats are anything from the size of a tennis court to an area of several football pitches, and you are walking on white sand, grasses and coral shallows surrounded by open-ocean deep blue drop-offs.

These Pancake Flats are only accessible by boat according to tide. As a fishing area this is unreal because, when the tide is right, fish come up from the deep

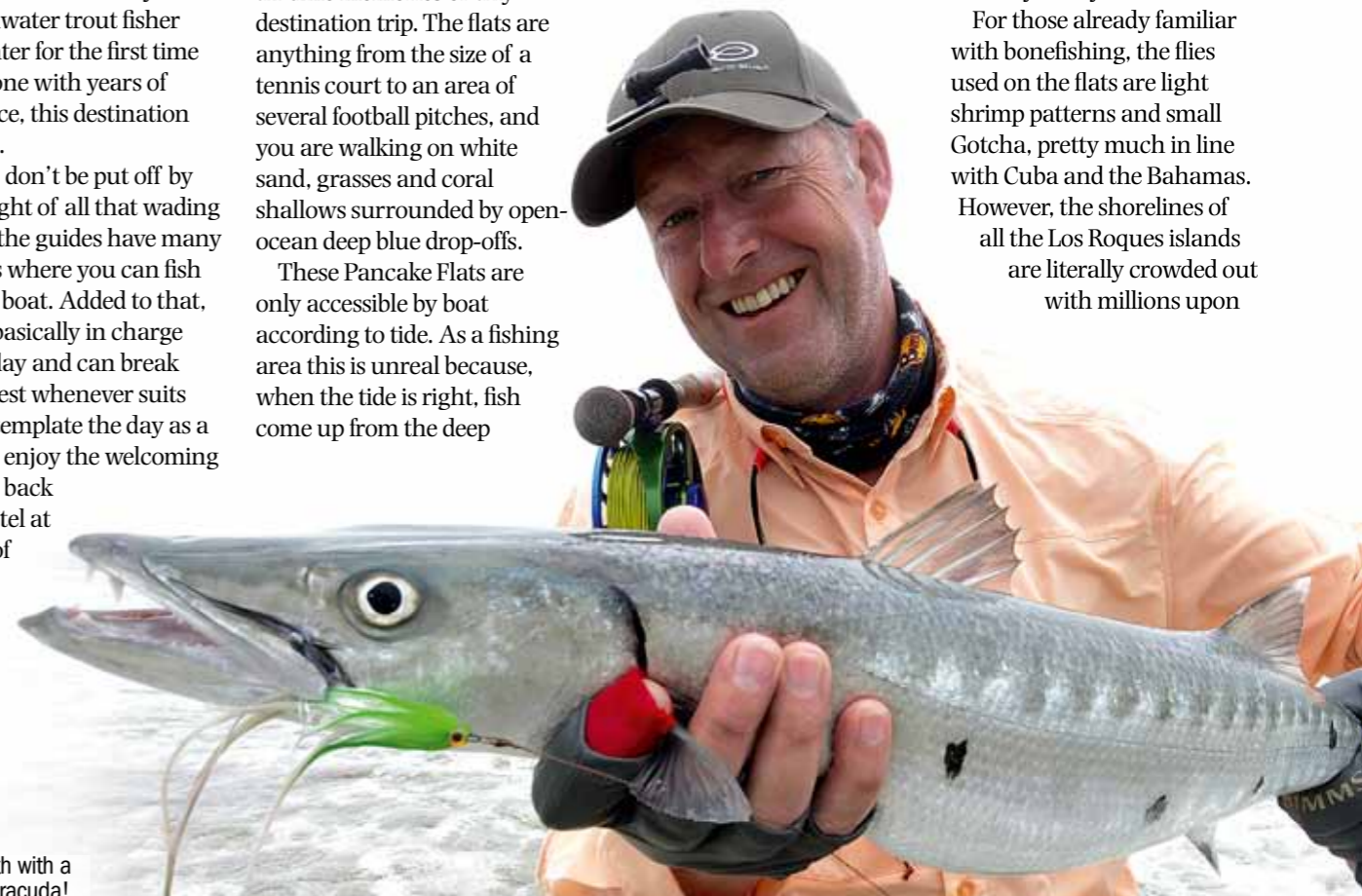
water to feed through the flats and you are watching for their approach. It's heart-stopping action as you cast ahead of them, stripping the fly as they are on top of it and seeing the action unfold before your eyes.

Some might say it's the same excitement as seeing a trout take a dry fly, but this action is turbo-charged and if you are fishing deeper holes and channel cuts, the essence of Venezuela fishing is that you have no idea what's going to smash your fly next.

For those already familiar with bonefishing, the flies used on the flats are light shrimp patterns and small Gotcha, pretty much in line with Cuba and the Bahamas. However, the shorelines of all the Los Roques islands are literally crowded out with millions upon



Los Roques offers fishing opportunities from the boat or shore along its miles of idyllic beaches.



Andy Smith with a toothy barracuda!

## ASPIRATIONAL

millions of small minnows the size of whitebait. Here it's all about predator activity, with bonefish hitting fry patterns along the shoreline as if it were their last meal. I'm not aware this happens anywhere else and had never heard of bonefish feeding like this, because it's normally about seeing them with tails in the air grubbing around for shrimp and crabs.

You can be forgiven here for thinking while wading that the large area of black in the water ahead is a weed bed, until it opens up to reveal white sand. It's only then that you realise it's a huge slick of baitfish minnows being hit by bones, and/or jacks or tarpon.

For those who just don't have enough fishing from 8am to 4pm each day, there's plenty of action off the beach near to the hotel – that's before breakfast at dawn and ahead of the guides coming to collect you. I will admit that I was one of those out every morning at first light. I had simply stunning action from bones, horse-eyed jacks, snapper and rainbow runners. The same can be said for evening fishing as well if you can make it. However, the

welcome tray of cocktails that greets your return to the hotel at the end of the day, together with fantastic food, gets the better of anyone as you relax, unwind and reflect on the day.

During our week, as some photos show, the weather was breezy to say the least, often dull and overcast. Hardly the best conditions for saltwater fly fishing, yet many of the group and I landed at least 100 fish each. Imagine being there with perfect conditions – it's just mental.

The season is almost year round for Venezuela but the summer months are largely ignored because it becomes far too hot to be out all day on the water.

If you like the idea of fishing this amazing location, my trip was arranged through Aardvaak McLeod, who I can say truly take care of everything to make the trip really special. So much so, I've already agreed to host another trip for them to Los Roques at the end of March 2017.

For more information about that trip or fishing this legendary destination, contact me at [andy@reelflyfishing.co.uk](mailto:andy@reelflyfishing.co.uk). 



Over the week Andy and many of the other anglers caught and released over 100 fish!



If you've targeted bonefish in Cuba then why not try Venezuela, the destination for those in the know over the last few years.

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