

# Condé Nast Traveler

MARCH 2020

## TRIPS TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

### THE AZORES FOR THE INTREPID

THE BEST DESTINATION  
SPAS IN THE WORLD

### NEW SHIPS TO ANTARCTICA

KEYS TO ITALY'S  
ARISTOCRATIC PALAZZOS

FANTASTIC BEASTS IN  
BOTSWANA AND BEYOND



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# THE CULTURAL COMPASS

FOCUSING IN ON THE WILD AND INVIGORATING, THE QUIET AND SKILLED, THE LANDSCAPE AS MUSE

## BACK IN THE SADDLE

"BE ABLE TO GALLOP OUT OF trouble."

This riding skill, required by Okavango Horse Safaris to join their horse-back tours through Botswana's Okavango Delta, gave me pause. I'd spent thousands of hours in the saddle since childhood, but mostly inside fenced arenas, never encountering any trouble that might warrant a galloping escape. In this context, trouble meant a confrontation with big game.

As a teenager I jumped horses over four-foot fences, an activity that scared me sometimes and now seems unfathomable. I rode on my college team too, but the onset of adulthood essentially ruled out a hugely expensive, time-consuming hobby involving the keeping of a large animal. I missed having a serious commitment to a sport, and more, I missed the mysterious partnership between horse and rider, the nonverbal ➤



PHOTOGRAPH BY ROGER AND PAT DE LA HARPE  
PHOTOGRAPHY/AFRICA IMAGERY





## GETTING HOOKED

THE MINDFUL SPORT OF FLY-FISHING IS GETTING A REBOOT. NOW A NEW LODGE IN CHILEAN PATAGONIA TAKES IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

THE WILLOWS ALONG the shore are swaying. Snowy Andean peaks are looming. After hours of intermittent rain, the sun is at full blaze, making the Rio Palena shine like an emerald. It's December—prime fly-fishing season in northernmost Chilean Patagonia—and I've been casting streamer flies to the river's spirited wild trout for about six hours. Apart from a hasty lunch break and a few reel-ins during which my guide, Arturo, had to oar the raft through choppy water, I've been doing nothing all day but fishing.

About a half dozen of the rainbow and brown trout I've hooked have come to hand (and just as promptly been returned to the water). None were *chanchos*—"pigs," or big ones—and for some reason my reflexes seem to be a split second off. Still, it's been a good day of fishing, all in all. As I drift off to sleep that night, I'll replay the day's rhythmic casting and stripping of fly line, the sweep of the current, and the live-wire feeling of having a fish on. For a spell, at least, the uneven rumblings of my brain will have become as smooth as a river stone. ►



From top: Chile's Rio Vodudahue, in Patagonia; a bonefish reel; a fly-fishing vest



# THE CULTURAL COMPASS

Clockwise: The Rio Palena; a sauna at Rio Palena Lodge; a bedroom at the lodge



➤ Fishing in Patagonia, where the enormous trout and nonexistent crowds prompt comparisons to Montana half a century ago, is the stuff of angling dreams. Add Eleven Experience's just-opened **Rio Palena Lodge**, with its asado cookouts, barrel sauna, and riverside canapés and glasses of Carménère, plus helicopter transfers to some of the world's finest alpine trout lakes, and you have a kind of luxury adventure it's easy to imagine making a habit of.

Let us take a moment to define terms. Fly-fishing, which relies on featherweight lures, is to "conventional tackle"—which is easier to learn and allows anglers to skewer worms and other live bait—what ballet is to wrestling. You'll likely be called a snob for saying so, but accepting such judgments has also long been a part of fly-fishing.

The essential pleasures of it can also be had a two-hour drive from my home in Brooklyn, knee-deep in a stream in the Catskills that is accessible to the public. I've felt plenty of that après-fishing contentment while devouring a sandwich at a picnic table and then retiring to my tent and sleeping bag. My dad taught me how to fly-fish in Maine, where I grew up and where my family still has an island camp in the north woods. In my 20s I drifted away from the sport, but I have enthusiastically returned to it in my 30s. It helps me get away from an overly urban frame of mind. I now spend more time plugged into the diurnal and annual rhythms of the natural world. I know about the life cycles of fish and insects. I know the difference between a freestone ➤

## HERE'S THE SCOOP

### WHAT TO EXPECT ON THE GROUND

The seven-room Rio Palena is the latest opening from the Colorado-based adventure company Eleven Experience, which has previously brought its signature blend of high design and guided outdoor sport to Iceland, the Bahamas, and other far-flung angling hot spots, including New Zealand's South Island. As is typical with Eleven Experience, the lodge is not the easiest to reach—it'll take at least two flights and a three-hour drive from Santiago, which the hotel will organize. But once you reach the large lakefront house, with its wooden suites, sauna huts, and wraparound terrace for sunset pisco sours, you won't mind how long it took to get here. The guides, too, are all experts in the field and mostly local (mine was a lovely guy from Uruguay). The program at Rio Palena is generous, with plenty of activities beyond fly-fishing, from kayaking, rafting, and mountain biking to paddle boarding. However, let's be honest: The fishing is what you come to Rio Palena for, and once you start casting well or land that first fish, you may reconsider the wisdom of devoting a precious six hours to waterfall hikes or taking a full day at the spa. Though individual rooms can be booked, the lodge is also available for group buyouts. The season runs from October through April. D.H. *Starting at \$5,200 per guest for a five-night itinerary; [elevenexperience.com](http://elevenexperience.com)*





➤ river, a tailwater, and a spring creek. Most importantly of all, I know that I've got a heck of a lot more to learn.

When I tell friends and acquaintances in New York that I fly-fish, many ask to be shown how it's done. Not since Robert Redford's film adaptation of *A River Runs Through It*, nearly 30 years ago, has this precise, often contemplative pastime garnered so much interest. Women are taking it up in unprecedented numbers; Orvis now offers all-female fishing trips. Some aficionados have repositioned it as a meditative wellness practice. Of course, predecessors from Ernest Hemingway to the 17th-century angling author Izaak Walton have understood that the recreational pursuit of fish can bring peace to a troubled mind. Science has now found ways to quantify the mental health benefits of both spending time outdoors and performing a repeated, focused activity. The rise in mindfulness and digital-detox programs has only broadened the appeal of going somewhere beautiful (trout, by the way, generally do not inhabit ugly waters) and calmly wielding a fly rod there for hours on end. Meanwhile, the photogenic and competitive nature of fly-fishing makes it a natural subject for social media.

There were no novices among the group of friends I fished with at Rio Palena. Still, the lodge is a wonderful place to learn. An on-site casting pond is under construction. The wooden soaking tubs and well-stocked bar ease the occasional frustrations of fly-fishing, which are the same whether you're a total rookie or a veteran succumbing to the inevitable vagaries of the sport. It's got top-notch loaner rods by G. Loomis, and Simms waders and boots. These are the kinds of comforts that make the pastime feel familiar no matter where in the world you cast your rod. **DARRELL HARTMAN**



From top: Mahogany dun is a popular bait; early-morning fly-fishing on the Grand River in Ohio; a snake fly for rockfish

## CLOSER TO HOME

THE WRITER'S FAVORITE SPOTS TO FLY-FISH IN NORTH AMERICA

### THE CATSKILLS

Rich in history, the Beaverkill and Willowemoc rivers are in many ways the birthplace of American fly-fishing, and a picturesque place to wade-fish for big brown trout or silvery wild brookies. The **Livingston Manor Fly Fishing Club** is geared toward urban novices who are interested in hiking and farm-to-table cooking.

### MAINE

The best freshwater fly-fishing here isn't on rivers but on lakes, where the target of choice is native brook trout. The state's backwoods environs and classic sporting lodges—I like **Grant's Kennebago Camps**, in Rangeley—add to the magic, whether you're a Mainer or not.

### EASTERN CANADA

My dad and I have a summer tradition of casting to majestic and highly elusive Atlantic salmon on the Bonaventure, in Quebec's Gaspé Peninsula. You can bet on a higher success rate (and a heftier price tag) at **Rifflin' Hitch Lodge**, in Labrador, whose owner has just opened his seven-room lodge to guests, with helicopter access to a handful of other salmon rivers.

### IDAHO

With its big rivers, big trout, and full-on angling culture, the mountain west is deeply beloved among fly-fishing enthusiasts. My best guided days there have come from Idaho's **Silver Creek Outfitters**. Ketchum and Sun Valley's sporty, spirited bar-and-restaurant scene is a plus.

### WESTERN CANADA

Steelhead compel as much angler worship as Atlantic salmon—and require equal amounts of patience. I caught my first two last November in western New York and now dream of fishing for them in British Columbia's enormous, winding Skeena River system. Based on their ability to get anglers to remote spots, the outfitters at **Frontier Steelhead Experience** would be my first pick.