

FISHING IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Fishing in the Northern Territory is world class and there are many diverse fishing habitats on offer; lush billabongs, big tidal rivers, mangrove-lined estuaries, a scattering of islands and hundreds of kilometres of unspoilt coastline.

A fantastic fighting fish, barramundi is famous for high leaps and strong runs. While the 'barra' is perhaps the most sought-after trophy, other species like jewfish, queenfish, giant trevally, mangrove jack, saratoga, threadfin salmon, golden snapper, billfish, marlin and mud crabs thrive in the Northern Territory's waters.

Darwin Harbour, an enormous expanse of water teeming with fish, is a popular fishing spot that is easily accessed from the CBD. Fishing is also an exhilarating way to experience the Northern Territory's other diverse destinations. Huge, wide rivers like the Daly and Victoria are prime barra haunts, as are the networks of beautiful waterways found in World Heritage listed Kakadu National Park and the Mary River area. Anglers seeking a real adventure can travel to more remote destinations like Arnhem Land and the Tiwi Islands.

Fishing in the Northern Territory is excellent all year round and while barramundi are most active from March to May, anglers can fish successfully at any time for a range of species.

You can hire a boat or bring your own, take a fully-guided [fishing safari](#), stay at a remote [fishing lodge](#) or charter a mothership – every type of angler and every type of fishing experience is catered for in the Northern Territory.

Estuary Fishing

The Northern Territory has some of the best Estuary fishing in the world. Fresh and salt water collide along its vast coastline as many tidal rivers meet the ocean, providing the perfect environment for a fishing challenge.

The Daly, Victoria, Adelaide, Finnis and Mary Rivers are some examples of the Northern Territory's famous estuaries. They stretch from the Timor Sea and wind their way far inland, remaining tidal for many kilometres.

Kakadu National Park is also famous for its excellent Estuary fishing. The South and East Alligator Rivers that flow into the Park and on through Arnhem Land from the Timor Sea are favourites for many anglers.

Most Estuary fishing will require either trolling over the many hidden rockbars or casting into the smaller creeks that run from the floodplains. These creek mouths are a prime spot to hook a big one, as the fish congregate under the flow of fresh water running into the salt.

Access to the big rivers is easy. There are plenty of public boat ramps at different locations and most are connected via good roads. Join a local guide on a tour – they know the best spots and techniques, and their local knowledge can add an extra element of enjoyment to the experience.

Fish varieties caught in the Northern Territory's estuaries include threadfin and blue salmon, cod, queenfish, golden snapper and, on the right tidal variance, barramundi. The root systems of the mangroves that line the rivers' banks provide the ideal place for these fish to lurk.

Reef Fishing

The Northern Territory 's nutrient-rich reefs attract a kaleidoscope of fish. The shapes and colours of the diverse species that thrive in the Territory's waterways make them highly desirable catches – and good eating.

Some of the most common reef fish in the Northern Territory are black jewfish, golden snapper and coral trout. Reef fish aren't just pretty; they're notoriously plucky - anglers will need cunning brains to outsmart the tricky snapper, and muscles to conquer the powerful black jewfish.

Several artificial reefs have been developed to encourage recreational fishing. The Japanese air raids on Darwin during World War II in 1942 and Cyclone Tracy in 1974, are also responsible for some of the wrecks in Darwin Harbour . These wrecks are now havens for species like golden snapper, cod, moon fish, Spanish flag, jewfish and barramundi. Get the coordinates for the wrecks on the [Fisheries website](#).

Some of the most popular (and quirky) artificial reefs in Darwin Harbour include:

- The Tipper, named after the tip-trucks that were used to create the reef
- The Rick Mills Reef, named after the man who donated old drilling equipment that was sunk to create a reef
- The Bottle Washer, named after the large industrial bottle washer, which was sunk to create the reef
- The Bus Stop, named for concrete bus shelters that form the reef

In 1988 the Northern Territory Government began developing an artificial reef complex at the Fenton Patches, about 17 nautical miles north-west of Darwin . This area is now noted for pelagic species. Sailfish are regularly encountered here as are black marlin.

Sports Fishing

Prepare for the fight of your life - sport fishing in the Northern Territory is not for the faint hearted. The Northern Territory 's blue water is home to some of the most aggressive predators and gutsy fighters in the sea.

Sport fishing targets bigger fish that favour deeper water and these fish are tireless fighters. The goal of sport fishing is to catch them using tackle that is light enough to give the fish a chance to escape unharmed – increasing the challenge for the angler.

The Northern Territory 's Timor and Arafura Seas are hot spots for this type of fishing. From Darwin anglers can launch their boat or join a fishing tour to places like Bynoe Harbour , where giant trevally (GT), queenfish, tuna and mackerel are some of the targeted species.

One of the Northern Territory 's best sports fishing destinations is remote Arnhem Land . Fishing charters are the best way to experience this region and they leave from Gove Peninsula in North East Arnhem Land, the Cobourg Peninsula and Maningrida.

Off the coast of Gove Peninsula anglers can catch barracuda, sailfish and marlin – the ultimate sports fish that put up a thrilling fight. Queenfish, mackerel, trevally and cobia are some of the other angling challenges for sport fishers in this area.

The Cobourg Peninsula, including Croker Island, is also another hot spot as are Groote Eylandt and throughout the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Fly Fishing

The Northern Territory is considered to be one of the best tropical fly fishing destinations in the world. Its waters are home to a variety of saltwater and freshwater fly fishing environments for the experienced or novice fly angler.

Local fly fishing experiences range from sight casting in the clear flats and estuary systems, hooking pelagic fish in the blue water, and precision casting amongst the mangroves. Saratoga, mangrove jack, trevally, mackerel, tuna and bigger species like sailfish and marlin have all been known to take a fly.

As with most types of fishing in the Northern Territory, the hotter months of October to May are best for fly fishing.

Territory Tips

To make the most of your fishing adventure, plan ahead and seek out some local knowledge before you set off.

From an anglers point of view, the Northern Territory's year can be broken into four distinct seasons – the Wet (Jan-March), the Run-off (March- May), the Dry (June-August) and the Build-up (September-December). Fish are prolific in Territory waters throughout the entire year with the best barramundi fishing occurring during the run off or build-up.

Fishing in the Northern Territory is not over-regulated, but anglers must still comply with rules and regulations to ensure the quality of Territory fishing is maintained for the future.

Catch and release techniques are strongly encouraged to help conserve our native fish and visitors can help by following a few simple steps, such as using barbless hooks where possible.