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CARIBBEAN

It's not easy, but two fly fishermen in Curaçao can help you catch the silver king



Norman Chumaceiro (left) and Albert Macares trade jokes as they angle for the king of all fish — tarpon.

By **BRIAN IRWIN**
Special Contributor

“Tarpon, two o'clock!” Norman Chumaceiro shouted. I fired my fly from my fly rod in the direction he was pointing. “Now they're at 10 o'clock! And six o'clock. They're everywhere!”

We were amid a school of over 100 tarpon, their shiny backs rolling on the surface as they fed. I cast to them repeatedly until my line went tight and screamed from my reel. I was hooked into a tarpon.

Known in anglers' circles as “the king,” tarpon are a stately fish. With large bucket-shaped mouths and weights topping 100 pounds, they are one of the most difficult fish to catch on a fly rod.

Curaçao isn't on the map of most fishermen, in fact there are no fly fishermen on the island, nor do many people fish for tarpon. The only two on the island who do are Chumaceiro and his best

friend Albert Macares. The two men, in their 40s, fish the Santa Anna Bay for sport, usually with bait. They always release their catch. And on this day, they had invited me along.

“This bay is filled with tarpon,” Macares said. “But no one fly-fishes here. It's windy and honestly most people would rather fish offshore and keep their catch. But not us.”

Macares was right, almost no one fishes for tarpon in Curaçao, mostly because the water is a bit turbid from ship traffic and a nearby oil refinery. But make no mistake, this water, although less clear than the picturesque half-moon bays and pocket beaches that are abundant on Curaçao, is arguably the best-kept secret in the Caribbean when it comes to tarpon fishing. The abundance of fish was, without hyperbole, world class. Curaçao was a Dutch island until it was grant-

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TO HOOK A TARPON

Photos by Brian Irwin/Special Contributor

TEXAS COAST

Eat your way through Port A

On the Gulf, don't miss the chance to catch great meals

By **JOHN LUMPKIN**
Special Contributor

Unwittingly, I was the culprit in what could have been a calamity for the Tarpon Bar & Grill — the disappearance of the only copy of its signature Baja Sauce recipe. My wife, Eileen, and I had just consumed the fresh-caught grilled mahi-mahi tacos with the sauce and pico de gallo, so I asked our accommodating waiter for the ingredients.

Upon request, the print-out was supplied and away we went. A

Tarpon Bar & Grill's Baja Sauce recipe, **5K**

frantic call to our answering machine at home in Richardson revealed that, oops, no back-up copy existed, but we were in transit by that time.

Not to worry — the morning before our visit, a fresh gallon-size batch of the fish sauce was prepared and refrigerated. When we heard the voicemail, a quick fax restored the recipe to Tarpon's files before the existing supply was exhausted. Adding to that, there was our memory of the crawfish queso and shrimp ceviche at Tarpon's that preceded the mahi-tacos, and you see that dining is integral to a Port Aransas vacation.

A Port A visit includes strolling the beaches of Mustang Island in front of your condo. Or grabbing binoculars for glimpses of hundreds of species of birds. Taking a charter for deep-sea fishing. Or hanging out with a book and doing little else while you are serenaded by the incoming surf. But you have to eat, so consider the options.

A hot intersection

The intersection of Beach and Station streets in an older residential section of Port Aransas is food-oriented on three of its four sides. On one corner is the softball

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John Lumpkin/Special Contributor

At Port Aransas' Tarpon Bar & Grill, the staff makes the tasty Baja Sauce by the gallon. It's great on the mahi-mahi tacos.



Produce is sold in Willemstad's floating market, which is a series of Venezuelan boats that come 40 miles from the mainland with perishables that can't be raised on Curacao.



The entrance to the Santa Anna Bay in Willemstad is lined with candy-colored buildings constructed in the Dutch tradition.

Fish along charming Curaçao shoreline

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ed near-full independence in 2010. The Dutch still maintain a cultural influence and a military base here, but Curaçao is more of melting pot.

Spanish, of course Dutch, English and even a prominent Jewish population make an exceptionally diverse land and culture, one that is pleasant, peaceful and welcoming.

The capital of Willemstad is a fascinating place at the entrance to the Santa Anna Bay. A UNESCO World Heritage Site for its old forts and 400-year-old buildings made of coral, the land is brightly colored and fascinating. One building has a cannonball still embedded in its wall.

Adjacent to that is the "floating market," where boats that have made the 40-mile trip from Venezuela sell produce, fish and dairy, commodities that must be imported onto this arid island where the best local meat is iguana or wahoo.

Chumaceiro was raised on Curaçao in a clover-shaped bay of crystal-clear water known as the Spanish Waters. He took me there just before a feast of calamari and shrimp paella at Macare's home, located in a neighborhood known as Casa Grande, home of the, well, big home.

Chumaceiro's great-great-great-grandfather was the first rabbi on the island back in 1860. The friendly man showed me around his home water, which was a quiet bay that held only a single home — his childhood dwelling — back when he was born.

Today the Spanish Waters is a community of the wealthy, with a golf course and yacht club. The water is clear and azure, the perfect place to learn to fish. Chumaceiro learned in



Photos by Brian Irwin/Special Contributor

these waters when he was 5.

"It was different then. My friends and I would go out and handline for snapper for barracuda. That's when I fell in love with fishing. It's been a part of my life ever since."

As we cast flies under the hulls of megayachts, pulling out barracuda but releasing them, Chumaceiro bragged, "We have big barracuda here. Bigger than the ones you're pulling out."

"This area is a good fishery, but it holds no tarpon. They like the harbor [Santa Anna Bay] because that's

where the mullet are. They feed on them, sometimes 2-foot-long ones. There are big tarpon in that harbor." As I listened, I took in the beauty of the shoreline. Curaçao is dry, its hillsides dotted with brush and cactuses, Chumaceiro explained.

"We get very little rain, but that's OK. The plants are built for that. See that brown hillside behind the golf course?" He pointed. "If it rains one day, the next day the entire hillside will be green. The plants are thirsty, but adapted."

That morning in the harbor, the

fish were rolling all around us. Typically, you may see a tarpon or two, perhaps a dozen in the best tarpon water in the world. But here, on Curaçao, there were many hundreds of fish on every day we angled, and they were thrashing and breaching all around us.

They were picky to eat my fly due to an abundance of baitfish, but I had tricked one into biting before I lost it. Now, I was in a tug of war with another, one who put on an aerial display as he jumped repeatedly to shake my fly.

My rod tip bent as I fought my foe from the casting platform of Macare's 19-foot Sea Fox fishing boat. The fish rocketed out of the dark water one last time, and shook the head of its 50-pound body, flinging water 10 feet into the sky. And with that, my line went limp. I turned to Chumaceiro. He shot me a toothy grin.

"You jumped two my friend. That's a good day. After all, that's why they call it fishing. Not catching."

Brian Irwin is a freelance writer in North Conway, N.H.

If you go

Getting there: American Airlines flies direct to Curaçao from Miami, which is an easy direct flight from Dallas. Flights from \$600.

Lodging: Floris Suite Hotel and Spa is a centrally located, adult-only resort. A fusion of Caribbean and Dutch colonial architecture meets an open-air design and fine dining. Suites from \$199 a night.

Guides: There are many options for offshore angling. For inshore, contact Norman Chumaceiro at chuma6666@yahoo.com. Fishing from \$300 for a half-day.

Tours and more information: curacao.com.

The author (left) casts for tarpon deep in Schottegat Harbor.

GEORGIA

The colorful world of author Eric Carle

Atlanta exhibit shows artwork from some of his children's books

ATLANTA — The High Museum of Art is inviting visitors into a colorful world populated by playful animals and imaginative children.

"I See a Story: The Art of Eric Carle" opened last week and features more than 80 collages from 16 books by the author of children's favorites like *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and *The Grouchy Ladybug*. Carle's bright images explore themes including childhood, nature and journeys.

Adults can revel in the nostalgia of books they read as children or read to their own children, while kids are treated to an exhibition arranged with them in mind. The collages are hung just a few feet off the ground, and a scavenger hunt provides an opportunity to engage more fully with the art.

A close look at the collages helps visitors understand how Carle works.

He uses acrylic paint on white tissue paper to create bright sheets that he stores grouped by color in his studio. When he's creating a collage, he selects a sheet from his collection and cuts it using a razor or tears it by hand before layering the pieces into colorful scenes.

The works in the exhibit span five decades and are drawn from the collection of the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art in Amherst, Mass.

The High is the only venue where

the exhibition will be shown. Once it's over, the light-sensitive works will be removed from their frames and matting to be returned to the Carle Museum's vault for 10 years, said Virginia Shearer, the High's education director.

Carle, who is 86, is formally retired and spends much of his time in the Florida Keys, but he still enjoys working in his studio space in Northampton, Mass., near the Carle Museum.

He was born to German parents in Syracuse, N.Y. His family returned to Germany when he was 6. He moved to New York City in 1952 and worked as a graphic designer in *The New York Times'* promotion department. He later worked as art director for an advertising agency.

He turned to children's books in 1967 when author Bill Martin Jr. asked him to illustrate a story that became *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*

The first book he wrote and illustrated himself was *I, 2, 3 to the Zoo* in 1968, followed by *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* in 1969.

Carle draws on his own life experiences for inspiration, said Ellen Keiter, chief curator of the Carle Museum. Insects and animals are drawn from memories of childhood walks with his father. *Walter the Baker* is an homage to an uncle who encouraged his creativity. *Friends* is based on his experience of leaving his best friend when his family moved to Germany. And *Papa, Please Get the Moon for Me* was prompted by a request from his daughter.



Photos by Kate Brumback/The Associated Press

Visitors to the High Museum of Art can reminisce with artwork from Eric Carle's books. He creates collages from white tissue paper colored with acrylic paint that he cuts or tears and arranges into vibrant scenes.

If you go

■ "I See a Story: The Art of Eric Carle" through Jan. 8, High Museum of Art, 1280 Peachtree St. NE, Atlanta; high.org, 404-733-5000.

■ Open Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., and on Fridays until 9 p.m.; Sundays, noon-5 p.m.

■ Adults, \$19.50; students with ID and seniors 65 and over, \$16.50; children 6-17, \$12; children 5 and under, free.

Dummy books show how some of his most famous books evolved from idea to finished product. They reveal original alternate titles, like "The Ill-Tempered Ladybug" and "The Mean Old Ladybug."

"They really let you see the hand of the artist and how he's thinking," Keiter said.

Kate Brumback, The Associated Press



Carle has illustrated more than 70 books. The exhibit includes some preliminary mock-ups, showing his creative process.