

SEA ISLAND LIFE

SPRING/SUMMER 2013



**THE
NEXT-GENERATION
GOLFER**
FINELY TUNED
ATHLETES
HIT THE COURSE

WILD TO TABLE
REVIVING THE
OLDEST CULINARY
TREND

**UNEXPECTED
BEAUTY**
GEORGIA'S MARSHES
THROUGH THE LENS

**KEEPING
TRADITIONS
ALIVE**

FAMILY TIME IN THE
GREAT OUTDOORS

GONE FISHING

KIDS NEVER FORGET CATCHING THEIR FIRST FISH AS THEY BEGIN A HOBBY THAT CAN LAST A LIFETIME.

BY JOE RADA



Wide-eyed excitement. Dancing-in-place exuberance. Yelping joy. That kind of enthusiasm marks the magical moment when a kid catches a fish for the first time. Witness this rite of passage involving a wiggly prize and unabashed pride, and you won't soon forget it. Neither will the child.

Lasting memories—that's the power behind youth fishing. It helps explain the national trend of programs introducing youngsters to the pastime. Wherever there are mountain streams, inland lakes, coastal marshes or open seas, there are guides glad to share a contagious interest in angling.

Why take kids fishing? It gets them off the

couch, into fresh air, active and away from TV and video games. It surrounds them with nature, stimulating their curiosity about the outdoor world. It nurtures practical skills ranging from navigation to knot-tying through hands-on encounters with boats, rods, reels, hooks, lines and sinkers.

It builds character, teaching patience when fish aren't biting and an understanding of life and death in food-chain terms. It provokes one-that-got-away storytelling, a cherished anglers' art. If parents join in, add quality time to the equation.

But mostly, fishing is just plain fun.

Around Georgia's barrier islands—where shallow waters teem with redfish, yellowtails,

blue crabs, croakers, flounder, trout and sharks—youth fishing has never been more popular. Kids line the dock daily behind The Cloister at Sea Island, casting rods and lifting crab traps for a look-see.

"Some kids are at the dock all day, every day, the entire week of their vacation," says longtime fishing guide, Charter Captain and Yacht Club Manager Mike Kennedy, who got his first boat at age 10. "Like me, they never get tired of fishing."

Some of those dock-hounds join excursions led by Kennedy and other Sea Island guides aboard 27-foot, single-engine, Georgia-built, Rambo boats holding up to six passengers.

"Two-hour trips are perfect for beginners.



We head to nearby saltwater marshes or St. Simons Sound in search of catching fish," Kennedy says. "We make it easy. All they have to do is show up at the dock, step on board ... and pretty soon they're catching some fish. If they want, we'll even bait the hooks for them." Youngsters and their parents are often hooked after their first fishing trip, prompting them to sign up for three or four more trips that same week.

Keeping kids interested is easy. "There's never a dull moment, so they don't get bored," Kennedy continues. "If the fish aren't biting in one place, we move to another, taking turns steering the boat. We spot dolphins, bald eagles, stingrays and sea turtles. We watch least terns dive straight down for minnows.

"All the Sea Island guides are naturalists raised in this environment, and we like sharing our knowledge," he adds. "We've taken thousands of kids fishing and are always successful in finding what is interesting to them. Some may want to see dolphins and others may be focused on catching lunch. So much is going on."

As a testament to fishing's popularity, Kennedy explains that his crew leads more than 1,200 trips per year, adding up to about 4,800 people participating in the pastime with guides at the resort annually. The high season is typically from March through August. "It's really become a popular activity here," Kennedy says.

Many graduate to four-hour adventures.



Crabbing off The Cloister Dock

"Those go to F Reef, an artificial reef seven miles offshore where we catch bluefish, barracuda, trout, cobia, mackerel, bull redfish and sea bass," says Kennedy. "About 70 percent of our guests are first-time anglers, and they come back asking for the same guides."

"Kids like quantity," he says. "My office door is covered with their thank you notes, and one guy who caught 137 fish drew 137 little fish on his card! A few fish get taken home or to a Sea Island restaurant to be cooked. When kids eat what they caught, that's a powerful lesson in where food comes from." What's not used for meals is released back into the water, which is the majority of fish caught.

Sea Island's excursions feature education

disguised as fun, from casting to netting to natural history. Guides point out loggerhead sea turtles poking their heads out of the water, spoonbills wading, ospreys building nests, skimmer birds flying low to catch fish and other wildlife in their natural habitats. The estuaries provide a scenic classroom, and guides take full advantage of their surroundings while fishing to educate children on the importance of the ecosystem, filling kids' heads with interesting facts. "We'll tell about the area's history, like how some of the hardwood forest on Little St. Simons Island has never been harvested, and how in St. Simon's Sound there's an artificial island made entirely of materials dredged to keep the shipping channels open," Kennedy explains. "When we're out on the water, lessons about nature are everywhere you look." ○