

The Rio Gallegos A Patagonian Hunt

Seatrout offer incredible sport along the wind-swept and barren rivers that meander through the desert-like and expansive Patagonian pampas. The Rio Gallegos is one of the most fabled rivers in the area, and it is one of those places where one can hunt for that elusive 20lb+ seatrout.



By: FELIX HANSVENCLE

Six years ago, a special hunt started for me. It was like firing up a Formula-1 race car on a road and not knowing exactly where it will end up. That's how I felt. Up until that point, I never had Argentina and fly fishing for sea-run browns (or seatrout, as we call them in Europe), on my radar. Sure, you see random pictures of Patagonian monsters, but – for the longest time - it was just seemed too remote and far away.

Anyway, suddenly there I was - doing one of my first hosted trips with a group of like-minded anglers and friends, boarding Lufthansa's direct flight to Buenos Aires, before a layover with (too much) empanadas, alfajores, and coffee – and then a connecting flight to Rio Gallegos. The rest is history; a history that left me highly addicted to the place, the fishery and the culture – and I am by far not the only one. It seems there is only one medicine capable of alleviating the withdrawals; to return year after year to the Estancia Las Buitreras.







A special place

So what makes this place so special? I get this question a lot. I know there are many beautiful fly fishing destinations out there but there are only a few that have me coming back on a consistent basis. The Rio Gallegos is one of them because it offers the “full package” – everything you need to have an unforgettable trip, still providing you with a substantial challenge every time you go there because, in comparison to other fisheries, this river makes you “hunt” for your fish.

“The Rio Gallegos makes you “hunt” for your fish”

The first time I fished the Rio Gallegos, it took me a few days to get used to the game. Casting a light double-hander with a floating line and some crazy looking flies (such as a size 10 or 12 rubberleg nymph), followed by continuous stripping. What the heck!?! Now knowing better, I am

prepared when new clients look at me with eyes full of question marks. A 20lb sea-run brown trout on a small fly like that? Stripping a nymph or streamer on a spey rod? No Snap-T’s if possible? Yes, you heard right, and I promise: You will love it!

Pre-covid memories

I remember my last fish from the pre-Covid season like it was yesterday. Together with Carlos and Ladd I fished a classic pool in the lower beats called “Puesto” during the “magic hour”, when the light fades in the evening and the seatrout get extra aggressive. It’s a perfect pool with all the right features but also a little tricky as you have a little back eddy scenario in the middle section. The goal is to make a precise 45 degrees downstream cast onto the opposite bank keeping your line straight, give the fly 3-4 seconds to sink followed by small and slow strips.

On the Rio Gallegos, the goal is to present your fly in the right way. This is much more important than how far you cast, or which fly you fish with.





The river has really shown me how rewarding it is to focus on the fly and how it's retrieved. I know this is not groundbreaking news or anything. But it's vital!

When fishing the Rio Gallegos, make sure the fly lands on a straight leader. Keep your focus and maintain direct contact with the fly always knowing where it is - and MOVE it! The thing needs to be alive.

“A big fish churns water like a washing machine”

I did my best to cover the water well, taking small stealthy steps after each cast. When I finally arrived at one of the hot spots; a small pocket along the other side I was shaky. Still, I somehow managed to make a long cast and dump my Vitamin D-nymph right into the pocket. I was counting, 1, 2, 3, ok, strip, sloooowly, don't shit your pants! Strip, slooo.... Bang! Hold on tight!

Deep angry headshakes now propagate through the line as a big fish churns water like a washing machine. Meanwhile, I try to keep things tight and stay calm amidst all the chaos, (which, of course, never really works). It just never gets old!

The takes are mostly violent and hard. The Rio Gallegos fish have nothing but bad intentions when going for your fly, no nibbling, no soft pulls, just pure destruction mode often followed by some of the most acrobatic jumps you have ever seen. Imagine the sun hitting the water with its last light and a fish flying through the air shining like a bar of silver while a guanaco is enjoying the view on the other side.

I could probably do this all day, every day!

The Rio Gallegos area

The river is located in the southern-most part of the Santa Cruz Province; the second largest province in Argentina, which mainly exists on mining, oil, gas, and sheep. The city of Rio Gallegos is the capital of Santa Cruz.









It is situated right on the estuary where the river enters the Atlantic Ocean.

Even Bruce Chatwin talks about this place in his book “In Patagonia”. While travelling through the region, he wrote about his own experiences and the history of the place and its person gallery - including the likes of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, who allegedly robbed a bank Rio Gallegos before escaping to Chile.

The Rio Gallegos has its origins in the Andes, formed by its two tributaries, Rubens and Penitentes. After the confluence of these two rivers, it flows all the way eastwards into the Atlantic Ocean where the seatrout enter the river. The area is known for its pampas style landscape and is literally like a zoo at the end of the world.

The river is a truly magnificent piece of water that meanders through the middle of nowhere. It houses resident brown trout most Europeans would wish to catch once a year on their local trout streams and obviously some

of the biggest seatrout you can find on this planet. It offers every feature you'd want if you could design your own river; big holding pools, small runs with cut banks, channel style pools with weed lines, Islands and so on. This river keeps you busy changing tactics and tackle. And on top of that it is simply stunning.

You will be accompanied by rheas, foxes, armadillos, rabbits, skunks, flamingos, a list of birds that doesn't even fit on a full page and a lot of other animals. With Patagonia being well-known for its paleontological treasures, it's not difficult to imagine how a might suddenly T-Rex stumble across your fishing spot. Nowadays, a wild horse or a guanaco will do just that, and that's not so bad either. But enough of this. Obviously, this is not the first article about the Patagonian realm, and who am I to talk about something so unique when so many great authors have already described the region in such elevated literary terms and sentences that I could only dream of ever expressing. Experience it yourself, you won't be disappointed!



Estancia Las Buitreras

The Estancia Las Buitreras owns the best piece of fishing water on the entire river with over 40 km of exclusive double bank fishing. Christer Sjöberg scouted this area back in 2002 and decided to build a lodge one year later, right in the middle of the Las Buitreras beats. Since then, the lodge has hosted fly fishers from all over the world with world-class service.

“Imagine the sun hitting the water with its last light and a fish flying through the air shining like a bar of silver”

When you arrive at Rio Gallegos airport, you will be picked up by one of the team members followed by a 45 min transfer to the lodge, which is situated just next to the banks of the river, a 10-minute walk from the home pool.

The lodge accommodates up to 12 anglers per week with a fishing ra-

tio of 2 anglers per guide and offers a cozy- as well as high-level lodge experience with some of the best food and wine you can think of.

Prepare yourself for maybe taking home 2 extra kilos of weight afterwards, it's just so good.

From 2022 onwards you will also have the chance to fish an add-on to your Las Buitreras stay, either a 3-day fishing package on the zone just above the regular Las Buitreras beats called “Zone Zero” with Las Buitreras lodge-accommodation, or a 3-day/week add-on at Estancia Glencross, residing in a very cool and traditional Estancia environment located on the borders of Argentina and Chile with the Cordillera de los Andes as a backdrop - appr. 1,5 hours' drive from Las Buitreras.

Combined with excellent resident brown trout fishing and a chance for seatrout you choose between three rivers, the two tributaries - Rubens and Penitentes - as well as the most upper part of the Rio Gallegos after the confluence.







Tackle

Sea-run brown trout fishing

A 7-weight 12-12,6 ft spey rod is the go-to rod on the Rio Gallegos offering you the perfect tool in your hands to give you accuracy and finesse for those smaller runs but enough backbone for bigger pools that require a longer presentation.

Combined with a short Scandi style shooting head (e.g. Scientific Anglers UST Short or RIO Scandi Short) to enable you to strip the fly and an intermediate poly-/versileader (as well as a selection of a few other sink tips, just in case) you will be equipped for most scenarios.

Remember, this is a fairly shallow river so there is no need to fish deep and heavy. During high water conditions you could grab your 8-weight 13 ft spey rod to have a bit more extra power and length. And last, but not least, if you experience calm/windless days, it is worth having a 7-weight 9,6 ft single hander in the truck to go into extra stealth mode and maybe even trick one of those monster chromers with a bomber. The single hander should be equipped with a floating or floating/intermediate fly line that has a short/medium body such as the Scientific Anglers Volantis Integrated – my favourite single-handed fly line currently.

The recommended fly patterns on the lodge are a.o. Yuk Bugs, Copper John, and Vitamin D nymphs in various colours, Leeches such as the Millers Electric Leech, Sunray Shadows, EMBs, Girdle Bugs, and Woolly Buggers, like the Yellow Yummy or Green Lantern. If you tie your own flies, make sure you use strong hooks. Don't use ordinary trout hooks as a big seatrout will bend or straighten them.

Resident brown trout fishing

For resident brown trout bring a 5 or 6-weight single handed fly rod. Rig it up with the before mentioned floating fly line, short/medium body, and make sure you have a good selection of big foam style dry flies – you don't want to miss out on this experience. Other than that, you can use your sea trout fly box for nymph- and streamer fishing.

Now, let's get back to the question: What makes this place so special? I will summarize a few things here. Where else but on the Rio Gallegos do you find a healthy run of fish that can be targeted with light-double handers and floating lines, over 40 km of the most prolific water with over 50 different pools and a huge variety of water structure, which causes the fish to spread out among all these pools/runs – and not just stacking them up in single pools?







Fishing the Rio Gallegos never gets boring. It's all about you and how- and where you place your fly. Every cast can win the jackpot. The lodging is excellent, the 'vino tinto' never disappoints. And then there's the daily chance of catching that mythical 30 lbs seatrout. The BIG ones are present every year, (we lost one of in front of the net last season). Oh, and I almost forgot the incomparable light, beauty, and mystery of Patagonia. All of these things combined is why many clients come back year after year.

Personally, I think Las Buitreras offers one of the most addictive sea-run brown trout fisheries on the planet. I certainly can't wait to set foot on the magical banks of the Rio Gallegos again!

For more info and to book your own spot, get in contact with Felix Hansvencel:

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