

The ultimate outfit for summer travels



ONE ROD, A HANDFUL OF LURES AND A PAIR OF SNEAKERS

By CAPTAIN ANDY LOCASCIO



A summer house on Cape Cod, a business trip to Tampa, a road trip along the Gulf of Mexico – what do all of these things have in common? They offer really fun opportunities to catch fish. But when you're traveling or vacationing, you can't bring all the tackle you'd like. You also never know what conditions you're going to encounter. Improvisation is a must.

Case in point: On a recent trip for Galapagos billfish, our charter boat was delayed. My friends and I jumped on a local skiff and found a small group of birds working bait. We used relatively light spinning gear and surface poppers to catch over a dozen yellowfin tuna up to 50 pounds, and a couple big wahoo. Weeks later I was in Key West for another offshore trip when a school

of bonefish appeared in the lagoon behind my friend's house. I used almost the exact same outfit, tipped a bucktail with a small piece of **Gulp! bait**, and landed a handful of fish before the school spooked. The point is, when you travel you need to improvise, and to improvise you need the ultimate all-around outfit. *(continued)*

Photo Tim Smith/skimmeroutdoors.com

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Take a break from the kids and get your shoes wet.

Spinning versus Conventional Tackle

Unfortunately, it is hard to work a range of artificial lures effectively with conventional tackle, and very light jigs are impossible to cast. Spinning reels typically allow for better casting distance and much more attractive retrieves, especially when using fast popping plugs. They can also cast a much broader range of lure weights. Until recently, one of the greatest shortcomings of spinning reels was their lack of line capacity. The advent of low-diameter braided/fused lines, however, has greatly increased both the line capacity and versatility of these reels. For the spontaneous angler, spinning reels are the way to go.

The Right Rod

For traveling, go with a two-piece rod, right? Not necessarily. Most two-piece rods are rated for a fairly narrow range of line and lure weights. This limits your ability to improvise. The good news is that airlines still allow up to an eight-foot rod tube to be checked as a piece of regular baggage. Rod tubes are inexpensive and help ensure your

gear will arrive in one piece. You can also place more than one rod inside. **Shimano** recently introduced the **Trevala** line of rods. The graphite/carbon TC4 construction means they are virtually indestructible. They're also incredibly versatile. These rods are specifically designed for braided/fused lines, and thus have a slightly softer action than some of the graphite blanks on the market today. Though you may opt for a slightly lighter rod, depending on your travels, my favorite is the seven-foot **TVS70ML**. It can handle lure weights up to five ounces and is rated for 20- to 50-pound line. Amazingly, this rod can still throw 3/8-ounce jigs for schoolie stripers, yet do battle with a 65-pound yellowfin tuna. It is equally effective for a summer flounder party boat trip as it is for jigging inlet snook.

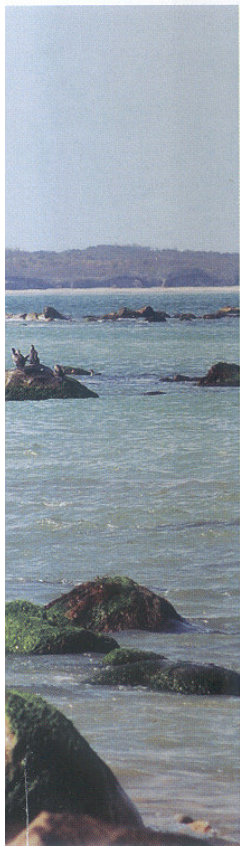
The Matching Reel

Line capacity and a quality drag system are the key factors in choosing the right reel. Many anglers make the mistake of selecting a spinning reel designed to handle

12-pound monofilament line, then load it with 30-pound braided/fused line. The drag system and internal components are simply not designed to handle the load created by a big fish peeling off 30-pound line. These reels inevitably fail and usually do so at the worst possible moment. A better choice is a reel rated for at least 16- to 20-pound line. A smooth running multi-ball bearing reel is certainly nicer to use, but the drag system is really the determining factor. A reel with a smooth, well-sealed drag will stand up to both the fish and the elements much longer. That means a price of \$120 or more.

Line Strategies

Though monofilament line is perfect for many applications, the traveling angler needs to leave it home. The best line for improvising is braided/fused line with an assortment of leaders to match situations. Braid casts farther and you can fit more of it on a spool. This extra capacity can make all the difference when the right fish comes along. Braid's lack of stretch adds sensitiv-



Bluefish are a summertime favorite in the Northeast.

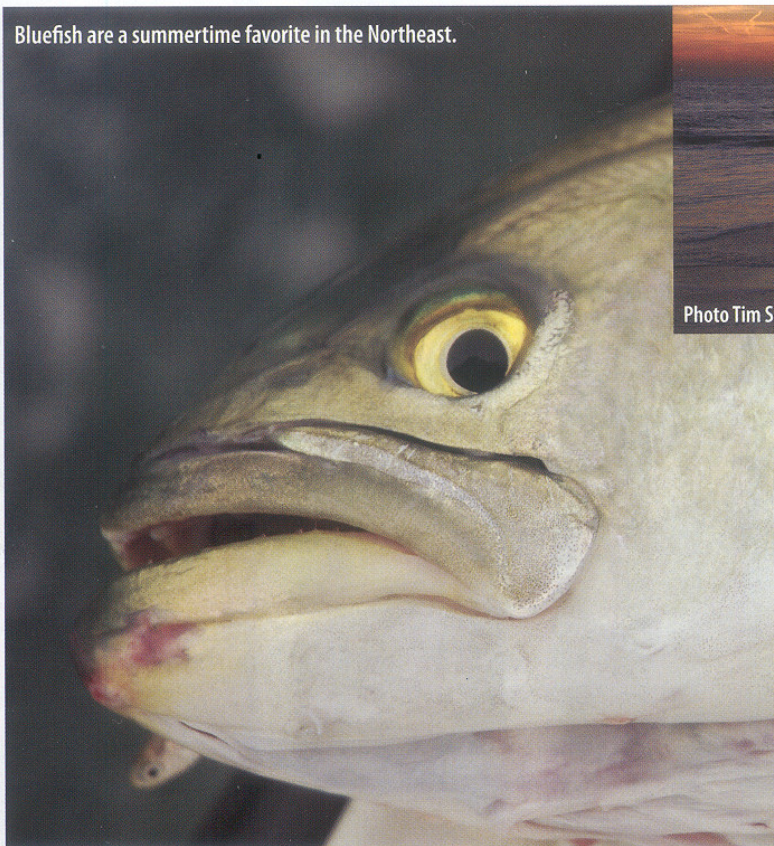


Photo Tim Smith/skimmeroutdoors.com



Snook cruise Florida beaches this time of year.

ity which is a real bonus when jigging. One drawback is braid's tendency to tangle into nasty wind knots. Berkley Fireline's fused construction counters this flaw. Its slightly frayed surface texture helps the line shoot off the spool more evenly, thus reducing wind knots. 20-pound **Fireline Crystal** is a wonderful all-around line, and is my first choice, but an extra spool loaded with 30-pound test is easy to carry and perfect for plugging big stripers and school tuna.

Leader Material

All braided/fused lines require a leader. Mono works, but I prefer fluorocarbon for its abrasion resistance. It also has light refraction qualities that are more similar to water. In addition, braided/fused lines are so thin they can cut the angler or harm fish during the landing process. A leader gives you a safe handling point. Attach leaders with a small swivel, or with a 30-twist Bimini twist. Connect the Bimini's double line to the leader with an Albright knot. You'll be ready for almost any situation if you bring an assortment of leader strengths.

Eight-pound test is perfect for bonefish, 20 works for sea trout and smaller stripers, 30 keeps you in good stead with most snook and small tarpon. Bring 60 for night fishing for snook and tarpon. A bit of 80 right in front of the lure will help you land toothy bluefish and kings.

Lures

A 1/4-ounce white bucktail just might be the most versatile lure in the world. Bring a bunch. But also pack an assortment of bucktails ranging up to three ounces in white, pink and chartreuse. A strip of pork rind adds versatility to any jig, but scented soft baits like **Gulp** are deadly on a naked jighead or on a bucktail. These soft plastics come in nearly every possible size and shape, from jerkbaits to squid, shrimp, and crab imitations. It's like carrying a small bait shop around with you.

You'll also need a mid-range bait. Swimming plugs like the **Yo-Zuri crystal minnow** shine. These lures are available in floating and sinking models, and range in size from 3 1/2 inches to 6 1/2 inches. The real fun

begins, though, with a selection of top water lures. Nothing compares to the sight of a big bluefish demolishing a popper. The **Yo-Zuri surface cruiser** casts like a bullet, is fairly easy to work, and is designed to withstand the abuse of brutal offshore fish like yellowfin tuna and wahoo. These poppers range in size from one ounce to three ounces.

Attitude

If there's water, I always assume there will be fish. My gear selection allows me to improvise. If they're hungry, chances are good I'll catch my share! If there is a local bait and tackle shop, I may drop in to gather intelligence, but more often than not, I prefer to go blind and work my way through my modest assortment of lures. I have a lot of confidence in the tackle I use, and I'm rarely disappointed. The traveling angler needs to be prepared for almost anything. Though there are times when this is impossible, the ultimate all-around gear will at least give you a fighting chance! ▶