



“The best way to learn is to join a fishing club and get actively involved in their outings.”

Nothing is more enjoyable than heading offshore on a beautiful day, with glassy seas, cobalt-blue water and the anticipation of catching that fish of a lifetime. For the novice lady angler who has never been to sea before, these are the perfect conditions for your introduction to gamefishing.

Not all days are like this; in fact, very few are. But for your first time offshore, when you're not sure how you'll travel, it helps if it's a good day. And remember, it's not only about catching fish; it's about enjoying the whole experience – the marine life you encounter, and just being there, absorbing the seclusion while observing nature in action on the open ocean.

I've been gamefishing for many years now, but I remember the first time I ever went offshore. It was rough and I was seasick. I had no sea legs and no idea what I was doing. I thought, “this is not for me”.

But things soon changed when we sighted a marlin coming up on one of the baits, followed by the big swirl. Then I heard that scream of the reel for the first time, and I was hooked on to my first marlin.

It was amazing and I'll never forget it. Everyone was screaming instructions. Lines were being cleared and I was just hanging on until someone came to help me – and then the fight was on in earnest.

The adrenalin was overpowering and I was shaking so much I could hardly breathe. It's an

experience that you can never really describe to anyone who has never felt it, but I'm not the only lady who has felt this way on her first big fish.

Over the years we've taken many new lady anglers out and have witnessed this same reaction time and time again. I know many who've been introduced to the sport and have since been gamefishing countless times.

Some are now competing successfully in tournaments. Given the opportunity, I have no doubt there would be a lot more ladies taking up the challenge.

JOIN A FISHING CLUB

When it comes to getting involved in sport or gamefishing, the best way to learn is to join a fishing club and get actively involved in their outings. Like most ladies, I had only basic knowledge, and gamefishing was a whole new thing compared to the type of fishing I was used to.

Joining a fishing club is a great way to make new friends and it's a great source of information. A good place to start is the Game Fishing Association of Australia's website (www.gfaa.asn.au). It provides details and contacts for an extensive list of member clubs.

Additionally, the Australian National Sportfishing Association (www.ansa.com.au) has an even larger list of clubs that focus on sportfishing for all species. The International Game Fish Association (www.igfa.org) is also a great source of information.

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A LADIES GUIDE TO GAMEFISHING

The fairer sex should be involved in gamefishing far more often. Ladies, if you've ever harboured thoughts of getting out there and having a go, Beverley Cheffins now guides the way and reveals all you need to know to do it effectively.

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PHOTOGRAPHY: TIM SIMPSON; BEVERLEY CHEFFINS; JENI GATES; RICCARD LE RICHE; LEEANN PAYNE;
AND COURTESY OF CANDACE MEYER AND KERRI BURRUS



Kerri Burrus is an IGFA representative and three-time World Billfish Series Top Female Professional Angler. She has fished destinations all over the world, including the Great Barrier Reef, where in 2003 she caught her fish of a lifetime, a 1100lb black marlin with Capt Laurie Wright.

I think the best advice I could give would be for them to seek out the best captains, if they want to fish offshore, or the best guides for inshore. Hire them, watch them and learn.

I have learnt so much from fishing with the best of the best local knowledge from the particular country I am fishing in. Most of the captains love fishing with women; they all say women are more patient and learn faster.

I didn't really have any obstacles, but I did notice that it was harder for me to get the respect of the male anglers who were fishing the same circuit as me. After I won a few tournaments they were great, and have treated me as an equal since.



Bill Boyce introduced his partner, Dianna, to light-tackle gamefishing on a Fijian holiday to Matava Resort. A quick learner, Dianna soon landed two Women's Fijian gamefishing records on 4kg tackle – and had a ball!

Choose a club in your area and inquire about their meetings. Make yourself known to the committee and tell them you're keen to participate and learn the sport.

Most will be only too keen to assist and introduce you to the experienced members. This is where you should meet members, who will gladly offer you the opportunity to fish with them.

Let them know you're serious about fishing and not joining just for the social aspects. Keen anglers – and ladies keen to be anglers – are taken seriously.

It may be daunting the first time you attend, but most clubs are extremely welcoming and you'll soon be part of the group. The meetings usually involve talks by invited experts, as well as members, who discuss tackle and rigging and how to target specific fish.

You also learn from club members, who give reports on their captures, where the fish are and what tactics and techniques they are using.

Getting involved in their outings and competitions broadens your knowledge. It's also a lot of fun. Every trip out is a learning experience, even for an experienced angler.

There are also many DVDs, fishing programs and magazines that are packed with valuable information for the novice angler.

Peter Pakula's gamefishing training program on CD-ROM is an excellent resource. (Copies are available at the BlueWater office: phone (07) 5501 5400 or email bw.qld@bluewatermag.com.au to purchase one.) It will boost your

success and make a lot of the sport easy to understand.

THE BOAT

You don't need a million-dollar gameboat to go gamefishing. I've always fished out of a trailerboat and caught the same fish and fished the same grounds as the bigger boats. There are advantages to fishing out of a small boat: they're a lot cheaper to maintain and run, and you only need two or three people to fish comfortably.

They're often faster, and get you to the grounds quicker, and are good for chasing that large fish that is trying to spool you.

The only disadvantages for a small boat may be the lack of a 'head' (toilet) and rough sea conditions. But, having said that, not all fish are out wide. We've tagged many fish within 10 miles of the coast when the warm currents are close onshore and the juvenile marlin are migrating south during the spring and summer months.

SHARE A CHARTER OR FISHING GUIDE

For ladies who don't have a boat, but want to try gamefishing, a charter boat or fishing guide is a good option. There are many boats to choose from, and a lot of them have share charters.

The prices will vary depending on the type of boat, so choose one that suits your budget, and be sure to tell them the type of fishing you want to do. You don't want to be taken bottom-bouncing when you're set to go marlin fishing.

Charter boats are usually equipped with good-quality tackle and experienced crew. They'll run you through the basics of the tackle and how to use it before you start.

Sometimes, on a share charter, you may be the only lady angler within the group, so there are a few things to consider. Some guys don't feel comfortable with a female onboard. I've found from experience that the best way to put men at ease is to introduce yourself and tell them your fishing experience. This is the question they always ask.

Let them know you're new to gamefishing. Chat to them about their fishing and you'll find for some, it's also their first time gamefishing.

It's also a good idea to speak to the skipper and crew about the fishing arrangements before you start. Boats have their own sets of rules, but a popular arrangement is to rotate the anglers every 30 minutes.

Any hook-up in that 30-minute timeframe goes to the angler who is on strike. This way everyone gets equal time. The crew are responsible for putting out the spread of lures or the baits, and they can often assist with photographing your captures before release.

I've been on a share charter many times and the guys have always been helpful and supportive. They tend to yell a lot of advice when you're on a good fish, but don't take it to heart. Everyone does that when the heat is on.

Also, when you hook into a decent-sized fish and you're on it for a long period, this is a good time to test the feel and performance of different rods and reels, and the comfort, fit and use of the gimbal belt and harness. You will soon learn how it all comes together.

ON A BOAT WITH NO LOO

When fishing on a small boat with a group of guys, another thing to consider is the toilet facilities – there often aren't any. I take a small, plastic bucket with me as this is an essential item that guys don't think about.

I normally make a humorous remark about my essential equipment when I go onboard, and tell them I'll let them know when I need to go. I've found it's the best way of approaching the subject.

This is a personal issue that needs to be addressed at the beginning or you'll worry about it all day – and so will the guys (they have to go, too).

YOUR OWN TACKLE

The guys at specialist tackle shops can help you with choosing your tackle. When you're setting yourself up for gamefishing, think about the type of fishing you plan to do.

Setting yourself up with quality game tackle is not cheap, so choosing the right gear from the start will prevent you a lot of heartache, time and money when you hook that special fish and your gear is not up to the job.

Top-quality lever drag reels will make fighting fish easier and simpler. They also last much longer and have excellent resale value. If looked after, they'll last you a lifetime.

For a lady, I think a 15kg (30lb) outfit is a good all-round starting point. In my early days, I always fished 15kg line class for sharks, marlin, yellowfin, wahoo and kingfish. It was my favourite outfit. There were times when something too big cleaned me up and left me staring at the empty spool, but this was half the challenge.

Another good outfit worth having is a high-quality and large-capacity threadline (eggbeater). I have one spooled with 6kg line and this has been a fantastic outfit for a whole range of fish. It's perfect for juvenile black marlin and sailfish.

I fished the Dunk Island Billfish Tournament using this outfit and never lost a marlin. It's good for trolling and casting and is capable of handling most of the smaller pelagics. I've had a ball with it casting around the FADs and traps for dolphinfish.

ESSENTIAL ACCESSORIES

Another necessity for a lady is a comfortable gimbal belt and harness. There are plenty to choose from, varying in price depending on the quality and style.

The one that works best for me is the Black Magic Equaliser, but other quality brands include AFTCO and Braid (both are US-based). Get the big gimble bucket as its width will provide much more comfort across your thighs – especially when your stance is spread for support while standing on a boat at sea.

A quality rod bucket makes it comfortable on a big fish, and the harness is great for leaning back and taking the pressure off your arms. It's important that it fits you comfortably. When I purchased mine they put it on me in the tackle shop and showed me how to use it correctly. It's advisable to put the gimbal and harness on and adjust



Jeni began fishing at the age of three. In her 20s she developed a passion for gamefishing in Broome with skipper Ross Newton. Jeni is a founding member of Reel Girls, who have found success in both local and away tournaments and actively encourage other women into the sport. Jeni is president of Exmouth Gamefishing Club, and with her husband, Matt, owns and operates a tackle store in Exmouth.

I believe that all you need to become involved in gamefishing is the enthusiasm to do so. The rest will come naturally, as long as you are keen to get out and give it a go. If you want to do something, don't let yourself be intimidated in any way. Most guys will encourage you to become involved.

One of the most common comments from people to my husband is that he is lucky to have a wife who loves fishing; so, really, the majority of men I have met are pleased to see a female keen on fishing. It's only the jealous guys (and girls for that matter!) who will try and talk women down and make them feel that they are not 'strong enough' to be involved in gamefishing.

The main strength you need has nothing to do with muscle. If you research different ideas and get the right equipment and the correct technique, you can tackle anything.



Renowned US angler Candace Meyer is a multiple world record-holder.

I live in Florida and began big-game fishing about 10 years ago. My then-boyfriend (and now husband) Jay Meyer has always been an avid fisherman. He took me to Madeira and I was hooked!

I have fished in Australia, Vanuatu, Kona, Bermuda, Madeira, Ghana, Ascension Island, Brazil, Canary Islands, Bom Bom Island and the Caribbean. I've been lucky enough to catch three world records, which include a 314lb yellowfin tuna on 60kg line, a 370lb bigeye tuna also on 60kg and a 490lb Atlantic blue marlin on 10kg.

I've also caught every billfish species, with the exception of a swordfish. The largest fish I've caught is a 1014lb black marlin, and I've tagged and released several black and blue marlin over 900lb.

My advice to potential lady anglers is to first decide what target species they want to catch and then pick signature fishing destinations. Get into good physical condition. Surround yourself with the best crews available, and listen to what they tell you to do. Listening to them is key to learning and being successful.

Obstacles to overcome would be coping with the 'good old boy' network. There aren't many, but there are a few men that find it hard to give credibility to a successful female angler. Just take it in your stride, smile and do your own thing!

it before you start fishing for the day as it's a lot harder once you're hooked to the fish.

COMFORTABLE CLOTHING

You spend a lot of hours out on the water and it's hard to avoid the sun, but sunburn can be avoided by wearing long-sleeve shirts, hats and plenty of sunscreen.

It's a good idea to wear lightweight protective footwear, but it will get wet, so should have good grip and a non-marking sole.

ALL-FEMALE TOURNAMENTS

There are several fishing tournaments designed specifically for women. These give ladies the opportunity to fish and gain confidence – and have fun at the same time.

The Ribbons ladies only game-fishing tournament is one such competition, held on the first Saturday in December each year off Cairns. (Contact Wendy Wall at info@ribbons.org.au for details.)

This is a 10kg line class event and caters for the novice to the experienced angler. You'll need to organise your own team and boat, but with ladies' ever-increasing interest in the sport there is sure to be another lady angler to share with you.

I've found that the guys on the charter boats not only accept the ladies, but actually enjoy their participation. When I've flown to Cairns or Darwin to compete in tournaments, I've found it easier to

organise a share charter with other anglers before I go.

Sometimes I don't even know the other anglers on the boat until I get there, but they've always been nice and I've always had the best time. This is how a lot of anglers fish in these tournaments.

Aside from the fishing there's the social side of tournaments. The events are a lot of fun and a great way to meet ladies with the same interests. Many lasting friendships have been formed at these tournaments.

The boats are moored in marina pens or rafted up together, and at the end of the day's fishing everyone shares stories and has an enthusiastic beer or wine together.

GIVE IT A GO

When it comes to competing in gamefishing tournaments, a lot of ladies have made their presence felt. There are some very capable ladies competing on the same level as men, and their efforts and achievements are being recognised.

I know from talking to other lady anglers that the attraction of tournaments is not just about winning, but the whole wonderful experience of being out there, making new friends and the thrill of catching that fish of a lifetime.

I'll see you out there!

If you'd like more information, or would like to join a ladies team to fish a tournament, visit Beverley's website (www.ladyfishers.com.au) or email her at beverley@ladyfishers.com.au



Beverley Cheffins would love to help more ladies to become active in gamefishing.