

GOLDEN DORADO

In the clear waters of Argentina

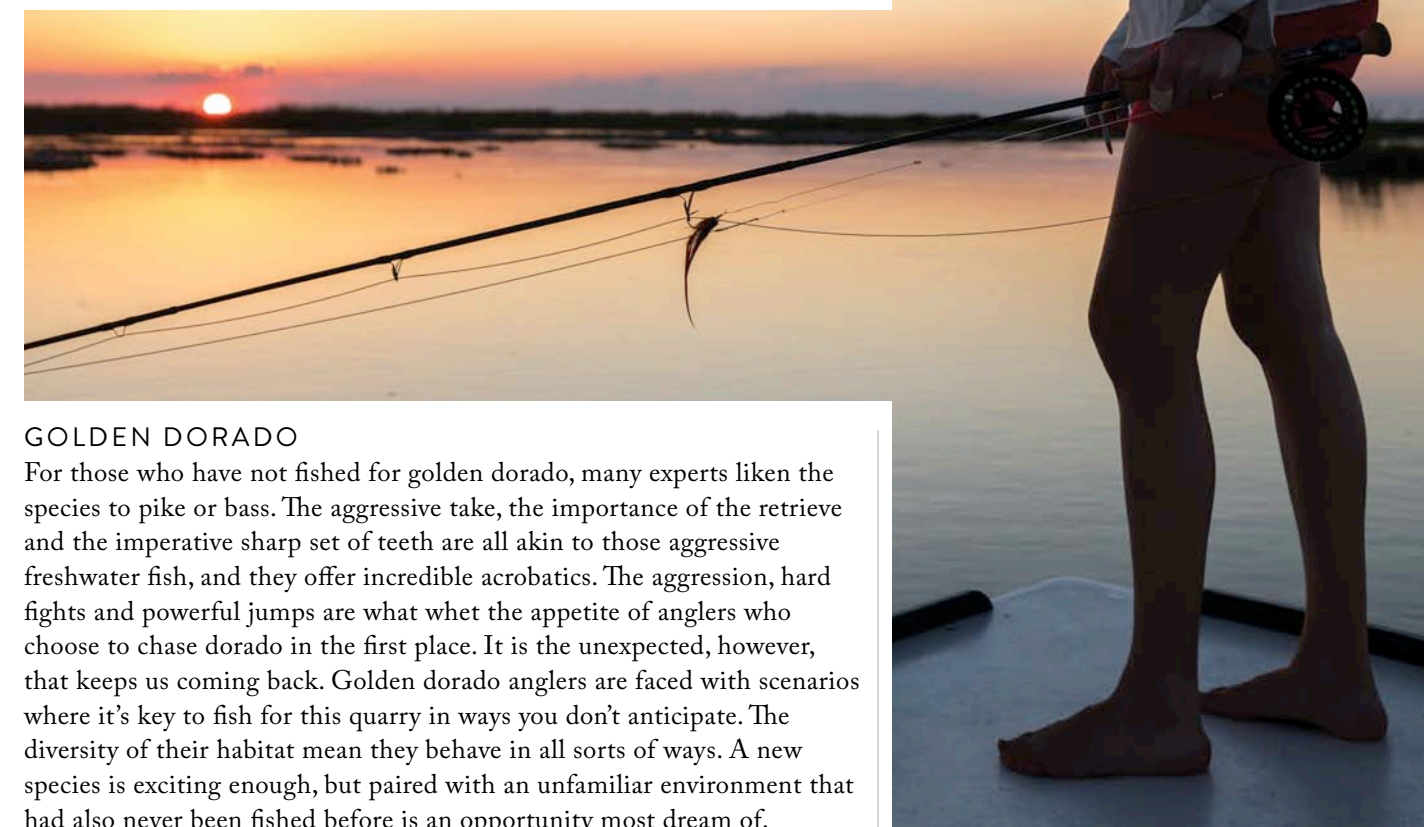
NOVICE ANGLER AND ADVENTURER **KATE FENSTERSTOCK** TAKES A TRIP TO THE PIRA LODGE IN THE IBERA MARSHLAND OF ARGENTINA, PROSPECTING FOR BARS OF GOLD

As any angler will attest, the most coveted landscape is one that is untouched, untainted, and full of fish foreign to the bits of fluff we put in front of them. This concept does not just apply to fishing; a passionate traveller yearns for the wild and remote, far from the reaches of technology and everyday diversions. It won't come as a surprise that an opportunity to fish untouched waters at Pira Lodge in the Ibera Marshland of Argentina would be of enormous interest to someone who falls into both categories of adventurer and fly angler. The team at Pira were working on carving out new locations for their adventurous guests who craved expedition and hopefully, productive fishing. Needless to say, I said yes.



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Searching the marshland for Dorado as the sun sets.



GOLDEN DORADO

For those who have not fished for golden dorado, many experts liken the species to pike or bass. The aggressive take, the importance of the retrieve and the imperative sharp set of teeth are all akin to those aggressive freshwater fish, and they offer incredible acrobatics. The aggression, hard fights and powerful jumps are what whet the appetite of anglers who choose to chase dorado in the first place. It is the unexpected, however, that keeps us coming back. Golden dorado anglers are faced with scenarios where it's key to fish for this quarry in ways you don't anticipate. The diversity of their habitat mean they behave in all sorts of ways. A new species is exciting enough, but paired with an unfamiliar environment that had also never been fished before is an opportunity most dream of.

THE FLASH OF GOLD

To warm up ahead of the exploratory trip, we started with a special spot. One of our guides, François, had explored it earlier in the season and was confident it held results. We travelled for miles over diverse marshland, pockets of overgrown brush and leaves teeming with wildlife, the boat navigating nimbly through the marsh land. In order to get to the unexplored region that François was keen to try, his work was cut out as he poled hard to get us through the toughest bits. We finally came upon a series of channels deep in the marshland, smooth and quiet, with water like glass. As we poled through a channel barely wide enough to fit the skiff, I was sure I hadn't heard right when François asked me to get out of the boat and stand bankside. Fishing for golden dorado from the bank? My chalkstream brain switched on and my trout-stalking instincts came alive. I was amazed at how clear the water was, and I was able to make out the distinct flash of gold with a black stripe. I had barely started my fishing adventure and had been thrown in headfirst, kept nimbly on my toes from the word go.

Bankside fishing as guide François points to where the first cast is to be made.



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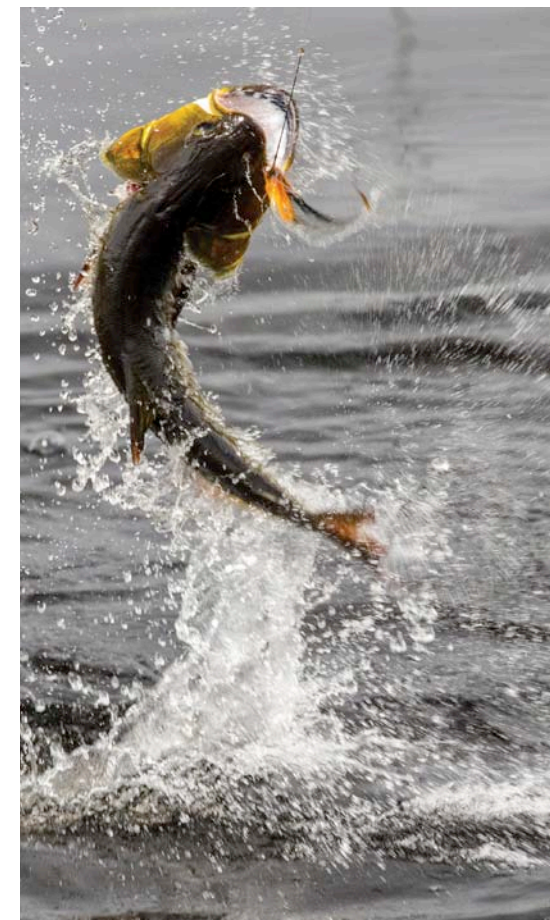


The Homepool dock where the skiffs were moored.

I focused on a gentle roll cast to maintain the glassy, undisturbed water in order to lift my fly and haul for distance, but similar to shallow-water salt pursuit and dealing with picky species akin to permit, it was hard to land the heavy streamer delicately. Our target took one look at the fly and was off without a trace. Without a hint of dejection, François simply brought me back to the boat and we motored to the main channel. The sun was sinking and I stopped for a moment to admire the rosy glow. Argentina was just as wild and remote as I had imagined, where the only sounds to be heard were the zipping of fly line, the pole in the water and the lull of birdsong nearby.

WAIT FOR THE JUMP

I started to cast again, working a double haul as François instructed, stripping long and fast in this slightly deeper, more complex water. We were racing against time, as we were miles from the lodge and had to beat the fading light.



Huge golden dorado can be expected especially as the sun sets.

Jumping dorado—the fight of these powerful fish is what attracts many anglers to target them.



Just as I thought I would have to wait another day before meeting my first golden dorado, I felt a distinctive jerk on the line. Without a moment to spare I kept stripping mechanically, desperate to hold that line tight. “Wait for the jump!” François yelled. Giddy with excitement, and in an over-dramatic fashion, I bowed as I had watched anglers do with leaping tarpon. Despite my theatrical antics, the line held and I had my first golden dorado in the boat for a quick picture. Just in time as well, as the sun was disappearing behind the horizon. We enjoyed a celebratory beer and sped back to the lodge to share the exciting news.

The marshland of Ibera offers some excellent golden dorado fishing.



INTRICATE SIGHT FISHING

Having had a taste of success, I was eager for more – and I was now to witness pristine landscape never tainted by human hand. We embarked on a route the following day to the intended exploratory spot, which was so remote we had to navigate via drone, and get out and push the skiffs in order to traverse the channels. About three hours in, when tackling a particularly challenging obstacle, every team member simultaneously fell through the floating marsh into chest-deep water, and thankfully managed to salvage any valuables. As we poled through a series of lagoons, we nearly jumped out of our skin as we spotted an enormous golden dorado swim by. It could easily have weighed 22lbs. Buzzing from this encounter, we quietly moved into a pool which we instinctively felt would be healthy. Sure enough, we had a fish every cast. I had never experienced sight fishing like this before. The visibility allowed the anglers to really take in the bizarre nature of the golden dorado. Some takes were sudden and out of nowhere, and some were absurdly close in, the fish having followed all the way in. The expert advice I had received echoed in my mind and I was thankful for the initial advice that prepared me as much I could have been for this peculiar fish. Frustratingly, I lost two over 10lbs which would have been my best to date. I was told to not let my strip set get lazy! Annoyed as I was that I couldn't connect into the big ones, experiencing

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such intricate sight fishing was exciting. I had never seen such detail. And I did manage to land some beautiful fish over the course of the day.

These fish (and the surrounding wildlife) had never seen our boats, our flies, or us, which meant the fishing was as fresh and organic as it would ever be. As I stood at the front of the skiff, drinking in the diverse biota of wildlife before me, I tried to log the memory as best as possible. In addition to virgin water and fish, the novice angler must do everything they can to appreciate first-time experiences. Although a lack of experience can be frustrating at times, I am told that success at the beginning of your career can be among of the most delightful moments of your angling life.



The Pira Lodge.

