

In the heart of the mangrove

Casting around for a great adventure in Kuala Trong



Reel Tales

EDDIE CHUA
eddiechua@thestar.com.my

KUALA Trong, which is tucked snugly in the Matang Mangrove Forest Reserve ecosystem in Perak, offers plenty of surprises for anglers.

Dubbed as the lost world by some fishos, the boat ride from the Kuala Trong fishing jetty offers a scenic view of the swampy mangrove forest.

The journey itself is interesting. It gives one an insight to the mangrove forest and its chains of streams and canals that connect to Sungai Temerloh, the river which separates the mainland and Pulau Terong, which is also part of the 51km-long Matang mangrove forest that runs from Kuala Gula to the Matang district.

Aside from being a fishing heaven, this location also offers plenty of opportunities for shutterbugs and bird watchers, as it is a stop-over point for migratory shorebirds.

If you are lucky enough, you might spot the endangered Milky Stork which has also made this swampy forest its permanent home.

According to a survey conducted by the Coordination Committee on Mangrove Forest Research and the Forestry Faculty of Universiti Putra Malaysia, there are no less than 100 Milky Storks, which are exclusively found here, left in the wild.

The report also stated that the number of these birds had dwindled over the years and there was no sign of them breeding.

Aside from this, one could also watch some of the 12 species of herons and egrets feeding along the waterways or perching on the branches or roots of the mangrove trees that surround the swamp.

The entire mangrove forest, dissected by numerous streams, canals and rivers, forms an intriguing maze. One could get lost here as the unchartered waterways zig-zag through the entire swampy forest.

It is advisable to get an experienced boatman when fishing here.

So, when my fishing buddy Ben Azryll organised a trip to this idyllic fishing spot, it was an offer that I could not resist.

Kuala Trong offers estuary fishing in brackish water. During the low tide, many of the fishing spots in this mangrove swamp are less than 5m deep.

While the fishing here is mainly casting, one could also do bottom fishing.

For casting, a light set up with between a 15 and 20 lb line is recommended.

For lures, one could use the spoon, minnow, chug, crankbait or soft plastics as bait.

However, different lures target different species at different times.



Good catch: An angler with two mangrove jacks caught during the Kuala Trong outing.

For example, spoon is good for barracuda all day long, while the minnow is used on dry and hot days for mangrove jacks. Soft plastic, which is attached to a hook sinker, is also effective for mangrove jacks and tarpon, but only when the current is moderate.

Crankbaits are effective for the jacks and barras but suitable in the morning or on cloudy days and when the river is calm.

Bottom fishing is only good for *jengahak* (golden snapper) as it rarely takes the lures.

Personally, I prefer the soft plastics and crankbaits here. I found it effective, especially those painted with bright flashy UV finish.

However, be prepared to get the lures stuck on the submerged mangrove roots, fallen logs and twigs when casting for the jacks or barras along the riverbank.



Old hands: It is important to get an experienced boatman when fishing here.

Depending on the tide and season, fishing in Kuala Trong can also be productive.

If you are there at the right time and find the right spot, good table-size fish of between one and one-and-a-half kilogrammes are common here.

If you are hooked on casting and enjoy the idyllic tranquillity of

the mangrove forest, you will definitely find a great place in Kuala Trong.

For me, I am looking forward to return to this mangrove forest again next month. The regular boatman who takes us out has promised yet another unforgettable fishing adventure. Meanwhile, happy fishing folks!



Idyllic: A journey along the Kuala Trong mangrove forest reserve waterway.