

NORDIC SEA TROUT FROM THE SALT

There is no better way to fish for *Salmo trutta* than in their marine environment, says Jan Delaporte.

PHOTOGRAPHY: JAN DELAPORTE, RASMUS OVESEN & CLAUS ERIKSEN



Making the most of
Denmark's long summer days,
a sea trout angler makes a
long cast into the sunset ↗

FLY FISHING



Fish on! A stripping basket is useful for line control when wading in the surf

Salmo trutta – in its beautiful, silvery oceanic form – is by far the most popular sport fish in Denmark and southern Scandinavia. With over 7,000km of coastline with prime habitat and near perfect salinity, Denmark is a mecca for the fabled sea trout. From north to south, east to west, island to island, keen anglers pursue their coveted prey year-round. Shallow and easily

wadeable waters provide fly fishers with unlimited options. Many small and medium sized rivers also provide good fishing for giant sea trout during the summer and autumn nights. The fishing has improved substantially through recent tougher regulations as well as increased focus on the value of the sea trout as a sport fish.

The following is a story of what can happen on the Danish coast.

I was fishing the island of Bornholm a few years ago, with four friends in March. The group saw me as the “expert” and somehow I was designated as the guide. On the first morning, we split up into two groups and drove to the first spot I knew was a real honey hole. Emil and another guy were to fish it, Miro and I were to drive on to another hot spot.

As we drove down to the parking area, we saw that it was windy and big waves were pounding the shore. The guys looked dismayed. “How are we supposed to fish in that?!” they



The author with another good fish



A good sea trout fresh from the salt



Low tide and calm conditions call for a stealthy approach

asked, in unison. I replied by pointing to a relatively large semi-submerged rock, not far from the shore, and informed them that the sea trout will come in close to this rock to pick off gammarus (a type of shrimp-like crustacean) washed away by the swell. “Emil, that’s where you’ll try first, OK?”

Five minutes later, just as I was rigging up my own rod, I got a call on the mobile from Emil. “The first 10 pounder has been landed!” he said. “Right, Emil, quit it,” I replied. “I don’t have time for your crappy pranks!” “But it’s true!” he insisted. And it was. Three casts and a huge sea trout had inhaled his fly. I guess I really was a genuine coastal sea trout guide after all!

SALTWATER TACTICS

Things are, of course, not always that easy, far from it, actually. Fly fishing for sea trout on the coast will never be a numbers game. Sea trout are simply too widely distributed in the vast expanses of the sea, there is plenty to eat most of the year, and trout are too smart to be caught easily. The fact is, and this has been documented by several Danish videos that include underwater footage, our flies actually pass by a surprisingly large number of sea trout without us ever realising. However, trout are trout and, no matter the habitat, we are only able to lure a few by applying the very best techniques and tactics we know.

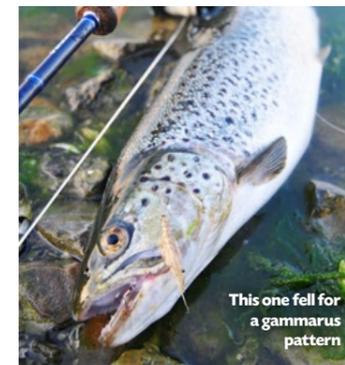


The general approach to fly fishing for sea trout on the coast is to use a 9ft, 6 or 7wt rod, floating or intermediate shooting heads of 9 – 10m, and either monofilament or coated (integrated) shooting lines, a rod length of nylon leader with a 0.25mm fluorocarbon tip. Flies are usually shrimp, gammarus, goby and sand eel imitations. Shallow water is ideal for the sea trout, unlike salmon, and almost all of the fly fishing is done by wading out onto reefs, sandbanks, rocky areas and points. A stripping basket is preferred by many fly fishers for longer casts and control of the shooting line.

Another particularly memorable morning’s sport took place in April, when I was fishing a well-known reef on the northern coast of Zealand, less than 80km from the capital city of Copenhagen. It was a quiet morning, there was no wind and seemingly no sea trout hunting on the reef. I moved slowly towards the right-hand edge of the reef, covering the water with long casts. Suddenly, I saw a small swirl on the glassy surface. Standing completely still, I then watched as a whole school of fish hunted along the margin between the reef and the surrounding sandy bottom. I managed to land the shrimp fly next to a fish and gave it a strip. Nothing, no reaction. I then changed down to a smaller

fly, a gammarus pattern. By this stage the sea trout were really active, and I could see tails and fins breaking the glassy surface. This time the fly landed close to a swirl and the take came immediately. A silver torpedo darted to the left with the fly in its mouth, but it wasn’t a big one, and I wanted to get it to hand quickly so as not to disturb the school. I had seen much bigger fish amidst the melee. A minute later, it was released back into the water and I was once again ready for action.

I then spotted a truly big sea trout, recognisable by the size of its caudal fin, as it chased gammarus in the weeds. It was a long way out so I was forced to wade chest-deep and cast as far as I could with a 6wt (about 30 yards) to where it was now hunting. To my delight, the fly landed perfectly, right in front of the fish and the take was hard and determined. Sea trout are hungry at this time of the year after a long, dark Nordic winter. The fight was exciting; I was into the backing on the first run as the fish headed for the open ocean. After three long runs, the fish started to tire and I began the long walk back to shore, ensuring the line remained taut. Lots of fish are lost during the tricky wading back to shore, but the fishing Gods clearly favoured me that day as I brought the fish safely to hand – 10lb, a stunningly beautiful silver hunter – the trout in its most efficient and awesome predatory form.



This one fell for a gammarus pattern

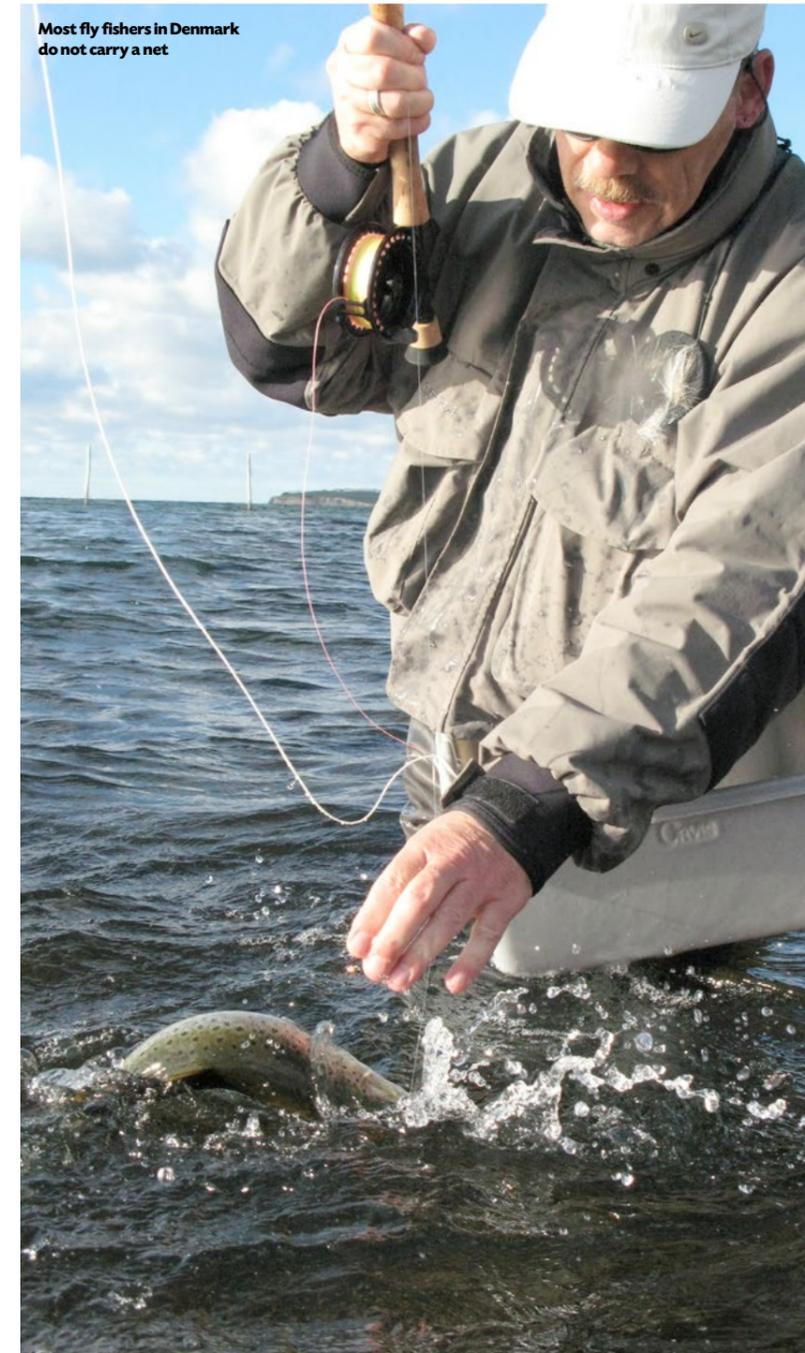
WHERE AND WHEN TO GO

It is also worth noting that several rivers and streams in Denmark and southern Sweden boast some of the biggest sea trout in the world. Denmark’s Karup river produces 20lb+ sea trout every season and plenty of 10 pounders; quite astounding considering the relative small size of this watercourse. Sweden’s rivers Em and Morrurn are world-famous for gigantic

Baltic sea trout, with world-record size fish landed every year.

But Denmark is a small country, consisting of islands and peninsulas and, no matter where you are, the sea is never more than 50km away. Indeed, tougher regulations, increased focus on river habitats and improving water quality has spurred the development of fishing lodges and professional sea trout guides along Denmark’s coast in recent years, with anglers from all

Most fly fishers in Denmark do not carry a net



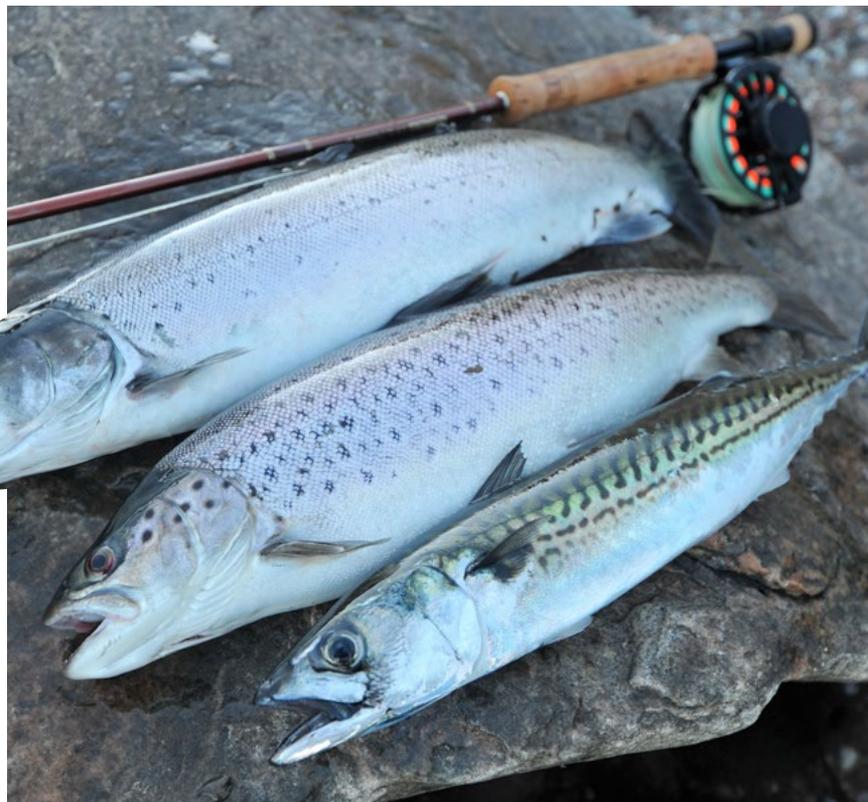
FLY FISHING

over Europe coming to fish for coastal sea trout. Most head for the islands of Funen and Bornholm, which are very easy to get to. The accommodation is of a high standard, it is scenic and the coast is very accessible (no privately owned beaches), and it's inexpensive – all that is required is a state license which can be bought online for £20. Furthermore, 99 per cent of the fishing is done by wading, so boats are not necessary.

The island of Bornholm in the Baltic Sea, the city of Odense on Funen, and the island of Moen are ideal bases. The southern and southeastern part of the country is generally the best for sea trout and prime times are the months of March through April and September through October,

although sea trout can be caught year-round, except when water temperatures exceed 20°C or during severe winters when there is ice formation.

Of course, Denmark's fishery cannot compete for size and numbers with the Rio Grande, but it definitely can in regards to price, accessibility and activities for accompanying non-anglers. Granted, you should not expect to catch a lot of fish, or indeed many over 10lb; this is a fishery for the challenge of pursuing the elusive sea trout in its most formidable form and in its natural habitat with a fly rod. Velkommen!



A typical Bornholm sea trout



Rasmus Ovesen with a brace of sea trout for the pot

CONTACTS

→ General information

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