

Saltwater Fishing off Anchor Point – What’s it like?

Saltwater fishing charters from Anchor Point use a tractor to launch into the surf off the Anchor Point beach. Most Anchor Point saltwater charter skippers have a six-pack license, which means they are limited to a maximum of 6 paying clients. The boats are equipped with comfortable seats and all fishing gear is provided.

In recent years, fishing regulations have reduced the number of sports fishing charters operating in the area, and it is therefore advisable for visiting fisherman to make their charter reservations well in advance. Charters, including half-day and the bigger party boats, are available from Homer, but our choice is the custom charters out of Anchor Point.

Drive down the beach access road to the Anchor Point beach and climb aboard a fishing boat, secured on its trailer and fitted with rods, reels, tackle, landing net, and a variety of up-to-date electronics, plus all of the appropriate safety equipment. Stash your gear, and sit down and relax on a comfortable fishing chair, joined by up to five other fishing buddies or soon to be new friends.

Take a deep breath and enjoy the sweet smell of the salty air as it gusts across Cook Inlet in this pristine part of Alaska. This is a good time to put on sunscreen and a hooded jacket to break the wind that can be cool as it comes off the glacier-chilled Inlet water.

Eagles and shore birds are seen working the waves that are gently rolling onto the beach, picking up bits of fish and fighting over who gets to keep each treasure, as though each battle was a matter of survival.

Across Cook Inlet, snow covered Redoubt, Iliamna, Augustine and Cape Douglas volcanoes shine in the sun, majestic peaks pushed up from deep in the earth’s crust by the Pacific Plate as it plows under the North American Plate at this location. White clouds around the volcanoes’ peaks may be simply weather systems generated by these giants, or plumes from active volcanic vents.

One can imagine the days in 1778 when Captain Cook anchored the Resolution just off the beach at this spot, on a voyage that turned out to be his last, as he was brutally killed by natives at Kealahou Bay, on the Big Island of Hawaii after he returned there to winter over later in the year.

The launch tractor connects to the boat trailer and with a jolt it backs the boat and all aboard into the surf. Hang on. Your guide and skipper starts the outboards and signals to the tractor operator just as the boat lunges off the trailer and into the waiting surf. The skipper heads the boat for one of his favorite halibut holes, or turns down the beach to troll for salmon – bright fish, each returning to spawn in the specific river on the Kenai Peninsula where its life started several years earlier.

The salmon will be feeding while they are in the surf, providing a great fishing opportunity for lucky travelers to the Peninsula, but timing is everything when it comes to these fish as a school of salmon will

either be there or they won't.

Once off the beach, Kachemak Bay comes into sight with views of rugged peaks and glaciers on its south shore. Sea otters, frequently with pups on their bellies, roll off their backs from their resting positions on the water and dive as the boat comes too close for their comfort range.

If the timing is right the charter can include king salmon fishing. Herring and downriggers are a preferred rigging, although other hardware is sometime used to catch these monster salmon that can weigh in at 50 pounds or more.

King salmon will usually hook themselves and the fisherman needs only grab the rod after the downrigger disengages and then yell "fish on," and at that point the excitement really begins as these big fish will jump out of the water and make fast powerful runs from one side of the boat to the other, sometimes passing directly under the boat.

A successful "fish on" battle ends when the guide nets the fish, an effort that requires coordination and cooperation between fisherman and guide, but one that is usually efficiently orchestrated by the guide who has netted his share of kings from rods held by "Cheechakos."

Halibut fishing is normally done on anchor in deep water of 50 to 200 feet or more, although many of the big flat, bottom fish are also caught while drifting, or in shallow water, or even while trolling for salmon near the beach.

Just about any bait seems to work for halibut, although cut cod on circle hooks is most popular. Lead ball weights are used to get the bait down to these bottom fish, and depending on the tide, it may take 1 or 2 pounds to hold the bottom. Jigging with an artificial lure is also a popular technique.

The guide will explain "hook setting" techniques to the Cheechako, as halibut will generally tug hard at the bait before taking it and a common error is to attempt to set the hook too soon, which usually results in lost bait and the necessity to crank up the heavy weight and tackle for re-baiting, a chore the fisherman with an aching arm will quickly learn to avoid.

Reeling in a halibut is an exciting and physical experience and head shake from big fish will show as action on the rod and the fish will periodically take out drag while being brought to the surface. The guide will release smaller fish and put the keepers in the fish box, keeping count of the two halibut/person limit.

Lots of keeper halibut are in the 20 to 40 pound range, although keepers to 100 lbs or more are not uncommon. Larger fish are sometimes caught and the guide and clients will need to have an understanding as to what the plan is in that event, as many guides and fisherman prefer to release the really big old breeding halibut that can go 300 pounds or more and that are not really good eating anyway.

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