

# Pretty fly for a trout, guy

Want to catch a trout? We've got an abundance of great spots around the country to do cast your fly. **Nick Dall** grabs his beadheads, hoppers and nymphs, and wades once more unto the breach.

pictures: nick dall, wolf avni, mavungana flyfishing

BRAD PITT'S ROLE in *A River Runs Through It* did wonders for the worldwide popularity of fly-fishing, but it also spawned countless misconceptions about what the sport really entails. That whole spiel about getting the mayfly to dance above the water like the real thing is utter hogwash. In practice, all the fancy casting is just an elaborate way of getting your fly into the trout's feeding zone. Plus I've never got a sunburnt bottom while fly-fishing.

The only thing that makes fly-fishing any more romantic than conventional *visvang* is never having to deal with grimy *bakkies* of redbait, and these days you can catch just about any species on a fly if you really put your mind to it. That being said, trout and salmon remain *the* quarry of fly-fishermen around the world. Unfortunately, there aren't any salmon in the Rainbow Nation, but here are the best spots to catch a trout or two... →

**THE WADING GAME**  
Our intrepid journo on the Elandspad River.

## Western Cape

Cape Town is closer to quality fly-fishing than any other major city in the country. Some of SA's best streams are found in the Du Toitskloof valley, on the northern side of the Huguenot tunnel, while there's decent dam fishing in most of the cooler high-altitude areas of the province.

The three rivers that crisscross Du Toitskloof all feature small, picky rainbow trout; crystalline, whisky-tinged water; boulder-strewn riverbeds; and fairy-tale mountain backdrops, but each stream also has its own distinctive character. The Smalblaar has the biggest fish, but is also closest to the N2. The Elandspad feels a million miles from anything, even though it's actually closest to the city. And the Holsloot is great in late summer, when the overflow from the Stettynskloof Dam ensures a steady flow of cool water.

Lakenvlei, beyond Ceres, is undoubtedly the biggest and best trout dam in the province, and like the rivers of Du Toitskloof, it is managed by the Cape Piscatorial Society. Closer to home (and, notably, to wine) is Eikendal near Stellenbosch.



**SIZE DOESN'T MATTER**  
It's all about the thrill of the chase.



**MY CUP RUNNETH OVER**  
Giant's Cup is so stunning you won't mind even if you catch nothing.

## The 'Berg

It goes without saying that SA's biggest, baddest mountain range should harbour some of its best trout fishing. Countless rivers and streams tumble off KZN's escarpment and – thanks to colonialism – they virtually all contain trout. The 'Berg is unique among South African fly-fishing destinations in that it holds at least as many brown trout as it does rainbows, and rivers such as the Mooi, the Bushman's and the Umgeni are synonymous with the sport in our country.

These days the trout in rivers and dams on public land aren't looked after quite as well as they used to be (officially, trout are an invasive alien species), but Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife does still have some good river fishing at Lotheni and Giant's Castle.

Arguably the best dam fishing in the country is at Giant's Cup, which is home to the only population of self-spawning still-water trout in the country. Otherwise, the Underberg-Himeville Trout Fishing Club allows members to fish a vast array of waters, while non-members can also fish a couple of their dams. →

## Shopping list

First up, have a long, hard think about what kind of fishing you want to do, then head over to your nearest specialist fly-fishing shop. You'll need a rod, some line and a reel, with the first two being far more important than the reel. Rods, reels and lines come in different weights – higher equals larger and cruder. What's more, lines can be sinking or floating – in general, floating lines are used on rivers and sinking lines in dams, but it usually pays to have at least one of each.

Weighty tomes have been written on the subject of flies, but the honest truth is that you could get through your first fishing trip with only a woolly bugger on the end of your line – especially if you're fishing in a dam. The woolly bugger is to trout what a Big Mac is to the Springbok front row, and a few different sizes in black, olive and brown will cover most bases.

Rivers are a bit more complicated, and you'll need a couple of nymphs (small sinking flies that mimic underwater larvae) and a few dries (floating flies that mimic little flying gaggas) too. As a beginner, you'll lose quite a few flies to the surrounding foliage – so bring backups!

## Dullstroom

Like most things in and around Gauteng, Dullstroom is quite cutesy and gentrified, and the fishing is also manicured and centred more around dams than rivers. Bank fishing is the order of the day, as there are very few trees to snag your woolly bugger in, and most dams even feature jetties to compensate for poor casting.

What it lacks in ruggedness, though, Dullstroom makes up for with the size and abundance of its fish. Mavungana Flyfishing is the one-stop answer to all your needs: buy yourself a rod or some extra flies, arrange a fishing guide for a day, or fish for trophy trout on one of Mavungana's own well-stocked dams. Otherwise, most of the country lodges in the area have stocked dams for paying guests.

## Contacts

### Cape Piscatorial Society

[www.piscator.co.za](http://www.piscator.co.za)

### Eikendal

[www.eikendal.com](http://www.eikendal.com)

### KZN Wildlife

[www.kznwildlife.com](http://www.kznwildlife.com)

### Giant's Cup

[www.giantscup.co.za](http://www.giantscup.co.za)

### Underberg-Himeville Trout Fishing Club

[www.uhtfc.co.za](http://www.uhtfc.co.za)

### Mavungana Flyfishing

[www.flyfishing.co.za](http://www.flyfishing.co.za)

### Wild Trout Association

[www.wildtrout.co.za](http://www.wildtrout.co.za)

### Semonkong Lodge

[www.placeofsmoke.co.ls](http://www.placeofsmoke.co.ls)

### Tourette Fishing

[www.tourettefishing.com](http://www.tourettefishing.com)



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## Rhodes

The remote mountain hamlet of Rhodes (population 26) is the jewel in the crown of South African fly-fishing. Landowners and fly-fishermen in the area have united to form the Wild Trout Association (WTA), which administers over 200km of pristine rivers and streams in this sparsely populated, but spectacular, corner of the world.

You won't get bigger river fish anywhere in the republic, and you have Rhodes' sheer remoteness to thank for the fact that even during the height of the season (later summer and autumn, when the trees go 50 shades of orange), the rivers are blessedly under-fished. The WTA does an excellent job of managing the fishing, and once you've booked a section of river, it's yours for the entire day.

There are a few dams in the area, all of which hold some enormous fish (that food chain again), but in a twist of snobbery typical of fly-fishing sorts, the rivers, streams and brooks (the smaller the better for many light-tackle aficionados) are what draw most people to Rhodes.

## Lesotho

Lesotho is one of the last great frontiers of wilderness fly-fishing, and although it lies outside of our official borders, it's only a short drive from both Joburg and Durban. It's the only country in the world with all of its territory above an altitude of 1 000m, which means it's chock-a-block with rivers and streams that are perfect for trout.

The fly-fishing industry here is seriously underdeveloped and there must be loads of spectacular fishing that's yet to be discovered. Even those rivers that are known for their trout are still wild and usually accessible only on ponies, thus fishing in Lesotho is best undertaken with a professional guide. Not only is the terrain rugged and access to emergency services complicated, but permission to fish also has to be negotiated with the local chieftains.

Semonkong Lodge is located on the legendary Maletsunyane River, which harbours some seriously large browns, and they organise regular fishing treks. Tourette Fishing specialises in bucket-list trips to remote African hotspots, and their two Lesotho itineraries are completely out of this world. ■