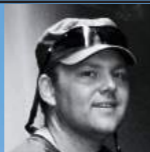


BY NICK DALL



# Hook, line & SINKER

I DID  
**this**

▶ Traditional handline fishing

Nick Dall got a glimpse of how the masters have been doing it for decades when he cast a line on a traditional Kalk Bay fishing boat



It's 6:19 am and the sun is finally showing its face on the horizon. We've been chugging towards Cape Point for nearly two hours, and it's a massive relief to finally feel some warmth on my skin. It's my first time on a traditional Kalk Bay fishing boat, so I take in the sights, smells and sounds. The other guys on the boat do this every day of their lives and they doze awkwardly against the boat's hard wooden sides. Shortly before 7 am, we reach the fishing grounds and the boat instantly comes to life. Another boat has beaten us to it, and their frenzied activity makes it clear that the yellowtail are running. Fadiel, the skipper, shows me how to bait a hook before hurrying back to his own spot on the boat.

'How do I know when I've got a bite?' I ask naively.

'You'll know,' they laugh.

'And what do I do then?'

'Pull! As hard as you can!'

And with that, my arms are nearly yanked out of their sockets and my line starts scything into the inky blue depths. After what feels like an age, I drag the fish aboard, take the hook out and leave it flapping at my feet. Over the next hour or so, we have quite a bit of success. The other (more experienced) guys nab as many as 10 each, but I am happy with my haul of four shimmering yellowtail – each one about as long as my arm.

And then, just as quickly, the fish go off the boil. I look up at Cape Point looming above us and realise just how lucky I am to be experiencing this. I can make out a trail of ant-sized tourists scuttling towards the famous landmark and I don't envy them one bit.

At around midday, we start the long trek back to the harbour. I put my hat on my head and try to doze, but I'm soon woken by gleeful shouts. Snoek – the fishermen's most lucrative catch – haven't been caught in the bay for a few weeks, and there is excitement all round. The snoek are far less discerning and a lot more vicious than the yellowtail, and the action is fast and furious.







## Fishing facts

- ▶ In the 1800s, Kalk Bay was one of several whaling stations at the Cape. By 1830, the whales had been hunted almost to extinction.
- ▶ The whalers turned to fishing and seal hunting. In the beginning, they used rowing boats, which they pulled up on to the beach. The first harbour was built in 1913.
- ▶ These days, handline fishermen find it hard to make a living and many boats supplement their income through crayfish quotas.

### YOU CAN do it too

- ▶ To book, phone Fadiel (074 861 2667) or Kalky's fish and chips shop (021 788 1726) to arrange a place on a boat. It costs **R350 per person.**
- ▶ Depending on the season, you may have to leave quite early – I had to be at the harbour at 4 am.
- ▶ All tackle and bait is provided, but you should bring your own food, gumboots and waterproof trousers. You can also fish in old jeans and takkies.
- ▶ You get to keep everything you catch, but I usually take one or two fish and give the rest to the crew. Alternatively, you could even try to sell your fish at the market.

As I struggle to land my sixth snoek in as many minutes, my line is taken by something far bigger and heavier, and I struggle to stay on the boat. And then, my line goes slack. When I pull up the lifeless, severed head of a snoek, Fadiel explains what has happened:

'You pulled it up too slowly,' he chuckles. 'A seal must have got hold of it.' When, a couple of hours later, we finally get back to the harbour, I have caught more fish than I could ever have hoped for and I've marvelled at whales, seals, dolphins and unbeatable views of Cape Point. And I've earned a very good night's sleep. Since that first time, I've been out on the boats a couple more times, and it's always been a completely different experience whenever I've gone back.

In summer, when the southeaster blows, you may be lucky enough to go out on a late-afternoon trip for kabeljou, and at other times you may go bank fishing for hottentot and red roman. While the details may differ, you're guaranteed an unforgettable experience at a ridiculously low price. Even if you catch nothing (which you won't), you can count on incredible views and a heart-warming window into the lives of people who are as real as it gets. ✨