

Dispatches from Cuba

FAR FROM THE TOURIST OUTPOSTS, PHOTOGRAPHER [NAME DELETED]
CAPTURES THE SPIRIT OF THE ISLAND'S SUBSISTENCE FISHERMEN

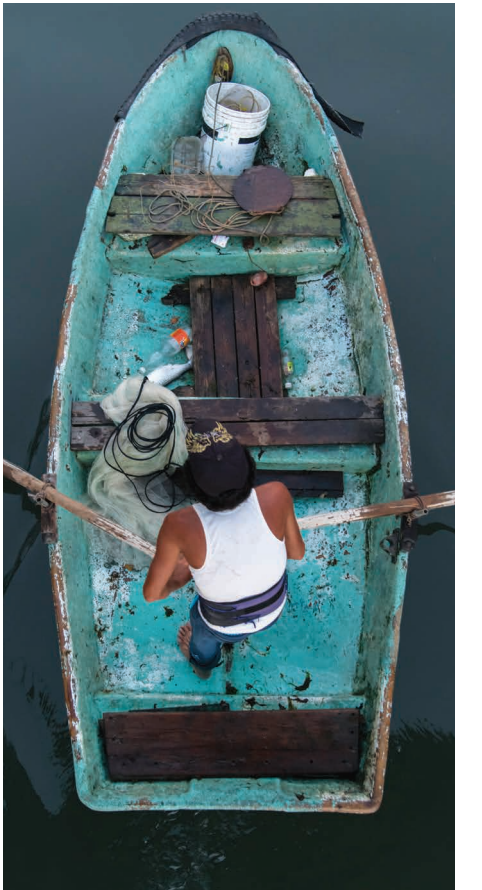
A "Cuban yo-yo,"
or handline, is the
tackle of choice
for many of the
island's subsistence
fishermen.



The subsistence fishermen of Cuba are among the most resourceful that photographer [NAME DELETED] has ever encountered. After documenting the men and women who work the waters of the Atlantic coast for almost a decade, [NAME DELETED] found ingenuity and resilience among the threadbare fishermen in eight Cuban waterfront towns, where they patch together their tackle and boats along with their ancient, U.S.-made cars. Economics and technology have barely touched the island's privately owned, heavily guarded waterfronts, called *particulares*, for more than 50 years. When [NAME DELETED] visited in February, he wasn't allowed aboard any workboats, but he hung around the yards long enough to befriend many locals for whom fishing is a way to put food on the table and earn a small income. "There are really no size or catch limits. They'll catch anything they can sell," says [NAME DELETED], who at 32 has been a professional photographer since 2009. The near-shore fishermen chase snapper and grouper, while others venture farther out for swordfish, tuna and sharks, he says. The sustainability of the fishery is a byproduct of catches limited by crude gear and small, underpowered boats.

A wooden workboat aground at low tide in Punta de Cartas. (Right) Chi-Chi Carreyo, a Cojimar fisherman.







What [NAME DELETED] saw is a far cry from the fly- and light-tackle fishing on the flats along Cuba's south coast, which is managed through a partnership between Marlin S.A., a government enterprise specializing in water sports, and Avalon Cuban Fishing Centers. Avalon, which serves visiting sport anglers, recently advertised four nights and three days of fishing for \$2,499 a person.

By contrast, many of the subsistence fishermen use a "Cuban yo-yo," a homemade wooden spool wrapped with monofilament. Twirling it around their heads, they can toss a baited hook with 2 ounces of lead 30 yards or more. Some have rods. "Tackle is limited to what they can make or trade with people who travel outside the country," [NAME DELETED] says, adding that several fishermen asked him to bring gear on his next trip. Until international fishing loot arrives, the anglers salvage useful materials from trash heaps.

Fishing is sometimes a solitary endeavor. When [NAME DELETED] was in Puerto Esperanza, a small town on the northern coast west of Havana, he witnessed a gathering at the waterfront in honor of someone who was missing at sea.

The majority of boats [NAME DELETED] observed in Cuba were small, wooden skiffs, some with engines, sails and oars, or paddles. He also saw makeshift rafts pieced together with Styrofoam and wood or plastic.

Along with yo-yos, some subsistence and commercial fishermen, who are generally middle-aged or older, fish long lines and gill nets, [NAME DELETED] says. Their makeshift iceboxes or coolers are stuffed with frozen water bottles.

Those without boats congregate at El Malecón, a seawall where the Straits of Florida meet Havana. In the evening, it's a popular gathering place to drink rum, fish, play music and dance. [NAME DELETED] says people fish for hours along the seawall, to pass time and to eat. "If I went back in 10 years," he says, "these fishermen probably would be doing the same thing."



José Alonso of Santa Lucia holds a cero mackerel. (Left) A fishing skiff from Playa Larga.