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THE LAND OF
**EVA
LONGORIA**





Before I moved to Maine, I had two associations with fly fishing and, yes, one involved Brad Pitt. The other was my college roommate's dad, who belonged to an old-school members-only fishing club in Stowe, Vermont. Throughout our 20s, we'd visit with our boyfriends and kayak around the lake, hike the surrounding trails and never once pick up a rod. Why would we? It seemed more hobby than sport, and we didn't have those back then. We also didn't see any other women out there doing it, just dad-aged white guys.

I still don't have hobbies, not really. But I have come around to more meditative forms of sport—and to actual meditation, too. Since moving full-time to vacationland, I've become something of a very amateur angler. Serenity is nice. So is being outside. I've learned to cast a rod, choose a fly based on something other than aesthetic appeal, wade through rocky waters without wiping out (mostly) and reel in a catch, sort of. It's at turns frustrating and peaceful and, when it works, more than a little empowering.

I'm no trailblazer. I'm actually late to the game, especially here in Maine, where a younger generation discovered the appeal of fly fishing much earlier in their lives. Women are now the sport's fastest-growing demographic, thanks to hometown fishing clubs around the country, an increased number of women working as guides, clinics and retreats geared toward solo and group female travelers and #girlshofish on TikTok, where women raised by dads who taught them to not only appreciate the sport but love and excel

at it share highlights, and sometimes a little bit of skin, with a whole new audience. These are women who, undeterred by the sport's heretofore male dominance, have the confidence to know that rivers don't belong to any one gender, race or socioeconomic group.

And they're excellent fisherwomen, too. While men remain fly fishing's predominant participants, many argue that women's attention to detail, patience and body awareness makes them even better suited to it. Research conducted in 2023 by the Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation found that one in five female anglers say that fishing makes them feel like they can do anything they set their mind to. The study also found that active anglers are 24 percent more likely than non-anglers to say that setbacks don't discourage them.

Despite its meditative aspects, endorphins are involved in fly fishing. Unlike ocean fishing, which I'd always considered exciting yet essentially consisted of dropping a line, cracking a beer and waiting, fly fishing is constant motion. You're casting, mending, casting again, always going for the perfect arc. You're wading into rushing waters along uneven rocky surfaces. You're following the drift. If you know how, you're analyzing the river for the spots the fish are most likely to be hanging out. You're noticing the bugs in order to decide which fly to use next. It requires focus, trust, balance and your brain.

It was on a trip to Colorado Springs last summer that I caught my first big fish. We found Angler's Covey guide Josh Heney through Bobby Mikulas, the owner of Kinship Landing, a boutique hotel built on the concept of providing guests with a "travel like a local"

experience. Mikulas is always eager to offer guests a recommendation for anything outdoorsy, and he happens to be an avid angler himself. Before my trip, he shared with me his favorite places to fish, even though anglers are famously hyper-protective of their spots.

Heney took us to one of them, a catch-and-release section of the South Platte River dubbed the "Dream Stream." Heney helped me choose a fly and coached me on my cast, which I practiced over and over. Again and again, I watched my line drift down the river—no bites, not even evidence of fish. We chatted and we were quiet. We waded and waited. Fishing challenged my patience and results-oriented mindset—how come this wasn't working?

And then it did. Heney had prepped me to pay attention to changes in the line that might indicate a fish was interested in my fly or already hooked on, and he warned me: That's when I had to be even more patient. You can't pull too soon or too fast. The key is to tire out the fish before you tire yourself.

My catch was a 4-pound rainbow trout. I posed for the requisite photo, then let him go. As with many things, fly fishing is about the thrill of the hunt and the satisfaction of the catch. But another reason I've come to love it is because it's also about impermanence, where the ultimate victory is in knowing that it's not the last. ■



FROM TOP: The author with her catch on Colorado's "Dream Stream"; fishing in Wyoming's North Platte River



TAL ROBERTS; DAN MASELLI

THE RIGHT ANGLE

OTHER GREAT FLY FISHING DESTINATIONS FOR WOMEN, WHETHER YOU'RE BRAND-NEW OR KNOW YOUR WAY AROUND A ROD.

LIMELIGHT HOTEL, KETCHUM, IDAHO

The Limelight offers access to Sun Valley's amazing and diverse fly fishing opportunities, from the high desert feel and mountain whitefish of the Big Lost River to the Salmon River, known for drift boat floating and summer influx of sea fish who make a nearly 900-mile trek all the way from the Pacific. The hotel's most-recommended operator for women is Silver Creek Outfitters, which staffs several female guides. limelighthotels.com

THE HERMITAGE INN, WEST DOVER, VERMONT

In southern Vermont, the Hermitage Inn offers fly fishing clinics throughout the summer led by pro guides and designed specifically for women, including casting instruction and lessons on choosing and tying flies. Learn to fish in the Hermitage's on-site pond stocked with brown, rainbow and brook trout before exploring the ponds, streams and brooks around the inn. thehermitageinnvermont.com

C LAZY U RANCH, GRANBY, COLORADO

At C Lazy U Ranch, the classic dude ranch gets a luxury upgrade, with upscale cabins outfitted with wood-burning fireplaces, an award-winning wine cellar, spa, evening entertainment and s'mores. In addition to year-round fly fishing in the private waters of Willow Creek, the ranch hosts regular women's-only wellness retreats. Come as you are: All guests have access to all the Orvis equipment you'll need for half or full-day guided sessions to wade fish for rainbow, brown and brook trout. clazyu.com

WEATHERBY'S LODGE, GRAND LAKE STREAM, MAINE

One of the oldest and most famous fishing and hunting lodges in the country offers three-day women's-only fly fishing schools taught by female instructors within walking distance of the three-mile-long, salmon-packed Grand Lake Stream. Highlights include instruction in casting, reading the water, knot and fly tying, wading and safety—and the most magical sunrises. weatherbys.com

BRUSH CREEK RANCH, SARATOGA, WYOMING

This upscale ranch spread across 30,000 pristine acres in Wyoming's North Platte River Valley includes 20 miles of private North Platte River tributary waters stocked with trout and regular fly fishing clinics for women in float fishing and wade fishing. At night, special trout dinners let you imagine, at least, you're enjoying the fruits of your labor (though the rivers themselves are catch and release). Horseback riding, yoga, sound healing, an award-winning full spa and wine cellar tours and tastings round out the experience. brushcreekranch.com