

FISHING FOR THE MAHIMAHI

In the Pacific it is called *mahimahi*, which means "strong", or "powerful" in Hawaiian. But it is found in every tropical sea in the world.

Scientists gave it the name *Dorado Coryphène*, English speakers call it *dolphinfish* because it looks rather like a dolphin and the Spanish call it *dorado*, the golden fish, in honour of the magnificent reflections which bounce off it.

This large fish of the open sea with its dazzling colours of deep blue, golden yellow and green can grow up to two metres and weigh up to 40 kilos. It is one of the fastest-growing fish there are.

Its long, aerodynamic body enables it to reach speeds of 50 knots and to leap from the water with impressive bounds. The male can be recognised by its prominent forehead and the fact that it is slightly larger than the female. Both have a life expectancy of three to four years. It is a great carnivore and hunts mackerel, squid and flying fish but also feeds on plankton and crustaceans.

Fishing for the *mahimahi* is very popular in Polynesia and every specialist has his own secret method. You can harpoon them or catch them with a dragnet, but whichever method is used, the fishing parties always leave you with vivid memories.

It all starts with observing the sky. You have to spot a bird which has seen the fish and is waiting for him to feed in order to devour his leftovers.

The *mahimahi* is a fish which moves on the surface, alone and rarely in a couple. Use polarised sunglasses and you will see its electric silhouette under the water.

Once it has been spotted, the lines are thrown and the decoys swirl around in the waves. When the fish is caught, he performs fantastic leaps out of the water, trying to detach itself. The *mahimahi* is a fish which fights to the utmost limit of its strength. It uses its great powers of acceleration to disappear beneath the surface and the strength of its spring to leap about as it attempts to rid itself of the hook.

The skill of the fisherman and the dexterity of the helmsman are the only factors which can promise success, as the exhausting struggle can last more than an hour.

On the human side, the main advantage is the legendary *poti marara*, literally "speed boat for flying fish", a boat invented in Tahiti, and unique in the world, whose speed and manoeuvrability have for decades ensured success for the fishing parties of enthusiasts.

The combat is even more spectacular with the harpoon. The fisherman manoeuvres his boat with one hand with the aid of a sort of broom stick, like flying an aeroplane. He needs to get the fish on the side where he has the harpoon, lying the length of his boat. There then begins a long combat involving changes of speed and direction, which is a real ordeal for the passengers! Finally, the harpoon is thrown. The trial of strength then consists of getting on board a trophy as big as the fisherman himself!

Once out of the water, the *mahimahi* rapidly loses its marvellous colours. A painter or photographer has only a few minutes to capture the sublime hues of the fish, which they will soon have to hand over to the cook, as the *mahimahi* is a dish much sought after by gourmets!