

SAVORING *the Swing*





Palate Pleasers and Silver Linings in the Great Wet North
STORY AND PHOTOS BY BRIAN CLARK



For some people, the primary draw of a fishing trip lies in catching fish, and that's reasonable enough — even if sometimes we don't. Some intrepid souls venture into the wild in search of *adventure*, whatever that means. Some folks go just to get away, whether it's from home or work or something else.

Chef Joshua Schwartz and his team at Travel Creel Hospitality understand all of those motivations, but they're after something even more ambitious: blending a whole range of motivations and experiences — prime fishing opportunities, epic food, great tunes, lavish digs, spectacular natural settings, and good people — into holistic trips with a harmonious thump that makes you wonder whether maybe you've finally found your place in the cosmos. TCH isn't just taking people fishing and feeding them spectacular gourmet grub; they're building *community*.

When I first learned about the pop-up fishing gastrolodge model that Josh and Samantha Schwartz have brought into reality with TCH, it struck a familiar chord: annoyance that I hadn't come up with this brilliant idea myself. Pop-up restaurants and stores have been a thing for years — why not a fishing lodge? Why the hell didn't I think of this? Probably because I've been neither a trained chef nor a professional fishing guide, whereas Josh has done both — and in no less an epicenter for food and fishing than Northern California.

Traditional bricks-and-mortar lodges are, by definition, dedicated to particular angling destinations; in sharp contrast, TCH rotates through upscale vacation rentals near outstanding fisheries scattered across both North and South America. For each stint of hosted weeks, the TCH team transforms a luxurious house into a temporary base of operations for some serious fishing and feasting. This approach solves a number of perennial problems with the fixed-location lodge model, one of which is seasonality: instead of being locked into a single location year-round, TCH is able to drop into a given destination for the prime weeks of that locale's respective fishing season, then bounce to a different place — in some cases, to another continent — to catch the best part of their season. If a particular area isn't fishing well this year, TCH goes elsewhere.

In fact, following Josh around the globe doesn't seem like a bad idea. Not only has TCH opened up some exceptional fisheries, the grub is guaranteed to be excellent. He and his cohort of accomplished chefs — more about the Travel Creel crew below — revisit most of their ten or so current destinations annually, so over time they've cultivated relationships with local purveyors of various epicurean delights: specialty meats from independent butchers, top-quality seafood suppliers, fresh produce sourced directly from nearby organic farms, and more. They've also established long-standing affiliations with regional fly shops and outfitters who supply guides, gear, flies, boats, transportation, and up-to-date fishy intel for the anglers.

Back to those routine challenges with the old school lodge model: another one is, well, the routine. It can be difficult to retain staff throughout a fishing season, particularly in remote places, and good luck luring a sought-after culinary professional out of a famous kitchen into the backcountry for an extended turn.

But for a week or two? That's a recipe for keeping things fresh, and happy chefs make wonderful food. Thanks to his several decades of service as an executive chef at elevated eateries in the California wine country — including stints as *Chef de Cuisine* at multiple restaurants sporting Michelin stars — Josh has direct access to a network of



rock star chefs. Some of them already fish or enjoy other outdoorsy pastimes, and working a rotation with TCH provides a pleasant break from the grind of a commercial kitchen. They're able to cook whatever inspires them in a low-stress, nature-rich environment, and they're feeding anglers who are not only appreciative of fine cuisine, they're literally *starving* by the time they get off the water.

For this year's Oregon trip, Josh himself did the honors. He built each day's menu based on what was freshest and most interesting, occasionally supplementing his local suppliers with food brought from elsewhere. Since he came straight to the PNW from the Bahamas, our crew was treated to conch balls and lobster enchiladas. One of the other guests generously contributed a coho salmon caught on his recent Alaska trip; Josh turned that into a salmon tartare that still has my mouth watering.

TCH brings some standards and traditions to each run. There's always a pot of coffee brewing at 5AM, and breakfast is a casual serve-yourself buffet of time-honored pre-fishing standards: scrambled eggs, bacon, toast, hashbrowns, and fresh fruits. Gourmet boat lunches get packed into Yeti coolers and can be customized with the angler's choice of packaged snacks.



It's in the afternoons that things really get cooking. You can count on finding a bar station outfitted with ice, limes, and a few other goodies for mixing drinks, and probably a Turtlebox rolling through a Grateful Dead playlist. One of the daily highlights is the afternoon array of finger foods — Josh whips up some dangerously tasty snacks. In fact, my only complaint about the food was my lack of self-discipline when it came to the appetizers. I'd roll in off the river, famished and thirsty, and find myself powerless to resist the gratuitous spread of next-level snacks.

Fishing out of a vacation home hits differently than being in a lodge. Most of the socialization takes place in the kitchen or a cozy den, and meals happen at the family dinner table. It's conducive to conversation and camaraderie in a way that feels different from sitting at the bar or getting served in a restaurant setting.

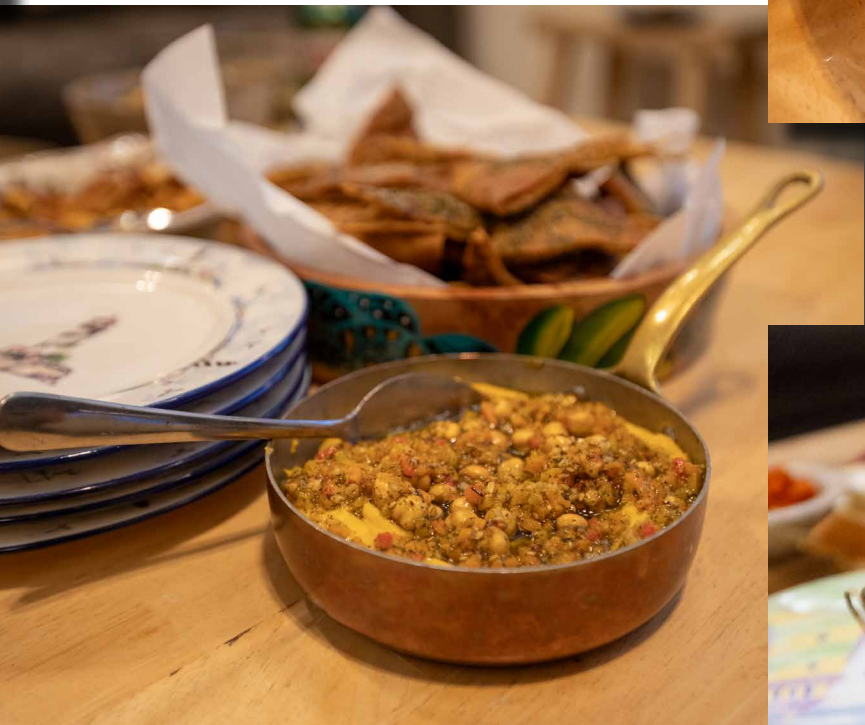
Even better for the aspiring gourmand, the cooking isn't getting done somewhere behind the scenes — it's happening right there in the kitchen, just like at home. For an enthusiastic home cook, it's almost surreal to be watching a world-class chef at close range, and Josh is extremely generous in sharing his culinary expertise. I've heard that a *Travel Creel Cookbook* might be in the works, but don't quote me on that.



Above: beef tartare with arugula and crispy onions in a Green Goddess dressing (arugula, avocado, mayo, fresh herbs, garlic, and more)

Left: eggs on eggs! Deviled eggs topped with salmon roe and fresh chives

Author's Note: thanks to overexposure at too many church potlucks, I've always positively despised deviled eggs. Josh broke me — these were amazing!



Top Left: Butter-toasted Ritz Crackers with smoked trout dip dressed with trout roe

Above Right: Sausage and goat cheese en croûte with za'atar and tahini sauce

Above: Roasted pepper hummus

Right: Fried conch balls made from imported Bahamian conch



Above: Pistachio and cherry parfait made with Oregon-grown sweet cherries

Below: Bleu cheese wedge salad with scratch-made croutons and local cherry tomatoes

Opposite: Chef Josh, resplendent in one of his trademark tie-dye shirts, plating a lovely Greek salad



Below: Josh has recently embarked on a collaboration with [Williams Knife Company \(@WilliamsKnifeCo\)](https://www.williamsknife.com) and they've made knives for him with the Travel Creel logo. It turns out that the folks behind WKC are avid fly anglers and bird hunters themselves, so don't be surprised if you see more of their knives show up in a future OTFM issue.



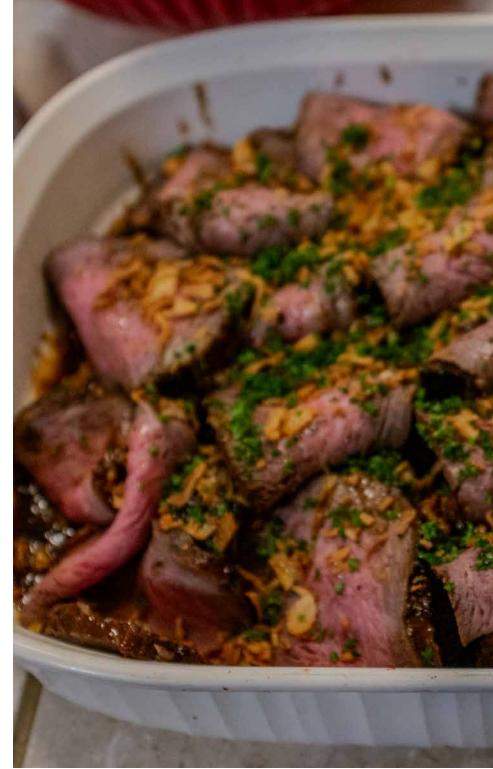


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ARGENTINA

TRAVEL CREEEL HOSPITALITY



Top Left: Harris game hens over tabbouleh cous-cous

Top Center: Oregon grass-fed ribeye over cheesy potato skins with gravy and crispy shallots

Middle Left: Oven-braised St. Louis Ribs with sofrito

Below Left: Wild boar and spinach egg rolls

Bottom Center: Teriyaki pork T-loin over kimchi fried rice with Tat-Soi rabe





Top Right: Aged Oregon beef, two cuts: cap and eye of the rib; served alongside Brussels sprouts and smashed sunchokes with a morel mushroom pan gravy

Middle Right: Poached Alaskan halibut with avocado and cilantro crema, dressed with Cotija cheese and garlic nuggets

Bottom Right: Bahamian lobster enchiladas



Back to the lodging, one last time: some fishing lodges can feel a lot like summer camps for kids, with bunk beds and shared quarters. Sometimes that's understandable due to the remoteness, even unavoidable. But because TCH deliberately runs relatively small groups in fairly large properties, the accommodations are exceedingly civilized. At most of their destinations every guest gets their own bedroom. On the Oregon trip, my room was spacious enough to allow every single piece of clothing I wore each day to get hung up to dry each night, which is a roundabout way of saying that we saw about nine minutes of direct sunlight in four days of almost non-stop rain.

And that brings us to the fishing. Obviously, it varies tremendously by location. I'd love to tell you that I touched chrome daily in Oregon, but that just ain't how steelheading usually works — especially when you're dedicated to swinging flies with two-handed rods. I can say that the guides provided by Northwest Fly Fishing Outfitters ([NWFFO](#))

in Portland were exceptionally good — unpretentious, competent, dependable, patient, sociable. For me, as an enthusiastic casting nerd focused mostly on the single-hand saltwater game, this trip presented a prime opportunity to workshop my Skagit technique. Fortunately, Colby Olson, my guide for most of the week, is a member of Sage's Elite Pro Staff, and he's very, very deep into the two-handed game. Whether we were finding fish or not (spoiler: NOT), it was tremendously enjoyable for me to geek out with him on the casting. I learned a ton, and it's definitely going to cost more time and money to feed yet another casting addiction.

Another of our guides was Matt Larson — watch for his name in a future issue of OTFM where we profile the non-profit he started in 2024, The Wilderness Calling Conservation Initiative ([TWCCI](#)), a steelhead tagging initiative intended to track wild steelhead once they return to the ocean. He's doing some exciting work, and we plan to support his efforts.



Whether it's roosterfish on Baja's East Cape, billfish in Mag Bag, stripers in Maine, bones in the Bahamas, tarpon in Puerto Rico, or trout in a variety of pretty places, TCH will bring professionalism, charm, and extraordinary fare to each fishery. Some of that is because they've chosen their destinations well and worked hard to cultivate local connections; it's also because Samantha runs a very tight shop logistically, and because they've built an extraordinary team of loyal collaborators. But a great deal of it comes down to Josh himself: he's warm, convivial, and awfully fond of garish tie-dye shirts that might stop traffic in some communities. It seems like he's always laughing, always feeding people — but it's clear that the laughter of others also feeds him. He's exactly the right creative, jovial, colorful personality to curate scenarios where special moments happen on a regular basis. He carefully sets the stage for a table of hungry anglers to become lifelong friends, then — as the TCH catchphrase goes — he feeds the fishermen, and the magic just happens. ➡✈

TCH's Spring 2026 trips to Baja's East Cape, California's Fall River, and Puerto Rico are already sold out, but dates remain available for trips later in the year to Xcalak, Maine, Louisiana, and the Black Canyon of the Gunnison in Colorado. Bookings are very dynamic, so check the website or contact Josh regarding availability.

www.travelcreel.com

