A beginner’s guide to St Georges Basin and Sussex Inlet

Gary Brown

The towns on the fringes of the broad St Georges Basin waterway make an ideal base for anyone who enjoys boating and fishing. They also offer easy access to the sheltered waters and beaches of Jervis Bay, which includes Hyams Beach, Green Patch and Murrays Beach, and the ocean beaches to the south.

This peaceful spot is perfect for the whole family to enjoy sailing, swimming, water-skiing, kayaking and snorkelling. Don’t miss Booderee National Park Botanic Gardens, which is a short drive from Sanctuary Point and well worth a visit. The scenic 40-minute Basin Walk follows the shoreline from Palm Beach Reserve to Paradise Beach Reserve. Conjola National Park has forests surrounding beautiful lakes and estuaries, and large areas of woodland and heath that become a mass of wildflowers in spring. The park is ideal for walking, bird watching, swimming, fishing and canoeing.

Much of the town of Sussex Inlet is built around a system of tidal canals, offering water panoramas and easy access for boating enthusiasts. Each of these is a scenic sensation, and the proximity of these varied seascapes gives residents and visitors to Sussex Inlet a great range of leisure options.

EROWAL BAY

Erowal Bay is best fished when the wind is coming from the north, as it can get very rough during a southerly blow. Not only can you fish out of a boat, but there are plenty of spots to fish from the shore too. If you drive down to the boat ramp at the northern end of the bay, you can fish here at all times of the day, although better results will come in the early morning and late afternoon. During the warmer months of the year, the surface action from bream, flathead and whiting can be mind blowing.

The depth varies and there are a number of dropoffs, cockle and weed beds. The 3 boat ramps that are situated there give easy access to many a great spot.

If the breeze is coming from the north, you could try drifting, starting from the shallows in the north and going right through the bay. Weighted soft plastics and blades are the go if lure fishing, but if you are a bait angler, try using pink nippers, half pilchards and strips of tuna and mullet.

THE DROPOFF

This whole stretch of shoreline along the south eastern side can be trolled for tailor and salmon on the edge of the dropoff, or you could work baits, soft plastics and blades from the edge of the weed beds to around 5m in depth. Flathead, flounder, bream, whiting, tailor, tarwhine, snapper and the odd mulloway can be caught while fishing this area.

THE ARTIFICIAL REEFS

The artificial reefs here have been constructed using Reef Balls, and are randomly placed. This area produces yellowtail, mullet, bream, whiting, flounder, snapper, tarwhine and mulloway. For more information on the GPS position of the reefs, go to http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fisheries/recreational/saltwater/artificial-reefs/st-georges-basin

SANCTUARY POINT

This shallow, small bay is another place worth fishing when the wind is from the north. Try working the shoreline with hidden weight soft plastics and hardbodies. As you get to deeper water, try working blades across the bottom.

This is also a great place for the shore-based angler who doesn’t mind wading out to the edge of deeper water. Pink nippers can be found here as well.

THE ISLANDS

The water depth around both islands is very shallow, but at times will hold good concentrations of bream, flathead, whiting, mullet and garfish. This area usually fires during the warmer months of year on surface lures and lightly weighted soft plastics.

Whether you are bait fishing or chucking a few soft plastics or blades, this is one of the most productive spots in the Basin. I have found that the slower you work the recommended lures, the better the results.

BASIN VIEW

A great boat ramp here gets you easy access to Wandandian Creek, Tullarwalla Lagoon, and the rest of The Basin. You can also shore fish from this area, and the ramp has a small jetty beside it. It’s a great place to trap a few poddy mullet for live bait.
COCKLE BEDS
The entrance to this small bay has a number of cockle beds, broken rubble, weed beds and sand flats. Work the shoreline and middle sections for bream, flattie, whiting, trevally, tailor, mullet and flounder.

SWAN BAY
There are so many places to fish in this bay. There are a number of cockle beds and broken reefs in deep water, weed beds, oyster beds, and sandy patches close to shore, and sometimes it is hard to make up your mind which one to start on!

It's a great spot to work surface lures during the warmer months of the year. There are a couple of shallow creeks worth a look when the tide is at its highest. Bream, flattie, flounder, whiting, snapper, mulloway, mullet and garfish frequent this bay at times.

THE INLET
The water drops off here from the main channel of Sussex Inlet to around 8-9m. It is a very popular spot on the run-in tide for both lure and bait anglers. If you are going to anchor up here and bait fish, I would strongly advise the use of a steady stream of berley. This will bring in and keep the fish at the back of your boat. For a berley mixture I usually use bread, chopped up old prawns and pilchards.

FAIRWAY CRESCENT
You can gain access to the shore here to target luderick, mullet and garfish, which school up during the cooler months of the year. It seems to work best on either tide. The top bait for luderick is local weed, but this can be very hard to get, so I would suggest you harvest weed or cabbage somewhere else and bring it with you. Remember to use berley to increase your chances.

SUSSEX INLET CANALS
This area can be a bit tricky to fish, as sometimes it fires and sometimes it doesn't. Try working the pontoons, wharves and boats that are positioned along the edges of the canals. I have found that the first couple of hours of the run-out tide produces the larger fish.

If you drive around here in a car, you will spot a few places that you can fish from the shore. Remember to fish as light as possible and don't forget to take some berley with you.

THE RSL CLUB
This is a great spot to take the kids for a shore-based fish for bream, flathead, whiting, mullet, garfish and luderick. Best results come from using using pink nippers, live bloodworms, and strips of mullet or tuna.

LAND-BASED
The water depth varies at this spot, and is best fished during the latter part of the day. Try using a ball sinker down onto a swivel and a leader of about 1m in length. Beach and bloodworms, pink nippers and poddy mullet are the go for bream, flattie and whiting.

THE POINT
As this is a fairly flat, rocky headland, you will need to take extreme care when fishing off here, as it is exposed to the ocean swells. Bream, drummer, luderick, tailor, salmon, trevally and bonito are targets.

BHERWERRE TO CAVES BEACH
Bherwerre Beach is the longest, highest energy beach on the south coast. The 7km long stretch of sand occupies much of Wreck Bay, a 9km-wide south-facing bay with St Georges Head to the east. The beach is bordered by a 30m high rocky headland in the north and the mouth of Sussex Inlet to the south. The beach can be reached on foot via a 400m long track from the Caves Beach camping area, and in the south off a gravel road that leads to the small camps at Christian Minde and Lumeah.

There seems to be a permanent rip against the northern rocks, where you can target salmon, bream, whiting and the occasionally luderick and drummer. At the southern end the shifting tidal shoals and channels of Sussex Inlet create additional variations in the surf, and once again you can target salmon, bream, whiting and flattie. Just inside the river’s entrance is a good spot for luderick from autumn to winter.

CHARTER OPERATIONS
Greg Reid

ACCOMMODATION
Our stay at Walmer Weekender was great, and we were joined by 5 kayakers.

A glorious sunset from the back of Island View.

The author caught these bream while working blades in the deep and poppers over the shallows.

This whiting engulfed a Strike Pro Blade. Major surgery was required to remove it.

This poor whiting had its tail removed by a very large tailor just at the boat.

A combination of deepwater blading and surface poppering led to the undoing of these fish.

You’ve really got to watch out for those fish-stealing pelicans at the boat ramps.

It doesn’t hurt to release a few fish now and then.

A day on the water with Greg Reid from Bay & Basin Sports Fishing is well worth it. He knows the place like the back of his hand.

Since the removal of commercial fishing in the Basin, the bream have come back in leaps and bounds.

After a morning on the water chasing a few bream with hardbodies, Gary couldn’t get the smile off his face.

This huge croc put the bite on Gary.