

# UNTAMED ANGLING



# Tourism as an alliance between the ancestral and the future





PH: Camilo Duarte

Untamed Angling (UA) is not just an enterprise. It is, first and foremost, a way of seeing the world, built from a strong commitment to the environment and the Indigenous Communities. Marcelo Pérez, CEO and founder with Rodrigo Salles, the project CEO in Brazil, talked with us about the beginning of this fly fishing company that is currently preserving over 12 million hectares of virgin rainforest, generating more resources for the Indigenous Communities than any other enterprise in the continent, protecting their ancestral culture. As the only fly fishing tourism operation with a legal entity within the Amazon, Untamed Angling exemplifies the transformation

from simple sustainability into regeneration and restoration. Their six lodges, three in Bolivia and three in Brazil, accurately portray the principles known these days as “B-Corp”, which, for these guys, are just their natural way of living.

In his eyes you can see the look of the hunter in the steppe, the angler into the current, the guide scanning through the jungle. The look that we have never really lost. When free, at least for a while, from our so-called modern world routine, we can get it back. Marcelo Pérez is talking with us in a hotel in the city of Buenos Aires, one of the biggest and most impressive in all Latin America. He is not looking straight into us or the recorder or

the glass of water on the table, just keeps looking into the horizon. Made us think of his Instagram handle, “jungleangler”, a modest description of the 17 years of non-stop working into the unexplored, one dreamlike universe to be both promoted and protected, that grant him the title of founder.

Marcelo created Untamed Angling in 2001. As a 100% practical man, he claims to have had only one idea in his head. A view on the world that demands a logical understanding of sustainability. It is vital for a long-term business project like this to acknowledge environment and local communities as fundamental pillars for success. A brand new and almost trendy



Marcelo Perez - PH: Camilo Duarte



Untamed Amazon boat in Rio Marié

concept for the majority of the business world, an obvious thing for Marcelo and the backbone of Untamed Angling.

The impressive background of this architect from Argentina was marked by designing and raising supermarkets in record time in Buenos Aires. This experience made it clear for him that “nothing is impossible and it is possible to think out of the box and beyond structure”. Both words, possible and impossible, kept coming up all along our conversation.

“My secret for finishing a construction on time used to be booking a fly fishing trip to some very appealing destination for the day

following the inauguration”. Back then, in addition to fly fishing, Marcelo used to write for a magazine about the places he visited while the idea of building a chain of unique fly fishing destinations was growing in his mind.

The first jungle destination was Tsimane, back in 2007. Untamed Angling was already able to rely on the the input brought by the commercial profile of Rodrigo Salles in Brazil and the experience gained with previous undertakings and destinations like Tierra del Fuego where “in a super wild environment we raised a lodge, brought crazy six-wheel amphibious vehicles, did weird things as usual”, Marcelo recounts with the

knowing smile to those who have been there, defying the elements. Also becoming familiar with the Guaraní ethnic groups from the Yabotí river area in the Missionary jungle awakened his concern about ancestral rights of the communities on their territories. Wielding the ILO-UN 169 Convention, Marcelo started on Tsimane.

Untamed Angling explored the Sécure river in October 2006 and started conversations with local community leaders. To date, three lodges have been raised in a National Park and an Indigenous Territory named TIPNIS, within the regions of Beni and Cochabamba: Agua Negra, Pluma and Sécure, where the Tsimane people apply

their ancestral knowledge to fly fishing.

In Rodrigo’s view, “our relationship with the Indigenous communities is as good as it gets, given that they are putting it all in. It is their territory, their river, their fish, all they possess. Therefore, the fairest thing to do for us is to also give all our effort, time and energy. The team we make together is truly unique”. The pro guide/indigenous guide duo is precisely what best portrays the dynamics of Untamed Angling.

“The involvement of the Indigenous people in Untamed Angling also stands for breaking away from the welfare work of many

organizations that raise funds for protecting them, which is a good thing. But we work alongside the

“One of our biggest challenges is, when faced to opening a new destination, to understand the logistic, social and political complexity of it, and it takes time. We are partners with the Indigenous communities, but the business risk is only ours”.

**Rodrigo Salles**

Indigenous people, together we are generating income, within a productive project of their own”,

Rodrigo Salles tells us. He also explains how the arrival of the Untamed Angling fly fishing projects stopped extractivist and illegal activities from settling in the area: “Our presence helps them preserve their territory because it brings economic resources that they need”.

Rodrigo emphatically points out that an exclusive water permit is key for the success of the Untamed Angling destinations, untouched regions where only those going with Untamed Angling are allowed to fish: “We do know that if we offer the best fly fishing conditions, the project will take on a huge social and environmental load because it is the fishing itself



Comunarios in Tsimane. - PH: Nick Kelley



Our partners - PH: Rafael Costa



what pays all that off”.

The addition of Brazil to the Untamed Angling history happened upon request: the Kayapó Indigenous people learned about the activities with their bolivian brothers and asked Marcelo and Rodrigo to bring the model over and replicate it together. Kendjam was the first lodge to be planned and designed, yet Rio Marié started operating earlier.

With a river 800 km long, the idea of a typical lodge was not all that convincing, until Marcelo came up with a 100% solar charged, ecologic five star boat/hotel. At first just a sketch on a little paper napkin (Marcelo still keeps it), Untamed

Amazon was brought to life by this architect and this engineer with their common drive and commercial skills always aligned. In 137 days it came true and its first sea-

“I can't imagine life without the jungle, it is part of everything I do, even though we are in a big city, in a fair in Denver, our mind is there, our heart is seeing daybreak over there”.

**Rodrigo Salles**

son started.

Pirarucú, the third Untamed Angling destination in Brazil, is loca-

ted in the core area of the Mami-rauá Sustainable Development Reserve. Fly fishing arrived here with the aim of providing sustainability to the right of the Indigenous communities of the core area to exploit their fishing resources, especially the arapaima, without affecting the scientific activities carried out in this ecosystem, one of the most delicate on Earth, in a way that the fish population remains protected. Marcelo Pérez makes it clear that “they turned to us for a solution to a problem, both social and ecologic”. When Marcelo and Rodrigo showed them the rods they were intended to use for catching the monsters from those waters, they almost died laughing. Pérez recounts that the main lea-

der of the the Caboclos challenged Salles: “You catch a pirarucú with that and we sign the contract”. That day, Rodrigo caught and released his first giant.

Even though Untamed Angling designed and worked on at least three other projects during the last 15 years, the company decided to focus on the jungle, called by Marcelo “our natural environment, with the Indigenous people, where we can keep developing and perfecting this model, a much stronger one than those taught at universities under the name of ecotourism or community tourism”.

A natural coexistence between a “money making” business profile

and the world view of cooperation takes place within Untamed Angling, where ecology and ancestral communities play the leading roles. Pérez says that “I understood that, in order to have our own fly fishing destination like this, in a forbidden and inaccessible area, with restrictive fishing rules and almost impossible logistics, we just couldn't face it as “normal” business. The Untamed Angling model was not conceived for generating utilities, but for opening breathtaking places to the world of tourism: “Untamed Angling is a key. My biggest motivation is: it is impossible, ok, we are opening the doors of the impossible”.

Untamed Angling invented a way of making business, in which the

model is defined by bonding with nature and the Indigenous communities. Every year about 300 anglers visit the bolivian Amazon and a slightly smaller number go to Brazil. In alliance with YETI, the season 2018 begins with the announcement of a total eradication of plastic bottles from the six lodges.

Before we met the Untamed Angling leaders, we were still reluctant to think of making good money without harming nature, sharing commercial benefits with Indigenous people and sustaining high-tech innovative projects in wild environments as a real possibility. Those were questions we didn't even get to make. Untamed Angling was the answer ■

"Honestly, the goal was not to generate income for the Indigenous people or protect the rainforest, it was to open a door to the best fly fishing spots in the jungle, which is only possible by working this way, regardless of the fact that I am incapable of working in any other".

**Marcelo Pérez**

"I learned to fish and to love fly fishing with my grandfather, I grew up catching dorado with him. I was a city boy, and at the age of 12 he took me to a Pantanal marsh, to the Mato Grosso, and I saw the virgin rainforest for the first time. The first day, an anaconda passed over my foot and a jaguar watched us from the shore. That trip changed my life".

**Rodrigo Salles**



"I can tell that we were the ones to open a legal door to fly fishing in the jungle, thanks to working in conjunction with the Indian communities, its associations, Government entities, and NGO's in order to gain access to protected waters and achieve unique experiences. Until then, all the other sport fishing tourism operators lack the legal entity to work inside Indigenous lands."

**Rodrigo Salles**

## Rodrigo Salles



Rodrigo Salles in Kendjam

## Marcelo Pérez

"I made it equitable because it is how I am. My line of thought was that if I visit a ranch a thousand hectares big in Patagonia and I want the exclusive rights to fish the waters there, the owner of the ranch will tell me Ok, 50/50. Why would I make a different deal with the Indigenous people if the land belongs to them? If I think long term, I must think of a fair deal, sustainable in time. Establishing an equitable and fair relationship guarantees the longevity of the project."

**Marcelo Pérez**



Marcelo with a arapaima in Pirarucú - PH: Camilo Duarte