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Belize Dive and Marine Conservation

Adventure Relaxation Culture

Trip Name: Belize Dive and Marine Conservation **Trip Code:** BEMC **Duration:** From 7 days

Trip Highlights

- Dive in one of the best dive spots in the world
- The second biggest reef system behind the Great Barrier reef
- Learn to dive whilst taking part in a fantastic conservation programme

Overview

Book before the 31st March, and you'll get a FREE PADI! (Open water, advanced or rescue only)

Belize is home to some of the most beautiful and unspoilt marine life in the world, yet this beauty and tranquillity is under threat. As a volunteer on this fascinating programme, you'll have the opportunity to play your part in vital research survey dives in the waters off the stunning Belizean coastline! If you haven't dived before, don't worry as we'll include a PADI Open Water Dive Course* for you to help you make the most of your time in Belize!

There are many areas of study for the team and volunteers in Belize, some of which include a Lionfish research project, Lobster surveys, Conch surveys, Reef checks, Coral watch and a Whale Shark research project. All of these studies and surveys are collecting extremely valuable information, which is helping to protect the delicate marine life in the area and secure a brighter future for the ecosystems.

It's not all work though, as well as participating in fascinating research dives you'll also have the opportunity to enjoy some fantastic fun dives! You'll also have free time at weekends on the mainland, which you can use to explore some of the other areas of Belize, discover historic Mayan ruins, explore the jungle or visit some of the

neighbouring Caye's for a bit of relaxation. Our friendly local team will be able to make some great suggestions for your free time!

*The PADI Open Water course itself is included in the programme, however you are required to bring along your own manuals for the course. You will also be required to pay an administration fee upon completion of the Open Water Course.

Destination Info

Lots of people are yet to discover Belize, it's a hidden gem in the heart of Central America. Nestled just south of Mexico and next to Guatemala on the Caribbean Sea, Belize is only a short flight from the United States.

The Belizean people are very friendly and polite. Travellers feel welcomed and comfortable and lots of locals, especially in Punta Gorda where our Diving and Marine Conservation programme is based, love to talk to tourists and hear all about other countries and cultures!

The Belize barrier reef, a UNESCO world heritage site, is the second largest in the world and boasts an incredible spectacle of marine life.

Itinerary

This is the perfect programme for those looking for the ultimate diving escape, combined with the opportunity to be involved in vital marine conservation work on the Belizean coastline.

For those who are complete novices to diving, a PADI Open Water diving course will be included* for you at the beginning of your stay in Belize, giving you a fantastic new skill to take away with you! If you are already a qualified diver you'll be able to get stuck in, straight away, to the fascinating research survey dives which form the basis for this unique programme! Each survey topic is different but they all have the same aim and purpose, to preserve the wonderful marine life of Belize that lives off its beautiful shores and more specifically help the Government of Belize to enforce the preservation area of Sapodilla Cayes Marine Park (SCMR) where the project work is primarily focused and located.

*The PADI Open Water course itself is included in the programme, however you are required to bring along your own manuals for the course. You will also be required to pay an administration fee upon completion of the Open Water Course.

As part of your time in Belize you will be helping out with vital marine conservation work.

The programme is focused on 6 primary research study areas which will be central to your time spent in Belize.

Lionfish Project – Lionfish are indigenous to the Red Sea and Indo Pacific oceans, not the Atlantic Caribbean belt yet this is exactly where they are now being found. In their natural habitats Lionfish feed on a variety of species which doesn't cause a threat to the environment and their natural predators are present which help to keep numbers under control. However in the Atlantic Caribbean belt, this balance does not exist and as such Lionfish numbers are spiralling out of control, posing a major threat to the species that are key to the local environment such as parrotfish, juvenile groupers and crustaceans. Should Lionfish numbers in Belizean waters continue to grow at the current rate, it could spell disaster for fish and lobster stocks in the area.

Whale Shark Project – As with many species of Shark, the Whale Shark is encountering a steep decline in population and may soon even be facing complete extinction, if steps are not taken now to protect this incredible creature. Due to their gentle nature Whale Sharks are an easy target for fisheries hunting them for meat and fins, which are highly sort after in the international shark fin trade. The Whale Shark Project works in partnership with Project AWARE which is working to build a global database to help record migration patterns for the species and in turn help with efforts to protect them. The team also submit all data on whale shark sightings to the Gulf and Caribbean Sharks and Rays Programme.

Caribbean Spiny Lobster – Lobster is a species of high commercial value throughout the Caribbean and beyond, as a result they are a victim of over fishing with population numbers on a rapid decline over recent years. In an effort to try and replenish stocks and boost population numbers, many Caribbean countries now impose open and closed lobster fishing seasons; the closed season normally falls when females release their eggs into the water column. In Belize the closed season is in force from February to June, during this time lobster is banned from restaurant menus and fishing. Together with the Belize Depart of Fisheries, the project is monitoring lobster population numbers, concentrating on migratory paths to the continental shelf where females release their eggs.

Conch – Conch is another species which is falling victim to over-fishing in Belizean waters because of its high commercial value. There is a large amount of debate surrounding the areas in which Conch breeds and whether shallow or deep waters are most common. Due to an increase in fishing levels in Belizean waters, there are theories suggesting that both are true, as Conch are forced into the safety of deeper waters to breed.

To be able to monitor the migration patterns and help protect the species, each conch is fitted with plastic cable ties each with an individual number that relates to that specific Conch. Once they have been labelled, each subsequent observation of Conch is recorded to indicate migration patterns at varying depths as well as recording any directional migrations patterns that may occur.

Reef check – Reef checks are carried out on a global scale all over the world and are key to monitoring the health of coral reefs. There are three identifying categories used to monitor the health of coral reefs including Fish, Invertebrates and Substrates, for each category there are a number of key indicators which are monitored to help determine the health of the coral reef system.

Within the Sapodilla Cayes, where the project is based, there are currently five different study areas where reef check surveys are carried out; each site is strategically placed to ensure the entire marine reserve is covered to provide a good resolution of results.

Coral watch – These are carried out to monitor the health and condition of coral reefs around the world. This aspect of the programme involves simple non-evasive techniques for monitoring the levels of coral bleaching and the assessment of coral health, using colour charts based on the exact colour of bleached as well as healthy corals. Each square of the colour chart corresponds to a concentration of symbionts in the coral tissue which is directly linked to the health of the coral. All data collected using this method around the world is collated into a central database which is used to compare the condition of coral reefs on a worldwide scale.

Lionfish – Since November 2009 the number of Lionfish in the local area has rapidly increased and now divers on this project are spotting Lionfish on every dive – something that was a rare occurrence a few years ago. In an effort to control the number of Lionfish in the area and limit the impact they are having on indigenous species, all divers will carry a spear on each dive and remove as many as they can!

Some of the fish speared during dives are dissected to study their stomach contents to monitor their diet.

As well as spearing the Lionfish, the team in Belize are also trying to introduce Lionfish as a food source to Moray Eels to further assist in keeping population numbers under control. If Moray Eels are spotted then divers will feed the speared Lionfish to them.

Whale Shark Project – It's not possible to guarantee an encounter with a Whale Shark but if you are lucky enough to come across one of these majestic creatures on a dive you will need to record as much information as possible. Each Whale Shark has its own unique pattern of pale blue stripes and spots, so you'll be asked to take photographs (without flash) and make notes about the skin pattern, size and other identifying factors to form a detailed record.

Following any Whale Shark encounters, you'll be asked to submit the sightings data and images to an online database that can be accessed worldwide. In order to participate in this Whale Shark project you will be required to pledge to follow the Whale Shark code of conduct.

Lobster – Using the rover diver technique, divers will conduct lobster surveys to obtain vital data on lobster population numbers in the area. Surveys are normally conducted along walls in groups of approximately 6 divers, the diver at the bottom of the line will normally be at about 25m and the person at the top of the line on the top of the wall. Additionally 2 divers carrying slates and a measuring stick will coax lobsters out of their holes, in order to collect the required data; they first determine the sex of the lobster followed by the total length as well as the length of the tail, if a female lobster is found, divers will look to see whether eggs are being carried. This process normally continues for a 100m section along a wall, with the diver at the deepest depth being rotated through others in the group.

Conch – In pairs, divers and snorkelers go down to sandy areas where large conch populations are found. One buddy is given callipers and a slate while the other will have a measuring device and tags which are used to mark the Conch. You will need to record the lip thickness (to determine the age and sexual maturity), size of spiral, total size of conch, habitat, depth and tag number. Once tagging projects have been completed, the team conducts a number of survey dives each week throughout the year to locate tagged Conch, taking notes of the tag number and location at each sighting.

All of the data collected during these incredibly important surveys is allowing the team to map out the key, biologically important, areas of the Marine Reserve in which they operate, particularly with regard to population numbers and activity. As a result of some of the information collected, the Belizean Government implemented 'no take zones' in the Sapodilla Cayes Marine Reserve; this is already having a positive impact on population numbers and in turn is also helping boost populations of species that feed on Conch, including the Spotted Eagle Ray.

Reef check – The team leader will set out a 100m transect line, which 3 buddy teams will use for the survey, one team will count fish, one for invertebrates and one for substrates. The fish survey will be carried out first to ensure that the fish do not get disturbed. Working in buddy pairs, one buddy will be timing whilst the other counts the number of indicator fish in a 5 metre cube area for 90 seconds; this process is repeated until the length of the transect has been completed. The second team will survey invertebrates, with one buddy on each side of the

transect line, they will be responsible for counting the number of invertebrates inside a 2.5 metre width on each side of the transect line; during the survey you'll be looking under rocks and ledges and into holes to ensure you haven't missed anything. The role of the third team will be to focus on the substrates, one buddy will be required to drop a plumb line with a small weight attached onto the transect line markings at 50cm intervals, once the line has settled a hand sign will be given to the other buddy who will need to record the data on the slate. During the surveys the team leader will records a site description, paying particular attention to any anchor or coral damage as well as any visible disease etc.

Coral Watch – As part of coral watch you will be diving in buddy pairs using a colour chart along with a slate and pencil. Using the roving technique, you'll simply be matching the coral colour to the health monitoring chart as well as identifying the species where possible and recording the results on the slate. Following the dive, all data collected will be collated and submitted to the data sheet which will be made available on the project website and can be accessed worldwide and used to compare the varying condition of coral around the world.

Important note: Not all of the surveys and methods are guaranteed to feature as part of your programme in Belize, some activities are seasonal while others can be dependent on the length of stay, dive experience and the number of participants on the programme. Our in-country team will give you an overview of the activities that you are likely to be involved in during your stay as part of your orientation at the beginning of your stay in Belize.

Be prepared for some early starts in Belize during the week as you'll be rising with the sun each morning and after a nice cup of coffee, some fresh fruit and a biscuit or two, you'll be off on your first dive of the day! After your first dive, you'll have worked up an appetite for the delicious Belizean breakfast that will be waiting for you when you get back from your dive. After breakfast there will be time for conservation training, PADI tuition or just relaxing in a hammock with a good book whilst enjoying the beautiful surroundings.

The second dive of the day is normally mid-morning and with most dive sites being only about 10 minutes or so away from the island, you'll head back to base afterwards for a hearty lunch.

The third dive of the day is usually mid-afternoon and whenever possible (weather permitting of course) at least 1 night dive will be offered each week to those who are interested. All volunteers wishing to participate in night dives MUST bring their own dive torch.

The evenings on the island in Belize are normally a low key affair, watching the sunset over the Caribbean Sea

with a cold beer or rum punch in hand to end the day, followed by a delicious dinner and good chat with your fellow divers and new found friends.

It's not all work on this programme though, as well as taking part in the amazing dives during the week on this programme you'll have free time each weekend, giving you the perfect opportunity to explore more of what Belize has to offer.

Accommodation is included at the weekend (meals are not included) in the programme however the weekends are a great opportunity to see this amazing country. The team in Belize can help arrange activities over the weekend for you and give some great recommendations on places to visit during your time off – Belize has so much to offer!

Accommodation

During your time at the project you'll be staying in beautiful cabanas with sea views; you'll have your own cabana but bathroom facilities are shared. Accommodation is basic but comfortable and is all you'll need after a long day of diving.

Accommodation at weekends is included in the programme, but why not take the opportunity to use your free time to travel in Belize and experience some of its fascinating sites and sounds. The team at the project are able to assist you in arranging weekend accommodation elsewhere if you wish and have some great recommendations for all budgets.

Meals

Three meals per day will be included and prepared for you by the team when you are on the island. Meals will generally consist of local ingredients and plenty of fresh fish! Most dietary requirements can be catered for, but please ensure that you make us aware prior to departure, as well as the in-country team when you arrive.

At weekends, meals are not included but this is a great opportunity to explore other areas of Belize and try out some of the great local restaurants. The team in Belize will be able to give you some great recommendations on

places to visit during your free time.

What's Included

- Accommodation
- Meals when on the island
- Castaway style island stays
- All diving including recreational dives. Normally 2-4 dives per day subject to weather conditions
- Dive equipment (excluding wetsuits, booties, masks and snorkels)
- PADI Open Water Diver course
- Training for survey techniques and methodologies
- Support and guidance from in-country team
- Airport transfers from Punta Gorda

What's Not Included

- Flights
- Travel insurance (required to participate in the programme)
- Diving insurance (required to participate in the programme)
- Visas
- Meals at weekends and when not on the island
- Items of a personal nature including spending money
- US$50 administration fee for those doing the PADI Open Water Course
- Marine reserve fee – US$25 per week or US$75 per month

What to Pack

This kit list is specific to the dive trip you are undertaking so you will need to bring all dive kit suggested below. For the other stuff though, this is a guide to helping you plan what you may need to take and you might not need all items listed below.

Personal Admin

- Passport, insurance certificates and personal documentation
- Photocopies of all the above to be left at home with your next of kin
- Spending money
- Cash for airport departure tax
- Proof of inoculations (please speak to your GP about necessary immunisations)
- Guidebook on country
- Photocopy of your passport

General

- High factor suntan lotion.
- After-sun lotion.
- Lip salve (those with sun protection are best).
- Dark sunglasses.
- Mosquito repellent recommended with DEET (available to buy in Belize)

- Small travel alarm clock.
- Torch with spare batteries.
- Swiss army knife (optional)
- Wash towel and beach towel.
- Camera.
- The in-country team are happy for our customers to bring underwater housing for those who are
- interested/passionate about photography.
- Power adapter (US).
- Standard medical kit i.e. re-hydration tablets, anti histamine, headache tablets etc.
- Books.
- Playing cards.
- CDs for the evenings if you have any favourites!

Clothing

- Swimwear, at least a couple of bikinis or shorts as you will be in the water most days.
- Shorts, at least a couple of pairs.
- Vest tops/t-shirts.
- Long trousers for the evenings.
- Thin long sleeved fleece for the evenings (only during winter months).
- Walking boots or trainers for jungle visits, walking etc.
- Thin waterproof jacket pref. breathable. (thicker for the boat during winter months)
- Something light to sleep in i.e. thin nightdress for women.
- Flip flops and/or sandals.
- Sunhat or head scarf.

Dive kit

- Long wetsuit 3mm is recommended, shorties may be OK for some people
- Booties
- A dive mask and snorkel
- Dive torch – a must if you wish to participate in night dives
- Dive computer or dive watch if you wish to use one (these are not compulsory but are not supplied)
- PADI certification cards (if applicable)
- PADI log book.
- Non divers need to purchase the PADI Open Water manual and Recreational Dive Planner
- Divers planning courses need to bring the PADI manual for the planned course

The rest of the dive kit will be supplied.

It is also advisable, but not mandatory, that you purchase the Paul Humann Reef Fish, Reef Coral and Reef Creatures identification books. These can be obtained on line or you can try a local dive shop. These are great reference books which will increase your knowledge of local species. It will be helpful if you can familiarise yourself with the main fish groups prior to your arrival, but not essential. Nb. These books are heavy so the team don't expect you to take them with you, unless you have space, they have copies on the island for you to use during your stay.

Medical Kit

- Hand sanitiser and wet wipes
- Anti-malarial tablets if required
- Personal First Aid Kit
- Personal medication e.g. prescription drugs/inhalers

- Painkillers
- Contact lenses and solution if necessary
- Plasters
- Lip Balm with SPF
- Tweezers (not in hand luggage!)
- Scissors (not in hand luggage!)
- Sanitary products for women if necessary
- Antihistamine tablets
- Rehydration salt sachets
- Ear Plugs – in case you sleep close to a snorer!
- If you suffer from seasickness think about tablets for boat based research

Basic medical items can be bought locally, however you should certainly bring with you an ample supply of any medicine or drug which you use regularly.

Minimum Age

Minimum age 18 years.

Flights

Your flight to Belize should arrive at Punta Gorda Air Strip on your programme start date, and your return flight should be arranged for your programme end date.

To book your flights, please contact your travel advisor who will do their best to get you the best deal on the day. Please provide them with your full name as it is stated in your passport. Before you make the call please make sure you have your required departure dates, return dates and other details you may require.

Please note: If you are flying to Belize via the USA you will need to obtain Travel Authorisation by registering online through the Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (ESTA) no later than 72 hours before departure. This is compulsory and will cost USD$14 to register. To register, please visit: www.esta.cbp.dhs.gov

It is important that once you have booked your flights you add these details to your Online account, or alternatively you can contact us with your departure date, the flight number and arrival time at your destination.

FAQs

1. **Do I need to take a sleeping bag?**
   No, all bedding will be provided for you.

2. **Do I need to take a mosquito net?**
   Mosquito nets aren't provided so if you want one then you will have to take one with you. They don't have too many bugs as a nice sea breeze normally keeps them at bay!

3. **Will there be a safety deposit box/safe available?**
   No safety deposit box will be available however you will be on a private island which has a caretaker at all times so all belongings are secure!

Support & Advice

Your safety is paramount which is why all our programs have been visited and assessments have been conducted to ensure any major risks have been minimized.

In addition, you will have access to a 24 hour emergency contact number so you can contact one of our staff at any time should you need to. In addition our overseas partners and coordinators are on hand in-country to assist you.

Financial Security

We know that the last thing you want to worry about when you're planning your trip of a lifetime is whether your money is in safe hands. As a leading global gap year provider it's our job to make sure your finances are secure, so when you book with us you can be confident that we do just that.

Real Gap Experience is part of TUI Travel Plc, one of the largest travel organisations in the world, and these days in the travel industry, large means secure.

Insurance

Whether you're traveling for two weeks or two years, trekking the Amazon in Ecuador or on safari in Africa, insurance is an essential part of your adventure and will help you enjoy your travels, secure in the knowledge that you have the protection you need. In fact, everyone traveling with us must have adequate cover before their trip begins.

Of course you are free to buy insurance from any provider, however at Real Gap Experience, we have partnered with World Nomads to offer policies that have been specifically designed to meet the needs of global travel. If you think you're already covered by an existing policy, such as those offered by credit card providers, check the policy wording very carefully to ensure it covers you for your Real Gap Experience.

For more information on travel insurance please contact us to speak to one of our travel advisors.

Money Matters

In Belize the currency is the Belize Dollar (BZD; symbol BZ$), which is subdivided into 100 cents. Coins come in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 25 and 50 cents and 1 Belize Dollar. Notes come in denominations of 2, 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100 Belize Dollars.

The US Dollar is also accepted as widely accepted. The best credit cards to take are American Express, Visa or MasterCard which are accepted by larger business and at ATMs (cajeros automáticos) in all but the smallest towns. Most businesses will charge an extra 5% service charge for payment with a credit Card.

Meal, Inexpensive Restaurant $4.88
Domestic Beer (0.5 litre draught) $1.69
Coke/Pepsi (0.33 litre bottle) $0.92
Water (0.33 litre bottle) $0.70

(Prices quoted in US Dollar)

Passports and Visas

All nationalities require a full passport that must be valid for 6 months beyond the intended length of stay. It is your

responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, if one is necessary, in accordance with the regulations of the country you are to visit. The information offered below is to help you with that process. We are not responsible for the actions of local immigration and customs officials, whether at points of entry or otherwise, and any subsequent effects.

For stays of up to 30 days, citizens of the following countries are not required to hold a visa when visiting for tourist purposes only;

Andorra, Antigua & Barbuda, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Barbados, Belgium, Botswana, Brunei, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominica, El Salvador, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Holy See, Honduras, Hong Kong, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Kiribati, Latvia, Lesotho, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Spain, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, Tonga, Trinidad & Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Tuvalu, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Western Samoa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

All other nationalities should consult their nearest Guatemala Embassy or High Commission.

Cultural Considerations

Greetings

Belize is a very informal country with a relaxed laid back style of life. It is polite to acknowledge people on the street with a simple “Good Morning” or “Good Evening”. Belizeans are extremely friendly and genuinely interested in foreign visitors to their country. Be prepared for people to stop you on the streets, in restaurants and bars and ask where you are from and what brings you to town.

Social Hierarchy

The family is hugely important to Belizeans. It is common for three generations of families to be living together under the same roof. It is a way to increase the household income and to help one another. As you would expect, older people are treated with great respect. Women are traditionally responsible for bringing up the children, although this has begun to change in recent years. Men are still very proud of their machismo and view whistling and “hollering” at women as a compliment. Ladies, take it in your stride. You may be subjected to catcalls and the best way to deal with these is simply to ignore them!

Religion

The dominant religions in Belize are Roman Catholic and Protestants. However, Belize is a complete melting pot of cultures and religions with sizeable populations of Baptists, Methodists, Mennonites and Jehovah’s Witnesses, especially in Southern Belize,

Clothing

On the island it is perfectly acceptable and very practical to live in swimwear, t-shirts and shorts. However, when in town, it is advisable for men to wear t-shirts and ladies to not walk around in bikinis. Short skirts and tight clothing is

the norm for many Belizean women but ladies, be sensible, if you don't want a lot of unwanted attention then dress a little more conservatively.

With the warm climate and humidity, we advise that you pack a selection of lightweight clothing. The weather can sometimes be a little unpredictable so a light, long sleeve top is advisable especially during the winter months. A waterproof jacket is essential for those unexpected showers and for the boat journey.

Smoking, Alcohol and Drugs

Smoking and drinking is acceptable in Belize, and readily available. During the diving week, whilst we want you to have fun, we need you to be safe and don't advise diving after consuming a lot of alcohol. Of course you are on holiday, we expect you to enjoy a beer or 2 at the end of the diving day, but we advise to only have a couple of drinks if you intend to take the early morning dive the next day. At the weekends your time is your own and there is lots of great live music and a good fun social scene in town ready to be explored.

It is absolutely forbidden to bring drugs into Belize or to purchase or consume any whilst here. Always keep an eye on your luggage while travelling. Never bring anyone else's luggage through customs. If you get caught there is little chance that you will walk away without punishment. As in most countries, Belize has very strict rules when it comes to the possession of drugs. All drugs, including "soft" drugs like marijuana, which are readily available, are ILLEGAL. Do not be fooled by the image of a laid back Caribbean town. You will find the youths, especially young men, smoking marijuana and they will tell you it is not a problem! IT IS!! If you are caught with one marijuana cigarette you can get up to 5 years imprisonment! Please do NOT use any illegal substances whilst travelling – it is not worth the risk and is not acceptable at the project.

Tipping

Staff on the project work extremely hard to ensure you get the most out of your experience, a tip is always greatly appreciated! The same goes for in the bars and restaurants in town. If you get good service then a small tip (typically 10%) goes a long way. If you are not impressed with the service then don't feel obliged to leave a tip, it should be to reward good service.

Vaccinations & Health

Travel health can often be something people forget about before going away, but a little preparation and knowledge can go a long way to help you stay fit and healthy while abroad. The risks to your health whilst travelling will vary depending on your general health and the type of activities you are going to be partaking in and the length of your stay.

Since we are not medically qualified, it is recommended that you consult with your Doctor or a recognised Travel Medical Advisory Service who will assess your particular health risks before recommending vaccines and/or anti-malarial tablets and advising you on what precautions you should take.

Safety

Although Belize City is a notorious crime hot spot, the rest of the country is generally pretty safe. Punta Gorda is a small Caribbean fishing town and is know for being a safe, laid back town.

The Belizeans are very friendly towards tourists and harassment is not an issue. In fact, there is a law in Belize where locals can get up to a $2,000 fine or 6 months in prison if a tourist reports them for harassment!

However, be aware that Belize is still a third world country and there will always be opportunists ready to make a quick dollar, it is best to be vigilant and not carry huge amounts of cash.

This information is not supposed to scare you or put you off, it is just to make sure that you are informed and can take the appropriate precautions where necessary.

We advise that you check your government's advice before travelling abroad. For UK, American and Australian customers please see the relevant links below;

UK: www.fco.gov.uk
USA: www.travel.state.gov
Australia: www.smartraveller.gov.au

ATM Theft

It is very likely that you will need to withdraw cash at some point during your travels. Please be cautious when withdrawing money from an ATM and ensure that you are vigilant of other people near the ATM, especially those that offer unsolicited assistance if your card is detained. It has been recognised that individuals are operating unlawful withdrawals by placing 'traps' in ATMs whereby personal bank cards are being detained, causing the victim to believe their card transaction has not been completed, and leaving their bank card in the ATM which is then later retrieved by the thief. To avoid this it is advised that you withdraw cash inside the bank at the counter. You will need your passport and driving licence and they will direct you to the teller to obtain your funds. It is more time consuming than using the ATM, but is the most secure way of withdrawing money.

Food & Drink

The food is plentiful and a real highlight of the trip. During your time on the island you will be extremely well fed with a delicious fusion of local and international dishes. Meals are all freshly cooked from wholesome locally sourced ingredients and wherever possible organic produce. All dietary requirements are catered for.

As you will soon discover Belizeans love to eat! On the mainland you will find there are many food stalls and restaurants. Prices vary depending on the restaurant you choose. Belizean places serving bbq chicken, stewed chicken, rice and beans, tamales etc are much cheaper than those serving American food. A typical American meal costs circa $20 Bz $10US (£7) and a typical Belizean meal can be as little as $6-10 Bz $3-5US (£2-£3). Belize has great 'street' food, which is cheap and delicious!

A typical Belizean breakfast consists of eggs, beans and tortilla or fried jacks (the Belize equivalent to fried bread!) Chicken or fish with rice and beans or beans and rice (there is a difference!!!) will be on most menus and you must try the homemade hot pepper sauce, it varies from place to place but is always guaranteed to have a kick!!

Drinks

All the normal soft drinks are available and popular throughout Belize. Fresh watermelon, lime or orange juice is available at most eateries along with the very popular and healthy coconut water!

Alcohol-wise, Rum is the drink of choice for most Belizeans, served with cranberry, orange or pineapple juice,

coconut water or coke. Wine is available in some shops and restaurants, usually Chilean, but it is expensive. Beer and Stout are widely available and there is a small range to choose from. Some bars serve a wider variety of mixed drinks and cocktails.

Public Holidays

To view a list of the public holidays for Belize, please see the link below:

www.worldtravelguide.net/belize/public-holidays

When planning your trip, you should be aware of the major national holidays celebrated throughout the country. Many schools, government offices, stores and banks are closed on National Holidays. Please note that there may be slight date variations for some of the holidays each year and that the list is not exhaustive.

Weather

Belize has a comfortable tropical climate with an average annual temperature of 29C (84F). The island sea breezes provide cooling relief even in the hottest summer months while winters can be cool but never very cold. In short, the climate is pretty much near perfect.

Even in winter the temperature in Belize rarely falls below 60°F (16°C), while throughout summer the temperature is consistently around 86°F (30°C). Humidity is also fairly consistent at around 85 percent.

Belize has two, rather than four seasons, rainy and dry.

Belize’s dry season, falling between February and May, has significantly lower rainfall than the rest of the year, and when rain does come it is usually in mild, short bursts.

June through December marks Belize’s wet season. Wild storms associated with the Caribbean occur, usually in the late afternoons. The most frequent rainfall usually occurs in June or early July and is punctuated by a break in late July or August known as the "little dry."

Hurricane season in the Caribbean is officially June through to November. However, hurricanes rarely hit Southern Belize. Hurricanes are more predictable in October when this project does not run.

Visibility for diving is excellent from March through June; on some days it can get as good as 30-40 metres! The visibility in the Caribbean is always good and the diving is always top class, with water temperatures averaging 28 degrees and dropping no lower than a comfortable 26 degrees.

Time

Guatemalan time is seven hours behind GMT.

Electricity

Electricity in Belize is 110 Volts, alternating at 60 cycles per second. If you travel to Belize with a device that does

not accept 110 Volts at 60 Hertz, you will need a voltage converter.

Outlets in Belize generally accept 2 types of plug:

Flat blade plug

Two parallel flat pins with ground pin

Trip Note Disclaimer

The information contained in this trip note has been compiled with great care and is provided in good faith. Any itinerary featured is correct at time of release. However, our itineraries may change as make improvements that result from travellers' comments, our own research or from time to time as a result of reommended travel advice.

You can rest assured that it is always our goal to provide you with the most rewarding trip and experience ever!

Our Details

If you have any questions about this trip please do not hesitate to contact us and we'll be happy to answer them.

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