

## CORAL ISLANDS & MAYAN CAVES

A Classic Sea Kayak & Snorkel Journey Along the Belize Barrier Reef *plus* a day of caves & jungles

### Trip Details

6 days / 7 nights

### Price

\$1579 USD & CAD

### Departures 2008

Dec 20, 27

### Departures 2009

Feb 14, 21

Mar 7, 14, 28

Apr 4

### Activities

Sea Kayaking  
(paddling & sailing),  
Snorkeling, Fishing,  
Cave Exploration,  
Hiking, Birding,  
Photography,  
Natural History  
Interpretation

### Accommodations

1 night forest cabana  
1 night island lodge  
4 nights beach camping  
1 night hotel



### The Setting...

The Barrier Reef, which runs the full length of the Belizean coastline, is considered one of the richest marine ecosystems on earth. The 185 mile (300 km) long reef runs from 10 to 25 miles offshore, is the longest continuous reef in the Caribbean, and the second longest in the world. Along the Barrier Reef are over 225 cayes, ranging from small, sand-fringed islands perched along the reef's edge, to larger islands of partially submerged mangroves.

Historically, ships avoided this area of the Caribbean because of inaccurate charts and the difficulty of navigating the shallow reef-strewn waters. Teeming with brilliantly colored fish, sea grass beds and patch reefs, the reef systems have not seen nearly the level of human impact as witnessed in Mexico to the north and Honduras to the south. We travel in the less developed southern regions of Belize's Barrier Reef, which remains a near pristine marine ecosystem and is unparalleled in the Caribbean. It is in this region that we find the best sea kayaking and snorkelling. Our base of operation, in the southern coastal community of Dangriga, is the ideal launching point for us to explore this spectacular region.

The Mayan archaeology cave, Actun Tunichil Muknal (Cave of the Stone Sepulcher), is set within lush tropical rainforest on the boundary of the Cayo District. The region is characterized by mature karst geology sculpted by the many flowing creeks and rivers in the area. The cave contains thousands year old pottery, carved slate stelae where Mayan elites cut themselves with obsidian blades to collect their blood and offer it to the gods. A Calcite coating formed from dripwater has encased many of these artefacts over the centuries, including the calcified remains of a young woman who researchers believe was sacrificed to the rain god, Chac, during a prolonged period of drought.



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## A Note About the Ecology...

### Flora & Fauna

On our journey to Actun Tunichil Muknal, we travel through broadleaf, semi-deciduous forest. All around us are signs of life, from the tropical birds like the keel-billed toucan orepndola and mot-mots to the mammals that inhabit the forest floor, including Belize's largest herbivore, Baird's tapir.

The ecology of the Belizean coast is a complex combination of coral reefs and sand flats with extensive turtle grass and mangrove ranges. The Barrier Reef shelters the Belizean coastline from the rougher open waters of the Caribbean sea. It acts as a huge break-water, holding in the sand, resulting in the beautiful islands forested with coconut palms, sea grape and coco plum, and in the remarkable protected reef structures. The 'breakwater' action also enables the diverse ecosystems of the mangrove and turtle grass to flourish. These tangled partially submerged "forests" provide essential feeding and nursing habitat for hundreds of species of fish, shell-fish, reptiles, marine mammals, and birds.

While traveling along the Barrier Reef, paddling from caye to caye among the many "patch" reefs, we will have the opportunity to view a diverse range of sea-life and tropical birds, such as: bonefish, angel and parrot fish, stingrays, conger, moray eels, goatfish, just to name a few. Trailing a line from our kayaks, we may hook a barracuda, grouper, kingfish, or snapper. On the water we see various birds including osprey (the billy hawk), royal terns, boobies, frigate birds, hawks, mangrove warblers, and white crowned pigeons. Throughout the reef and along the coast are nesting sites for logger-head, green and hawksbill turtles. If we're lucky, we may see them while out snorkelling. We will definitely have a chance to see and sample the main staple for Belizean fishermen—the spiny lobster (in season) and the queen conch.

## Recommended Tour-books:

Eltringham, Peter. 2004  
Belize: The Rough Guide. London. Penguin Publishers.

Perottet, Tony. 2004  
Belize: Insight Guide  
Singapore. Houghton Mifflin Publishers.  
-Great photographs and written by a Belizean!

## Recommended Reading:

Rabinowitz, Alan. 2000  
Jaguar, One Man's Struggle to Establish the First Jaguar Sanctuary  
New York. Island Press.

## Typical Daily Itinerary:



**Day 0:** Arrive at the Belize International Airport where you are met by our representative and transferred to the Tropical Education Center, adjacent to the Belize Zoo. Here we are able to explore the surrounding savannah forest through their network of interpretative trails and wildlife viewing platforms. There is also a great interpretive center, which details the diverse ecology of Belize, and is an ideal starting point for the adventure ahead. After checking into our rustic accommodations, we are welcomed to Belize with dinner where we have a chance to meet our fellow travelers. *This day is your day to arrive before the trip starts, meet your fellow travelers and acclimatize to your new tropical environment.* Transfers from the airport and lodging are included.

**Accommodations:** (Lodge) **Meals:** Dinner is included on this night

**Day 1:** We rise early to start today's extraordinary journey, which takes us deep into the Mayan underworld known as Xibalba (shil-balba), a mythical realm inhabited by spirits and powerful gods, an underworld of untold fears and dreams where Mayan shaman, in supposition to the gods, ventured into darkness to conduct their secretive rituals. As we venture underground into the caves, we learn from our guides how the caves

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played an important role in the ancient Maya civilization and about ongoing archaeological research taking place underground in Belize. After our jungle and cave adventure, we travel through the Maya Mountains along the Hummingbird Route to meet up with our motor boat charter awaiting to take us to the barrier reef from the coastal town of Dangriga. This 45 minute trip takes us to our island lodge perched on the eastern edge of the southern Barrier Reef. We arrive at in time to settle in, have dinner and plan our next days on the barrier reef.

**Accommodations:** (Island Lodge)      **Meals:** B,L,D

**Day 2:** On the cayes we rise early to the sounds of the sea. After breakfast and an island orientation your guides teach you entry level to advanced snorkelling and then the remainder of the morning is snorkelling from the caye. In the afternoon, guides begin with kayaking fundamentals and review ocean touring techniques with the whole group, including how to pack our boats. After a short paddle, we arrive to our first camp already set-up, giving us time to settle into our camp, enjoy a fine meal cooked and guides are always ready to provide instruction on the finer points of horizontal hammock surfing.

**Accommodations:** ( Beach Camping)      **Meals:** B,L,D

**Day 3-5:** We sail and paddle south along the barrier reef camping on idyllic tropical cayes, usually traveling 5-8 miles a day along the reef (with some lay-over days). We have plenty of time to snorkel, fish and enjoy the scenery and marine life of the Caribbean. We explore many different regions of the reef including the inner and outer walls, patch and fringing reefs, mangrove ranges and protected lagoons. Our traveling routes often cross those of the fishermen who make their living from the sea and with this inter-action we gain good company and an insight into a way of life that is very different from our own. Each night we camp on small cayes along the barrier reef.

**Accommodations:** (Beach Camping)  
B,L,D

**Meals:**



**Day 6:** We end our journey on an island along the inner channel of the barrier reef, and are transferred to the mainland by motor charter. Back in Dangriga, we settle into our accommodations, and have a chance to shower, dress and relax before our evening celebration at a local family's house for dinner. Trip finishes in Dangriga the following day. Our office can help you make whatever travel arrangements you need from this point.

**Accommodations:** (Hotel)      **Meals:** B,L,D



## What's Included...

Comprehensive Pre-Trip Information Package

All meals, accommodations, and transfers described in the tour

Unlimited use of our Equipment

Use of waterproof dry bags during kayak trip

Accommodation on the day before the trip ('Day 0') and the final night

Professional Guiding Services (both North American Leaders and Belizean Guides)

## What's Not Included...

Transfer back to Belize City

Gratuities

International Flights and Airport Departure Taxi  
Extra costs due to late Arrivals, lost baggage and circumstances beyond our control

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## Accommodation...

On 'Day 0', we will be spending the night at the Tropical Education Center, with accommodations in comfortable jungle cabanas. The Education Center harbours Belize's largest collection of tropical animal specimens, a fantastic interpretative center, and has a great network of cut trails and wildlife viewing plat-forms, perfect for exploring the pine savannah setting.

On Day 1 we stay at an island lodge, on Tobacco Caye, perched over the sea looking the barrier reef. This small Belizean-owned lodge gives us a comfortable staging point for the trip before we camp for the next few nights.

On Days 2-5, out on the cayes, we are practicing minimum impact camping, to ensure the pristine state of the wilderness remains for future visitors. We will be keeping our weight and volume to a minimum, carrying our gear in our kayaks from site to site. We will be staying in three person MSR tents, which provide more than enough room for two people and gear (some single tents are available on each trip). As we travel from caye to caye, we use pre-determined camping areas to minimize our impact on the islands. However, we also give ourselves considerable flexibility to adjust our schedule to different conditions encountered as we travel.

On the final night we will be staying in Dangriga. Our accommodation is at Chleanor's Hotel, a Belizean-style hotel in

## Thinking about seeing other parts of Belize with IEC?

The Coral Islands & Mayan Caves combines well with an adventure traveling inland. The two day Maya World Extension gives you a wonderful opportunity to extend your vacation with a stay at the Birds Eye View Lodge in Crooked Tree. Visit some of the ancient ruins of Belize such as Lamanai and Altun Ha. Also included is a interpretive boat tour of the wetlands of the Crooked Tree Bird Sanctuary.

## Getting back to Belize City ...

Our North American office can help you make arrangements for your return to Belize City the day after the trip ends, unless you have made other arrangements with us. We can book a domestic flight from Dangriga to Belize City. The cost of this flight back to Belize City (25 minutes) is approximately \$60.00 USD per person or you can travel overland by bus (2-3 hours) for approximately \$10.00 USD.

## Thinking About Traveling Independently, Before or After Your Trip?

With over 20 years of exploration in Belize, our very knowledgeable and experienced office staff can offer you a wealth of travel information to help you plan the best vacation possible! However, we do recommend that you read up on the country and find what interests you. Once you find an area of interest, give our office a phone call.



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