



A BIRMINGHAM ZOO TRAVEL OPPORTUNITY

# BELIZE

## Family Expedition to the Maya Heartland

**7-Day Expedition • March 17-23, 2007**

**Adults: \$2,398 • Kids (12-18): \$1,660 • Kids (6-11): \$1,260**

**Prices are per person, double occupancy with children rooming with adult. Airfare not included.**

The small country of Belize offers kids and adults of all ages a remarkable variety of experiences, all packed into the relatively short span of our 7-day journey, and all combined to make family travel there educational, fun and unforgettable.

First we visit South Water Caye Marine Reserve, the longest unbroken living reef in the world, providing snorkelers and divers with wonderful chances to see some of the most beautiful coral and fish anywhere. The reef also protects an extensive string of small islands with white beaches and swaying palm trees. Coastal mangroves provide shelter and rookeries for thousands of birds. Our accommodations are on a picture perfect coral island situated literally on top of the barrier reef near the Smithsonian Coral Reef Research Station.

Then we view great scenery and interesting wildlife. Belize is a crossroads for wildlife of the temperate north and the tropical south. But unlike many of Earth's tropical regions, Belize still has large tracts of primary rainforest, preserving many rare and colorful species, including a thriving population of jaguar. We'll float through caves on inner tubes, and walk on trails through the rainforest. By canoe we'll also see huge iguanas sunning themselves along green crystalline rivers, and howler monkeys roaring in the high jungle canopy.

But Belize is not only a fantastic wildlife destination. Another key element is the magnificent palaces and temples left behind by the Maya more than 2,000 years ago. On our expedition we visit Xunantunich, the longest established archaeological site in Belize.

Our itinerary, planned and refined over decades, combines these elements in splendid fashion. We hope you'll join us.

**Day 1 • Saturday, March 17**

**U.S. / Belize City / Dangriga**

Fly to Belize City, where we meet our naturalist guide. Travel on the Western Highway to the Belize Zoo and Tropical Education Center for a close-up look at native jungle animals. Here we also learn about the interesting conservation work sponsored by the zoo. Travel south into coastal savannahs on our way to Pelican Beach Resort in Dangriga. Pelican Beach is a small, family run hotel right on the beach. Tonight we learn about the Garifuna, or Black Caribs, people who are descendants of African slaves and Amerindians who settled in Honduras and Belize. The Garifuna have preserved much of their culture with their own language, songs and dances reminiscent of Africa. (D)

**Day 2 • Sunday, March 18**

**Dangriga / South Water Caye Marine Reserve**

Our boat is waiting to take us to the island of South Water Caye, located directly on the Belize Barrier Reef. En route we see Man O' War Caye which is home to many frigatebirds. We may find bottlenose dolphin, manatee and sea turtles. South Water Caye is a small island, and our accommodations are situated on the tip end of the island. It is a choice location with great snorkeling right from the beach. In the afternoon, we board our boat for the first of several snorkeling excursions that we will have over the next few days. (B,L,D)

**Days 3 & 4 • Monday & Tuesday, March 19 & 20**

**South Water Caye**

Each of the next two mornings we enjoy snorkeling excursions to some of the great sites in the calm, protected waters of South Water Marine Reserve. Massive stands of staghorn coral line the outer reef while large brain coral and other, more delicate forms of coral thrive in the quiet waters of the inner reef. Some of fascinating fish we are likely to see include rainbow parrotfish, queen angelfish and spotted

eagle ray. We also visit Carrie Bow Caye, the location of the Smithsonian's marine research facility.

The afternoons are free to relax and enjoy snorkeling from the beach. (B,L,D Daily)

**Day 5 • Wednesday, March 21**

**South Water Caye / Caves Branch/Macal River**

Today we explore one of the best caves in Belize by floating through it on inner tubes. A mountain stream flows right through the cave, and Mayan artifacts can still be seen. After changing into dry clothes, we have a picnic lunch and then continue our journey on the Hummingbird Highway. Our accommodations are at Crystal Paradise Resort, a lovely family owned lodge located on a hillside above the Macal River. (B,L,D)

**Day 6 • Thursday, March 22**

**Macal River**

Paddle canoes leisurely down the Macal River, observing a variety of birds and animals. At the Maya Medicine Trail we take a walk to learn about the abundant medicinal plants that grow in Belize. After lunch, we continue down the Macal River, stopping often to collect or observe, all the way to San Ignacio, where our vehicle is waiting to take us to the Maya archaeological site of Xunantunich. The hilltop location provides a panoramic view of house mounds, pyramids, palaces and ceremonial plazas. The largest pyramid is decorated with friezes and masks in the Classic style. (B,L,D)

**Day 7 • Friday, March 23**

**Macal River / Belize City / U.S.**

After breakfast we travel again on the Western Highway. Time permitting, we visit the Bermudian Landing Community Baboon Sanctuary. We continue to the Belize International Airport to catch our afternoon flight back to the U.S. (B)



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