

MAYA RAINFOREST TO THE BARRIER REEF 10 Days

Did you know?



The Garifuna people, descendants of West African slaves and Island Caribs, populate the eastern-coastal regions of Belize, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Their ethnic background brings together a colourful blend of cultural traits to form a distinct culture in language, music, food, and lifestyle. While you are in Belize watch and listen for their alluring dances and rhythmical drumming. The Garifuna are also skilled hunters and fisherman.



Marine Location

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 cays, 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 coloured fish, marine invertebrates 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.

While traveling by sea kayak along the barrier reef, we have a unique chance to experience the abundance of life in a tropical marine environment. Paddling from cay to cay and over the many patch reefs, we see fish like barracuda, bonefish, angel and parrot fish, stingrays, conger, moray eels, goatfish, just to name a few.

Throughout the region, there are nesting sites for loggerhead, green and hawksbill turtles; if we're lucky, we may see them while out snorkeling. And we definitely will have a chance to sample the main staple for Belizean fishermen, the spiny lobster (in season) and the queen conch, a Caribbean delicacy.

MAYA RAINFOREST TO THE BARRIER REEF

Broadleaf rainforest covers approximately 60% of Belize's wooded area. The year-round growing season, plentiful precipitation during the rainy season (May-November) and millennia of evolution has yielded this area with a complex and tremendous diversity of plant life. A spongy mass of roots, fungi, bacteria and microorganisms carpets the forest floor, which rapidly breaks down any organic matter. Each plant fulfills its own ecological niche, as the continuous recycling of the decayed plant matter fuels new growth. With this rich nutrient cycle a diverse range of plant life, from the huge buttressed ceiba trees to the smallest of fungi thrives. High above the forest floor is the enchanting world of the broad-leafed canopy. The canopy may tower 100 ft and more, with massive hardwoods like santa maria, mahogany and sapodilla trees forming a broad canopy and in turn supporting many species of Epiphytes (air plants). This habitat provides for a unique community of wildlife and many species will spend most of their life inhabiting the roof of the rainforest.

Hiking or paddling in the rainforest we see iguanas resting in the branches of fig trees, we may hear the grunts and snuffling as a herd of peccary (wild pigs) passes close by. Large tropical birds are frequently sighted. We see toucans with their oversized bills, flying ungainly from one fruiting tree to the next. High overhead loud, raucous squawking alerts us to the presence of scarlet macaw in the river valley. Once in view, the size of the bird and the splendor of their red and blue plumage are unmistakable. There is also a multitude of falcons, hawks and vultures scavenging and hunting from the sun-bright upper canopy down to the mottled light of the forest floor. Also, found in the southern Belizean rainforest are a number of often bizarre mammals, the largest being Belize's national animal, Baird's tapir- locally known as the mountain cow in Belize is an animal unique to the New World tropics with a large hippopotamus-like body and a long snout, reminiscent of the fabled aardvark. The tapir, along with the white-lipped and collared peccary, the jaguar, and the puma are some of the larger mammals that inhabit the river valleys and forests where we travel.

Accommodations

Tropical Education Center The Education Center has comfortable, rustic accommodations in a beautiful pine savannah setting. The Center has a fantastic interpretative center and harbors Belize's largest collection of tropical animals, with a great network of trails and wildlife viewing platforms, perfect for exploring this rare forest environment.

Expedition Camping While out on the cays, we are practicing minimum impact camping, to ensure the pristine state of the cays 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 tents, which provide more than enough room for two people and gear (some single tents are available on each trip). As we travel from cay to cay, 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.



Recommended Reading

Greenfield, David E., Thomson, Jamie E. 1997
Fishes of the Continental Waters of Belize University Press of Florida

O'Neal, Catherine 2003
Hidden Belize: Including Tikal, Copan, and the Cayes Ulysses Press

Rabinowitz, Alan. 1986
Jaguar, One Man's Struggle to Establish the First Jaguar Sanctuary New York. Island Press

Peedle, Ian 1999
Belize in Focus: A Guide to the People, Politics and Culture Interlink Publishing



MAYA RAINFOREST TO THE BARRIER REEF

Typical Daily Itinerary

B= breakfast L = lunch D = dinner

Day 1: Arrive at the Belize International airport and transfer to Belize Zoo and Tropical Education Center. After settling into our quarters we are led by a senior zookeeper on a unique nocturnal tour of the Belize Zoo. Organized around the theme of "a walk through the habitats of Belize" with trails leading into pinelands, the forest edge, rainforest and wetlands we are able to see first-hand the remarkable diversity of wildlife in the neo-tropics. The Belize Zoo has gained an international reputation for its outstanding conservation and education achievements within Belize.

Overnight: Tropical Education Center D

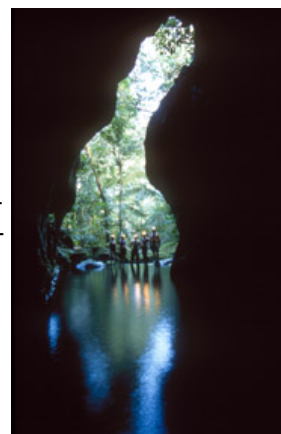
Day 2: An early start this morning, as we travel west to the edge of the Mountain Pine Ridge to begin our remarkable journey back through time into the dark underworld of the Maya. Our destination—Actun Tunichil Muknal—the *Cave of the Stone Sepulcher* (burial vault) is reached after hiking a rainforest trail and wading through waist deep creeks. Once at the cave entrance we gear up with helmets and waterproof lights, then wade into the clear, cool water that flows out from the cave mouth. Inside the cave we follow the creek bed to the entrance of a massive chamber that holds an astonishing array of Mayan artifacts; our light beams illuminate ceramic bowls and vases, stone tools, carved slate altars and eerie calcified skeletons of what are believed to be sacrificial victims dating back centuries to the terminal classic period of the Mayan civilization. To the ancient Maya, the caves were the entrances to Xibalba (*shil-balba*), a realm inhabited by spirits and powerful gods, an underworld of untold fears where Mayan shaman, in supposition to the gods, ventured into darkness to conduct their secretive rituals. In our experience the cave of the Stone Sepulcher is one of the most profound archaeological experiences in the Americas. *Overnight: Tropical Education Center B,L,D*

Day 3-4: Over the next few days we explore and learn about biodiversity and tropical rainforest ecology. Paddle inflatable kayaks through the rainforest on the South Stann Creek, hike interpretive trails and enjoy swimming in hidden pools. Afternoon and evening activities focus on the Maya people through stories, traditional foods, arts and crafts. *Overnight: camping in the rainforest or at the park research facilities.*

Day 5-9: We travel from the rainforest to the southern barrier reef. Here we paddle and sail our kayaks from cay to cay experiencing one of the richest coral reef environments in the entire Caribbean. Our activities include snorkeling, sea kayaking, and fishing along with inter-tidal and mangrove exploration and daily lectures on coral reef and fish ecology. For our last night, we celebrate the culture of the Garifuna people with a night of songs, stories, music and traditional dance.

Overnight: camping on Cays

Day 10: After breakfast we transfer by boat back to the coast and travel overland to connect with our international flight home. Note: Itinerary may be adjusted to begin with inland activities and finish on the sea.



Student Responsibilities

- * eager participation in activities
- * understand that we are traveling in remote settings and respond fully to direction from leaders, guides and teachers
- * assist with camp set-up, breakdown, meal preparation and clean up with direction from trip leaders and teachers



Guides and Group Leaders

Both Belizeans and North Americans will pilot the trip. Alongside our NA trip leaders, we will bring in guides who have specific expertise pertaining to the local area. Typically this will involve Garifuna or Creole captains and fisherman on the sea and Mayan or Creole bush guides. Leaders are trained and certified in Emergency First-Aid procedures

Teachers/Facilitators Responsibilities

Generally work with IEC leaders and guides to ensure smooth flow of activities and logistics. Responsible for assigning sleeping arrangements, mustering students to staging areas for meals and activities. Establish standards for accepted behavior.

MAYA RAINFOREST TO THE BARRIER REEF

Equipment...

Island Expeditions will provide all group and specialized equipment for the duration of the trip. This will include but is not limited to:

- * Expedition-equipped sea kayaks, two-person and single boats, paddles, lifejackets.
- * Inflatable two person river kayaks
- * Tents for sleeping & group camp equipment
- * Portable field kitchen
- * Safety equipment
- * Emergency response kit
- * VHF Radio and satellite communication devices as required in remote areas



Services

- * 2-4 professional guides/leaders
- * Meals as per itinerary
- * Accommodations, hotels and camps
- * All camping and field facilities
- * International flight arrangements (optional)
- * All Park fees
- * Transportation within Belize
- * Pre-trip information packages
- * Free trip for facilitator
- * School Membership with the Belize Audubon Society

Not Included

- * Belize Departure Tax - \$20US
- * Personal gear as specified on equipment list including masks fins, snorkel
- * Items purchased that are of a personal nature

Did you Know?



Ocelots (*leopardus pardalis*), also called 'tiger-cats' are the most commonly seen cats in Belize.

They are nocturnal and diurnal and feed mainly on small mammals, fish, frogs, and turtles. They can be found in dry scrub areas to dense forests, and also at the Belize Zoo! They are an endangered species and sought after for their beautiful fur.

Trip Costing

The cost of your Belize trip is based on several factors:

- * Group size
- * Number of Facilitators
- * Activities included
- * Dates of travel
- * Length of trip

Itinerary revisions and adjustments are possible and we encourage you to discuss your objectives with our office staff. These changes may effect the trip cost.

The Belize Audubon Society

Is a membership organization founded in 1969. The society is involved in enhancing the development of Belize's Natural Resources through environmental education, protected areas management and advocacy programs.



Toll-free: 800.667.1630
Phone: 604.452.3212
Fax: 604.452.3433
Email: info@islandexpeditions.com
Website: www.islandexpeditions.com
School Trips: www.educationaltrips.org

