MAYA RUINS TO THE BARRIER REEF ~ 8 Days

Did You Know?

The Queen Angelfish (holacantus ciliaris) is arguably one of the most beautiful fish in the Caribbean. Often seen around shallow patch reefs its brilliant blue and yellow color easily separates it from all other western Atlantic angelfish species. The adults feed on sponges, tunicates, corals & algae and they are found in pairs year round, suggesting a long-term monogamous bond.

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.

Visit us online at www.educationaltrips.org and www.islandexpeditions.com
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 turning 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.

In the rainforest we see iguanas resting in the branches of fig trees. 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.

Camping on the Cays 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. However, we also give ourselves considerable flexibility to adjust our schedule to different conditions encountered as we travel.
**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:** We explore and learn about biodiversity and tropical forest ecology. Paddle inflatable kayaks on the Sibun River, hike interpretive trails and enjoy swimming in hidden pools. **Overnight: Tropical Education Center. B,L,D**

**Day 3:** An early start this morning as we travel west to the Maya Ruins of Xunantunich (shoo-naan-too-nich) located near the western border with Guatemala and the confluence of the Belize and Mopan rivers. Xunantunich is a Late Classic period ceremonial center that is best known by its towering temple called El Castillo. The view from the top of the temple is spectacular, looking over three small plazas and rolling forest and ranch lands. After our discovery of the ancient Mayas we travel south through the Maya Mountains to the Caribbean Sea where we connect with our motor charter to the southern barrier reef. **Overnight: Tropical Education Center. B,L,D**

**Day 4-7:** On the southern barrier reef 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 along Southern Barrier Reef. B,L,D**

**Day 8:** After breakfast we transfer by boat back to the coast and travel overland to connect with our international flight home. **B, L**

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**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.

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**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.

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**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.

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**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, life-jackets.
- Tents for sleeping & group camp equipment
- Portable field kitchen
- Safety equipment
- Emergency response kit
- VHF Radio and satellite communication devices as required in remote locations

**Services**
- 2-4 guides/leaders
- Meals as per itinerary
- Accommodations, hotels and camps
- All camping and field facilities
- International flight arrangements (optional)
- Transportation within Belize
- Pre-trip information packages
- Free trip for facilitator

**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

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**Did you Know?**
**Snowy Egrets** (egretta thula) can be found throughout the wetlands and coastal margins of Belize. These graceful herons feed primarily on fish, invertebrates and reptiles and in drier months, other nesting birds. As a protected species there numbers are stable but are threatened by pollution and habitat loss.

**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.

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**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.