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The best of Belize: Can't miss experiences

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Belize (<https://www.cheapflights.com/flights-to-belize/>) is an un-belizeable country to experience, particularly for those seeking an Eco-tourism trip. An independent nation since 1981, this Central American country is a charming escape for outdoor enthusiasts who enjoy diving, swimming and adventure. The laid-back Caribbean hideaway is populated with pastel clapboard restaurants and shops, turquoise water and sparsely populated beaches.

Belize's six districts and 200 offshore cayes (islands) are easy – and beautiful – to navigate. We've curated 12 can't miss experiences that represent the best of Belize.

Dive into The Blue Hole



The Blue Hole is the largest formation of its kind. (Image: **Belize Tourism Board** (<https://www.travelbelize.org/>))

Serious divers must experience The Blue Hole, a 1,000-foot across sinkhole that is home to diverse marine life like hammerhead sharks and expansive underwater vistas. Made famous by a 1970s Jacques Cousteau documentary, this is the world's largest formation of its kind. Located 55 miles east of **Belize City** (<https://www.cheapflights.com/flights-to-belize-city/>), The Blue Hole is 412 feet deep, not for the faint of heart. Tour operators like **Ramon's Village Dive Shop** (<http://ramons.com/diveshop.cfm>), **Splash Dive Center** (<http://www.splashbelize.com/>), **Portofino** (<http://portofinodiving.com/>) and **Seahorse Dive Shop** (<http://belizescuba.com/>) offer tours to The Blue Hole.

Be a beach bum



Caye Caulker boasts beautiful, uncrowded beaches (Image: **Belize Tourism Board** (<https://www.travelbelize.org/>))

Leave the crowds behind and escape to Caye Caulker's quiet beaches. Home to some of the best SCUBA diving and snorkeling in Belize, Caye Caulker is an easy water taxi ride away. There are charming small shops, excellent seafood restaurants and idyllic beaches.

Step back in time



Xunantunich has Belize's most impressive Mayan ruins. (Image: **Belize Tourism Board** (<https://www.travelbelize.org/>))

Once home to the Mayans, Belize is dotted with ancient ruins. One of the most popular and impressive ruins to visit is the hilltop **Xunantunich** (<http://www.nichbelize.org/ia-maya-sites/xunantunich.html>) ("maiden of the rock" in Mayan), near the Guatemalan border. Accessible by taking a hand-cranked ferry ride over the Mopan River, the ruins were built during the Classic period (200 A.D. – 900 A.D.). The ruins include six plazas, 25 temples and palaces including El Castillo (the Castle), the largest pyramid that towers 130 feet above the plaza and is adorned with elaborate friezes on the east and west sides.

Try 'The Royal Rat'

Made famous by Queen Elizabeth who sampled the tasty treat during a visit to Belize, gibbon is a large rodent. Nicknamed "the royal rat," this delicacy can be found at **Nerie's** (<http://www.neries.bz/>) on Freetown Road in Belize City. What started as one tiny restaurant has expanded into a trio of restaurants serving Belizean cuisine like rice and beans, plantains, fresh fruit juices and, for the adventurous, gibbon.

Enjoy hoppy happy hour



Enjoy Belikin Beer beachside. (Image: **Belize Tourism Board** (<https://www.travelbelize.org/>))

One of the best spots to sip local Belikin Beer is Placencia Peninsula. Known locally as “Barefoot Perfect,” Placencia Peninsula is 16 miles of golden sand, the only golden-sand beaches on mainland Belize. After sunbathing on the beach, soak up the traditional *Kriol* (Creole) fishing village vibe over an ice cold Belikin lager or stout at local village bars and restaurants, or enjoy a bottle or two with your feet in the sand.

Monkey around in the jungle



Colorful toucan (Image: **Belize Tourism Board** (<https://www.travelbelize.org/>))

How does spending the night in the jungle sound? Located in the Bermudian Landing village in the Belize River Valley area, **Howler Monkey Resort** (<http://www.howlermonkeyresort.bz/>) is a riverside lodge where travelers can get up close and personal with nature. There's a trail that traverses the 20-acre monkey sanctuary. The resort has six air-conditioned cabins located beneath the monkey's canopy, providing perfect photo opportunities.

Go cave tubing



Cave tubing is fun for the entire family in Belize. (Image: **Belize Tourism Board** (<https://www.travelbelize.org/>))

Grab an inner tube and float through the Caves Branch River east of the capital, Belmopan. The Nohoch Che'en Caves Branch Archaeological Reserve is home to caves the ancient Maya held sacred. Tubing tours take visitors into the caves populated with stalactites, stalagmites, Mayan cave paintings and aquatic life. Tours run daily, so stop, *er*, float by and don't forget your camera. Tour operators like **Vital Nature and Mayan Tours** (<http://cavetubing.bz/>) offer cave tubing tours daily.

Feelin' hot, hot, hot: Sample Marie Sharp Hot Sauce



Save

Can you handle the heat? (Image: **Belize Tourism Board** (<https://www.travelbelize.org/>))

On most restaurant tables in Belize, diners find a bottle of **Marie Sharp's Hot Sauce** (<http://www.mariesharps-bz.com/>), a fiery habanero pepper sauce blended with carrots and onions in varying degrees of heat, from mild to "beware." Dabbing some Marie Sharp Hot Sauce on Belizean cuisine is a must. Diners will quickly realize why the sauces are so popular (sales totaled \$3 million last year). Hot sauce fans can go on a free factory tour to see how the Belizean makes her famous sauce. The 20-minute tour, sometimes led by Sharp, includes the farm where the raw materials come from and the facility where the sauce is made. There is a gift shop too (tours are offered 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday).

Swim with the fishes



Snorkel with nurse sharks and stingrays. (Image: **Belize Tourism Board** (<https://www.travelbelize.org/>))

Considered part of **Hol Chan Marine Reserve** (<http://www.holchanbelize.org/>), Shark Ray Alley is located one mile south of the Hol Chan Cut and was once a place where fishermen would clean their catches, which attracted stingrays and nurse sharks. It's now a prime spot for snorkeling with stingrays, nurse sharks and turtles. Aquatic adventure seekers must visit via a boat and guide from San Pedro or Caye Caulker to visit Shark Ray Alley.

Indulge in an amazing outdoor massage



Relax al fresco at Chaa Creek. (Image: **Chaa Creek** (<http://www.chaacreek.com/>))

Set within a 365-acre rain-forest reserve, Eco-resort **Chaa Creek** (<http://www.chaacreek.com/>) is bordered by the Macal River and Maya Mountains foothills. While the 23 thatched cottages provide luxurious and relaxing accommodations, the **Hilltop Spa at Chaa Creek** (<http://www.chaacreek.com/amenities/belize-spa>) makes this a destination worth seeking out. The spa offers a range of massages, facials, manicures and pedicures with herbal and Eco-friendly products. Try the signature Chocolatissimo Spa Treatment, a soothing sensuous spa experience that includes a trio of cacao treatments, a scrub, a body wrap and 60-minute massage.

Get immersed in Garifuna culture



Drum, dance and dine Garifuna style (Image: **Belize Tourism Board** (<https://www.travelbelize.org/>))

Hopkins, a coastal village in eastern Belize, is known as the cultural center of the Garifuna community. Descendants of West African, Central African, Carib and Arawak people, Garifuna culture thrives in Hopkins. Visitors are warmly welcome to dance, learn, drum and indulge in traditional cuisine like tamales and conch fritters.

See sunsets and sip sundowners



Enjoy the sunset in Ambergris Caye (Image: **Belize Tourism Bureau** (<https://www.travelbelize.org/>))

Adjacent to the largest barrier reef in the Western hemisphere, Ambergris Caye is a popular place for diving and snorkeling. Ambergris Caye is Belize’s largest island (approximately 36 miles) and is also the best place for viewing the sunset with a sundowner. From the cobblestone streets of San Pedro to the beaches, visitors are almost guaranteed a picture-perfect sunset.

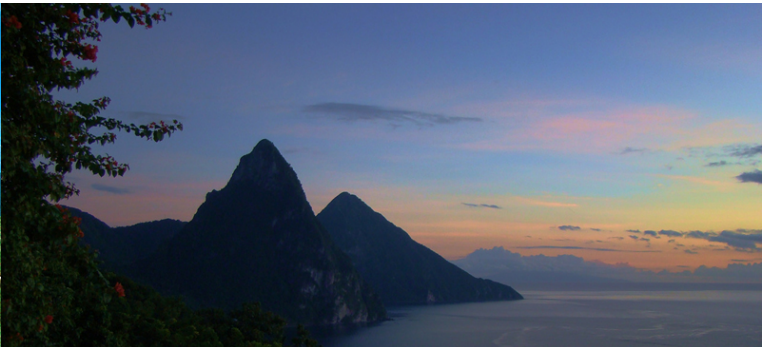
(Main Image: **Belize Tourism Bureau** (<https://www.travelbelize.org/>))



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Lauren Mack has traveled to 40 countries on five continents, including Cuba, New Zealand, Peru and Tanzania. For many years, she called China, and then Taiwan, home. Countries at the beginning of the alphabet, particularly Antarctica, Argentina and Australia are on her travel bucket list. Lauren is a multimedia travel and food journalist and explorer based in New York City.

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