

Lan Sluder's Guide to Mainland Belize

Pages: 368

Publisher: Equator (April 22, 2016)

Format: pdf, epub

Language: English

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Lan Sluder's

Guide to

Mainland

BELIZE

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Lan Sluder's Guide to MAINLAND BELIZE

By Lan Sluder

Published simultaneously in a print edition:

ISBN-13: 978-0692687451

ISBN-10: 0692687459

Published by Equator, Asheville, N.C.

First Edition, 2016.

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Surprise! It's Mainland Belize

By LAN SLUDER

Surprise! This travel guide focuses on Mainland Belize, and it's the only guide of which I'm aware, other than one I wrote many years ago (Belize First Guide to Mainland Belize, now out of print), that does.

Many travelers come to Belize mainly for its islands and atolls, with their great diving, snorkeling, fishing and other marine sports. That's totally understandable. San Pedro, Ambergris Caye, in 2016 was named the number one destination in Central America by TripAdvisor.com. Caye Caulker, Ambergris Caye's little sister, increasingly is attracting visitors thanks to its laidback style and lower costs. Offshore lodges, both inside the Belize Barrier Reef and on Belize's three atolls, Turneffe, Lighthouse and Glover's, provide close-up access to great diving, fishing and relaxing.

On the other hand, many of us also value Belize for what it offers on the Mainland. I first came to Belize in 1991, and on my first couple of visits I didn't visit any of the country's islands or atolls. There is so much to do and see on the Mainland that you can spend weeks or months exploring the 8,867 square miles of rainforest, savannah and coastal areas and still not see it all.

I did this guide for those whose primary interest is Mainland Belize: Its rainforests, wildlife and bird encounters, its caves, rivers and low mountains, its amazing ancient Maya ruins and contemporary Maya villages, its adrenalin-pumping outdoor adventures like jungle trekking, hiking, mountain biking and cave tubing. Of course, you can also enjoy the pleasures of the beaches and the water on the mainland. In Placencia, Hopkins and elsewhere, you're only a few splashes or a short boat ride away from wonderful snorkeling, diving, fishing and other maritime activities.

Of course everywhere in Belize you'll encounter its greatest treasure: the Belizean people. If variety is the spice of life, Belize is red hot, because the people of Belize come in myriad colors, races, backgrounds, religions and cultures: Mestizo, Creole, Maya, Garifuna, East Indian, Chinese, Europeans and others, and often these are mixed together in a creative gumbo of genes, languages and traditions. If they share one common thing it is a welcoming attitude. Sure, there are exceptions, but in general you won't find friendlier folks than in Belize.

If you want to visit and enjoy other parts of Belize beyond the mainland, I encourage you to get one of my other guides to Belize: Lan Sluder's Guide to Belize, Lan Sluder's Guide to the Cayes, Coast and Beaches of Belize and Best Hotels and Restaurants in Belize. I've also authored every edition of Fodor's Belize, and I've written books about retiring and relocating to Belize, such as Easy Belize. Altogether I've done 18 books and ebooks on Belize.

If for now your main interest is Mainland Belize, I hope and think that you'll find this guidebook of value. It's based on a quarter century of reporting on Belize. I've traveled to every corner of this beautiful country. I've stayed in more than 250 different hotels, inns, guesthouses, resorts, lodges and hostels. I've tried nearly every restaurant in the country. So you get first-hand knowledge. I've done my best to put you, the reader, first, even if it means making a hotel owner or tourism operator angry. Everything here is based on my candid opinion. I'm sure I've made errors and omissions, and your mileage as always may vary.

This book covers every part of the land portion of Belize from Corozal in the north, Punta Gorda in the south, San Ignacio and Cayo District in the west, Belize City and Belmopan in the middle and coastal areas from Sarteneja to Dangriga, Hopkins, Placencia, Monkey River and Punta Negra. I've also included chapters on easy side trips to visit Tikal and Flores in Guatemala and Chetumal in Mexico.

Enjoy Belize. Thank you for reading this guide. I hope you find it useful. And I hope to see you in Belize some day!

Ground Rules for This Guide

The ground rules for this guidebook are simple: We list only attractions, hotels and restaurants that we believe are the best choices in the category.

For lodging, we typically provide the rate (as of mid-2016) for a room for two persons in-season (usually mid-December through Easter) and off-season. Some hotels have year-round rates, and most charge extra for the Christmas/New Year's and possibly also the Easter holidays. Rates shown are in U.S. dollars and, unless otherwise noted, don't include hotel taxes or service and other extra charges. Again, unless otherwise noted, hotels are listed alphabetically.

In the case of restaurants, again prices are in U.S. dollars, although most restaurants in Belize list their prices in Belize dollars. (The standard exchange rate is that one U.S. dollars equals two Belize dollars.)

The pricing system for restaurants in all areas is as follow:

Inexpensive: Under US\$7

Moderate: US\$8-\$19

Expensive: US\$20-\$39

Very Expensive: Over US\$40

Restaurant prices don't include tax (unless specifically included by the restaurant), tip or alcoholic drinks. If not otherwise stated, the price range is for one person for dinner. Also, unless otherwise noted, restaurants are listed alphabetically.

Except in the Top Everything section, we have not attempted to rank lodging and dining places and visitor attractions with a star or other rating system. However, those places that are particularly noteworthy in their category are listed in RED (bold-faced) and also denoted with the symbol  (a star within a circle). What makes these places noteworthy varies: It could be value for the money, an especially beautiful location or extraordinarily high quality and levels of service.

A few of our really, really favorite places get additional hearts, from two () to five (). Note: Some digital devices may not display color, and some may show a character rather than a star within a circle (Zapf Dingbats font). Sorry!

Area ratings at the beginning of each destination section are a comparative ranking, using an A to F scale, like your old school report card.

All possible efforts have been made to ensure that the information in this guide is accurate and up-to-date. However, things change. If you feel we have left something out or have something wrong, please notify us, and we will attempt to investigate and, if necessary, correct the information as soon as possible.

Turn the corner and meet a jaguar!

Photo licensed from Adobe WHY BELIZE?

You have a whole world of vacation destinations. Why should you consider Belize? What's special about it? What's different or unique? Will you like it? Here are some of the reasons we believe that you will have a great time in Belize. Rainforests

Nearly 80% of mainland Belize is covered in forests. Within that huge canopy are tropical and semi-tropical rainforests, from lush rainforests that get up to 200 inches of rain a year to dry rainforests and bush and even piney woods.

Wherever you go in Belize, you're not far from a carpet of rich green life. Belize is one of the most lightly populated countries in the world, with only around 370,000 people in a mainland area the size of the state of Massachusetts. Outdoor Adventures

Belize is all about outdoor fun. Hard, soft and in-between. Cave tubing. Hiking. Birding. Canoeing

and kayaking, rivers and sea. Horseback riding. Snorkeling and diving. Swimming with whale sharks. Going underground to Xibalba or clambering to the top of a Maya temple. Mountain biking. Climbing Victoria Peak or surviving nights in the jungle. Ziplining and skywalking. Windsurfing. Even parasailing and kiteboarding.

Of course it's easier if you're 23 and a triathlete, but even we who are not young and fit anymore can participate in many of the outdoor adventures Belize offers. **Wildlife Encounters**

Ever been face to face with a black jaguar? Heard the incredible booming thunder of a troop of howler monkeys? Seen keel-billed toucans or scarlet macaws or a flock of parrots in the bush? Jumped in the water with sharks and stingrays? Watched a hunky manatee peep out of the sea or a green iguana hang out on a limb over a river? Seen the eyes of a crocodile in a lagoon or a red-rump tarantula scuttle back in its hole?

All of this and more are everyday sightings in Belize. Belize is home to more than 590 species of birds, 145 species of mammals, 140 species of reptiles and amphibians. And that's before you even get in the sea, with its 500 or more kinds of fish, 100 or more species of living coral and hundreds of kinds of invertebrates. **Caribbean Beaches**

Mainland Belize has nearly 200 miles of coastline. Much of the coast is mangrove swamp, but in several areas, including near Dangriga, Hopkins, the Placencia peninsula and in off-the-beaten areas of Toledo District, Belize has lovely stretches of beach on the Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Honduras. There also are beach areas on Corozal Bay.

Are the beaches in Belize the best in the world? Candidly, no. The Belize Barrier Reef along the coast of Belize creates an ecology that's a nursery for marine life. This is wonderful, but it means that even the most pristine of beaches in Belize, despite the crystal clear Caribbean waters and clean white or khaki-colored sand, may have seagrass or a gunky bottom. It may not be ideal for swimming.

Still, until you've relaxed under a cocopalms on a sandy beach, looking out over the emerald green, turquoise blue and deep purple Caribbean, you've never been on a Belize beach. **Jungle Lodges**

Among the wonders of Belize are the jungle lodges. Some, such as Chaa Creek, Chan Chich and Blancaneaux are among the best lodges in the world. Most are in Western Belize, around San Ignacio and in the Mountain Pine Ridge, but some are in the north, in rural Belize District and Orange Walk District, and a few are in Stann Creek and Toledo districts. Most of these lodges, frankly, cost an arm and a leg, but if you can find it in your budget they are a great experience. Some, however, are affordable, even cheap, so even the budget traveler need not miss out.

At these lodges, you're next door to adventure and to wildlife and bird spotting. As the slogans go, it's adventure by day and comfort and cold beer at night. A visit to Belize without spending at least a night or two at a jungle lodge is like, uh, a day without sunshine. **Maya Temples**

Belize and neighboring Guatemala and Mexico were at the heart of the great Maya civilization that reached its peak from 1,000 to 1,500 years ago. The Maya had architectural, mathematical and other skills that rivaled those in Europe and Asia. Maya cities like Caracol in Belize and Tikal in Guatemala were among the largest 10 cities in the world at the time. Belize has many important Maya sites. Besides Caracol there are Lamanai, Altun Ha, Xunantunich, Cahal Pech, Cerros, Lubaantun, Nim Li Punit and others. The greatest of all Maya sites, Tikal, is just a hop, skip and a jump from San Ignacio. There are enough other Maya sites in El Petén, Guatemala, to keep a Maya buff busy for months. **Great Food & Drink**

You might have heard that Belizean food is nothing special. You heard wrong! Belize today has some wonderful food, from basic Belizean dishes like stew chicken with beans and rice or garnaches to amazing pork and delicious lobster, conch, snapper and other seafood. You can eat a filling meal for a few dollars in a local restaurant in Belize City, Belmopan, San Ignacio, Corozal Town or Punta Gorda, or enjoy a sophisticated dinner in San Ignacio or Placencia. Meals at jungle lodges seem pricey, but considering that you are miles from nowhere the meals, even if served by candlelight or kerosene lamp in an open-air palapa, are amazing.

That special dinner in Belize won't be cheap, but it probably will cost two-thirds less than you'd pay in Miami, San Francisco, New Orleans or New York. In most cases, you'll enjoy the seaside or jungle ambiance even more. Belize Barrier Reef

The Belize Barrier Reef and Belize's atolls became a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1996. Belize's reef, part of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef system, is the longest reef in the Western and Northern Hemispheres. Belize's reef is only a few hundred yards offshore on North Ambergris Caye and 25 miles out in the far south. While this guide focuses on Mainland Belize, the Belize Barrier Reef and even the atolls are accessible from Sarteneja, Belize City, Dangriga, Hopkins, Placencia, Punta Gorda and elsewhere on the Mainland.

Although the Barrier Reef faces challenges from human pollution and global climate change, it and its related environments remain home to a stunning variety of sea life, from hammerhead sharks and eagle rays to permit, bonefish, tarpon and other game fish to beautiful living corals and tropical fish. Belize's reef is one of the most diverse ecosystems in the world, with more than 500 species of fish, more than 100 types of hard and soft corals and hundreds of species of invertebrates.

The Belize Barrier Reef system with around 1,000 cayes and three Pacific-style atolls on the Outer Reef, altogether covering a total of 370 square miles, offers visitors some of the world's best diving, snorkeling and fishing.

Also good news is that Belize is taking positive steps to protect its reef system. Belize has established seven marine reserves and marine national parks. In 2010, Belize became the first country in the world to completely ban bottom-trawling fishing, and in 2015 the government banned offshore oil drilling within one kilometer of the reef. Sunny Warm Weather

Belize has weather similar to that of Central and South Florida, depending on where you are in Belize. The mean average temperature varies from 81°F along the coast to 69°F in the hills. The coldest month is usually January while the highest temperatures are during the month of May.

Inland areas tend to have more extreme temperatures than coastal areas where the sea breeze moderates the temperature. For example, average maximum and minimum temperatures near San Ignacio in Cayo District are both hotter and colder than those at the Philip Goldson International Airport in Ladyville near Belize City. Although cloud cover can be significant, especially in the summer, generally Belize has warm, sunny weather year round. Cultural Diversity

Belize is a tropical gumbo of cultures, races and ethnicities. Talk about diversity! There are Creoles, a mixture of African, European and indigenous DNA, once the dominant culture in Belize and still so in Belize City and a few other places. The Bileez Kriol language (to use the proper spelling) still is a lingua franca in Belize. However, Mestizos from Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, often referred to as "Spanish," are now the largest group, about one-half of the population. Some are long-time Belizeans who came to south to escape the Caste Wars in Mexico in the 19th century and others are recent migrants from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. There are Maya -- Mopan,

Kekchi, Yucatec and other – and Garifuna, plus East Indians, Middle Easterners (“Lebanese”), Chinese from Hong Kong and Mainland China, Mennonites, Old School and progressive, and a good number of expat U.S., Canadian, British and other folks. Speak English

English is the official language of Belize. Government documents and signs are in English. Police and immigration officials speak English. Tour guides, hotel employees and restaurant staffs speak English. It makes traveling in Belize really easy. You can have real discussions with Belizeans you meet.

On the other hand, if you want to practice your Spanish – or Kriol, Garifuna, German, one of the Maya languages or even Mandarin – you’ll have a chance to do so in Belize. Many Belizeans are fluent in two, three or four languages. Get a Friendly Welcome

Every country brags that it is friendly and welcoming. In Belize, they really mean it. Belizeans, by and large, are among the friendliest people you’ll ever meet. A few are out to hustle you, but most are just interested in you, what you have to say and want to pass the time with you. Relax, keep your guard down (but use common sense), and you’ll meet some wonderful people in Belize.
Save Money

Whoever told you Belize was expensive was right. And wrong.

Sure, you can drop US\$400 a night, or more, at some fancy beach resorts and jungle lodges.

But you can also stay at a delightful seaside cabaña for under US\$100 or stay in a charming guesthouse for under US\$50 or in a hostel for US\$15. You can get a filling lunch of stew chicken and beans and rice for US\$5, drink local rum or beer in a nice bar for US\$2 or \$3 and have an amazing lobster dinner with all the trimmings for US\$25.

Yes, there are better bargain spots in Central America than Belize. Nicaragua and Panama come to mind. But Central America is changing. When we first went to Costa Rica in the early 1980s, a beer in the best hotel bar in San José was US15 cents, and you could ride the jungle train to Limon on the coast for US\$2. Now there are five-star resorts and US\$2 million homes. Guatemala used to be dirt cheap. Now you can pay US\$300 for a room, no meals, in Petén, where a majority of the people live on US\$1 a day or less.

Belize may be a little more expensive than much of the rest of Central America, but in Belize you can drink the water, eat salads and wander about most places without fearing for your life. By comparison with the islands in the main Caribbean, Belize is a bargain, baby. Go for It!

Belize is only two or three hours by air from many gateways in the U.S. You can leave home in the morning and be on the beach or at a jungle lodge by the late afternoon. What are you waiting for?

PLANNING YOUR TRIP

Rolling on the Rio Grande, Toledo

Photo by Sheila M. Lambert Overview of Destinations

Here, in thumbnail sketches, are your main choices of places to visit and stay in Mainland Belize. In the chapters that follow, we’ll explore in more detail the options in each of these areas, including a general overview of each destination, its rating (based on a scale of A+ to F, just like on your old school report card) on key factors likely important to you), how to get to the destination, what to do and see there, your lodging choices and the best places to eat and drink. We start with the

place where most visitors arrive in the country, Belize City. Central Belize

Belize City

Belize City has a reputation for gangs and crime, a reputation that to a great extent is deserved. But the city – hardly more than an overgrown town – is much more than its bad rep. It's the cultural, commercial, transportation and, although no longer the country's capital, political hub of Belize. You can't avoid it: You'll fly into here and transit it when going to most other parts of Belize. Cruise ships bring nearly a million visitors here each year although most quickly move on to cave tubing, snorkeling or Maya ruins tours.

This little city has a vibrant life of its own and a fascinating British colonial history that can be seen in the Fort George and Southern Foreshore areas. The ghost of Graham Greene still has a presence in this city.

Rural Belize District

Mainland Belize District has several destinations that are well worth your time to see: the Belize Zoo, billed – accurately, we think – as “the best little zoo in the world,” the Baboon Sanctuary, a success story in bringing back howler monkeys, Crooked Tree, one of great birding areas of Belize, and Altun Ha Maya site. Northern Belize

Northern Belize covers the two northernmost districts in Belize: Corozal and Orange Walk.

□□□Corozal

Most visitors to Belize either never get to Corozal or pass through quickly en route somewhere else. But Corozal Town and nearby villages, not to mention the Cerros area and Sarteneja village, offer a lot for those lingering awhile: low prices, friendly people, a generally low violent crime environment, the beautiful blue waters of Corozal Bay and, in the Corozal Free Zone, casinos. Then there's the bonus of having Mexico next door for shopping, dining and fun. Not that you probably care, but there's even a Walmart, Sam's Club, McDonald's and Burger King in Chetumal, just across the border. You won't find those chains in Belize.

Corozal is one of the undiscovered jewels of Belize. There's not a lot to do, but it's a great place to do it.

The Sugar Coast – sugarcane is a main agricultural crop in Corozal as it is in the Orange Walk District – is a place to slow down and enjoy life. The climate is appealing, with less rain than elsewhere in Belize, and fishing is good. The sunny disposition of residents – Mestizos, Creoles, Maya, Chinese, East Indians and even North Americans – is infectious.

Orange Walk

Orange Walk Town — the name came from the orange groves in the area — could be any number of towns in Mexico. There's a central plaza, and the town hall is called the Palacio Municipal. The businesses and houses along the main drag, called Queen Victoria Avenue or the Belize-Corozal

Road, have barred windows, and some of the hotels and bars are in fact brothels. In this setting, conservative Mennonites from Shipyard and Blue Creek who come to town to sell produce look strangely out of place. Except in Belize.

There's not much to do in Orange Walk Town itself. However, Orange Walk Town is a gateway to a magical area of Belize, the big sky, fertile land and unpeopled forests of Belize's northwest shoulder, bush and jungle pressed against the Guatemala border. Here you'll find Lamanai, with a stunning setting on the New River Lagoon, hard-working Mennonite settlements, the wild expanses of the Rio Bravo conservation area and Gallon Jug Estates, along with several amazing jungle lodges. Western Belize

□□□□San Ignacio Area

Cayo District has a lot going for it: wide open spaces, world-class jungle lodges, many important Maya sites, a big range of outdoor activities from birding and hiking to horseback riding, river canoeing and cave tubing, friendly people and relatively few bugs.

The major towns are San Ignacio/Santa Elena, with a population of around 20,000, about 10 miles from the Guatemala border, Belmopan City, the miniature capital of Belize, with a population approaching 20,000 and the often overlooked Benque Viejo del Carmen, the gateway town to the Belize border with the Petén region of Guatemala, home to the most impressive Maya site in the world, Tikal, as well as to many other Maya ruins and the charming island town of Flores.

Agriculture, ranching and, increasingly, tourism are the major industries in Cayo. About 35 years ago, the first small jungle lodges began operation around San Ignacio. Now there is a flourishing mix of hotels, cottages and jungle lodges near San Ignacio, along with good restaurants and loads of natural attractions, from remarkable caves like Actun Tunichil Muknal, butterfly farms and the Belize Botanic Gardens.

The country's most accessible Maya ruins are near San Ignacio, including Cahal Pech and Xunantunich.

□□□□Mountain Pine Ridge

Southeast of San Ignacio is the Mountain Pine Ridge forest reserve, more than 100,000 acres of piney woods, waterfalls and low mountains. It has three stunning jungle lodges and is the gateway to the crown jewel of Maya sites in Belize, Caracol, in its day a competitor city-state to mighty Tikal.

□□Belmopan

Between Belize City and San Ignacio, Belmopan is the downsized capital of Belize, but the attractions are in the surrounding countryside. Several good jungle lodges are near Belmopan. Along the scenic Hummingbird Highway are caves, wild rivers and national park areas, along with orange and grapefruit groves at the south end of the road. Southern Belize

Dangriga

Most visitors bypass Dangriga, except as a jumping off spot for Tobacco Caye, Southwater Caye

and other offshore cayes. While the Garifuna town is a bit scruffy, it has a lively attitude and a thriving art and crafts community. It is also the hometown of what is probably Belize's best-known export, Marie Sharp's hot sauce.

□□□Hopkins

On the southern coast of Belize in Stann Creek District between Dangriga and Placencia, Hopkins today is what nearby Placencia was like just a decade or so ago. Hopkins is a friendly Garifuna village that got its first telephones only in the mid-1990s.

New small seaside resorts and luxury condo and developments are going up in Hopkins and Sittee Point. Although at times the sand flies can eat you alive here, you can get in some excellent fishing and beach time, with day trips to the nearby Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary or Mayflower Bocawina National Park and boat trips to the reef and atolls.

□□□□Placencia

The Placencia peninsula boasts the best beaches on the mainland, and it's an appealing Mainland alternative to the bustle of Ambergris Caye. The paving of the Placencia Road, completed in 2012, has made access to the peninsula much easier.

This peninsula has some 16 miles of beachfront along the Caribbean, a backside lagoon where manatees are frequently seen, two small villages, several dozen hotels and restaurants and an increasing number of expatriates and foreign-owned homes. In recent years, the Placencia peninsula has been undergoing a boom, a boom that was slowed only temporarily by Hurricane Iris in 2001 and the Great Recession of 2008-2012. Building lots by the score have been sold to foreigners who think they'd someday like to live by the sea. Besides beaches, Placencia offers fine diving and snorkeling (including with whale sharks in the late spring and early summer) on patch reefs, the Belize Barrier Reef about 20 miles offshore and two of Belize's three atolls. Sport fishing also is good here.

The unknown kicker here is the opening in late 2016 of the Norwegian Cruise Lines cruise port on an island just off Placencia. Who knows what the impact will be of hundreds of thousands of cruise daytrippers waddling around Placencia and environs?

□□□Punta Gorda

Rainy, beautiful and remote, Punta Gorda in far Southern Belize is the base for you to visit unspoiled Maya villages and for onward travel to Guatemala and Honduras. The completion of the Southern Highway, now the best major road in Belize, has made access to the far south a lot easier, and work is far along on a new paved road connecting the Southern Highway to Guatemala, with a planned new border crossing at Jalacte.

PG, as it's known in Belize, is Toledo's only real town, with about 6,000 people, mostly Garifuna, Maya and immigrants from Guatemala. It enjoys a picturesque setting on the Bay of Honduras although there are no real beaches around the town.

The only rub in this off-the-beaten path option is renewed tension between Belize and Guatemala over Belize's southern Mainland tip and some offshore cayes that Guatemala claims, without much justification, that it owns. In the long-term, we don't see much real concern over a conflict with Guatemala. The world is on Belize's side, and Guatemala has its own problems.

□□□Toledo and the Maya Villages

Maya villages, with Mopan and Kekchi culture hardly changed for centuries, are located around PG. Cayes and the south end of the barrier reef, in the Port Honduras and Sapodilla Cayes marine reserves, offer good snorkeling and fishing. Lumbering, fishing, cacao and rice farming are the main industries, with subsistence agriculture the work of a majority of the district's families.

Once the stepchild of Belize's tourism industry, Punta Gorda and Toledo are still off-the-beaten path for visitors, but year by year that is changing, as more people discover the lush beauty of Belize's Deep South. Accessible mostly by boat are several beautiful coastal beaches in Toledo, including Punta Negra. Side Trips

□□□□Tikal/Flores, Guatemala

Tikal is the most impressive of all Maya sites. When you're in San Ignacio, or for that matter in Belize City or elsewhere in Belize, it's a fairly easy trip to Tikal, about 90 minutes by road from the Belize border. You can see the wonders of Tikal and also spend time in the charming Spanish colonial town of Flores, on an island (accessible via a short causeway) in Lago Petén Itzá. Yaxhá and many other Maya sites can be visited as well.

Chetumal, Mexico

When in Northern Belize, why not take a short trip to the capital of Quintana Roo? Get in a little downscale shopping in the Corozal Free Zone, play some hands of blackjack at the Las Vegas Casino and then spend a day or two in the "big city" of Chetumal, with a metropolitan population larger than that of the entire country of Belize. If you hanker for even more glitz, you can move on to Tulum, Playa del Carmen, Cancún or Cozumel.

Itineraries: Where to Go in Belize?

See the wonders of Belize

Map courtesy of Belize Tourism Board

Here are several possible itineraries for your Belize visit, or visits.

We've outlined four different itineraries, of different lengths from one to two weeks and for those with varying interests. Most trips can be done in reverse order. Note that you really need to plan to

add an extra day to the stated length of each trip to allow for travel time coming and going plus short arrival and departure days.

Of course, there are many other ways to see Belize. Consider these just starting points.

One-Week Turf & Surf

Day 1: Arrive at Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport near Belize City. Board a Tropic Air flight your 30-minute flight to San Ignacio's Maya Flats airstrip. Alternatively, go to San Ignacio via the George Price Highway by rental car or pre-arranged shuttle van. If you want to feel like a native and save money, take a bus. If possible, make a stop at the Belize Zoo. Get oriented to San Ignacio with a stop at the Welcome Center. If you're hungry, have a late lunch at Guava Limb or Ko-Ox Han-Nah. Go to your hotel in your rental car or taxi or with a hotel/lodge pick-up. If you want to stay in or near town, choose Ka'ana Boutique Resort, Cahal Pech Village or San Ignacio Resort Hotel, or for a more adventurous experience stay at the Lodge at Chaa Creek or Table Rock Lodge or another of the excellent lodges around San Ignacio. Have dinner at your lodge or hotel and turn in early.

Day 2: Get an early start and see the Maya ruins of either Cahal Pech or Xunantunich. You may even be able to squeeze in both. In the afternoon, take a canoe trip on the Macal, with a stop at duPlooy's Lodge for a tour of the Belize Botanic Gardens. Alternatively, visit Green Hills Butterfly Farm possibly combined with Calico Jack's zipline. Have a good dinner at your lodge or in town at Fuego.

Day 3: Take a full-day day tour either to Tikal in Guatemala or, as an alternative, do a day trip to Caracol, the top Maya site in Belize, with stops enroute at sights in the Mountain Pine Ridge such as Rio On pools and Big Rock Falls.

Day 4: Do a full-day guided tour of Actun Tunichil Muknal, the amazing cave in the Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve near Belmopan that is a highlight of any Belize visit. Return to your lodge or hotel for a good last meal, topped off with a Cuban cigar and pricey cognac.

Day 5: Transfer to Placencia by rental car, shuttle, air or bus. If you're driving, take time to see the renovated market in Belmopan, stop for a refreshing swim at the inland Blue Hole and stop near Dangriga to tour the Marie Sharp's factory. [Alternative: Go to Hopkins instead of Placencia, staying at Hamanasi if it's in your budget, or a small affordable beachside spot such as Hopkins Inn. From Hopkins you can spend one day exploring Hopkins, the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary and Mayflower Bocawina National Park and another day go diving, snorkeling or fishing at the Belize Barrier Reef or Glover's Atoll.] In Placencia, among the great lodging options are Chabil Mar Villas, Maya Beach Hotel, Laru Beya and Frances Ford Coppola's Turtle Inn. For your first night, you'll probably want to eat at your hotel, and if it's Maya Beach Hotel you'll be steps from the Maya Beach Hotel Bistro, the best restaurant in Southern Belize. Before dinner, arrange your next day's dive, snorkel or fishing trip – if it's whale shark time you usually need to do the arrangements further ahead, as space on the trips is limited.

Day 6: If it's whale shark season (usually March or April through June) and the timing is right, take a whale shark dive or snorkel trip to Gladden Spit. Otherwise, do a dive or snorkel trip to Laughing Bird Caye National Park or to Glover's or Turneffe atoll. If you're an angler instead of a diver or snorkeler, go fishing for bonefish, permit and tarpon. End your evening with a big dinner at your favorite restaurant, but leave room for more gelato from Tutti-Frutti.

Day 7: Explore the Placencia peninsula. You'll want to see Maya Beach, Seine Bight, the Garifuna village, and of course Placencia village. Save some time for relaxing on the beach. Traveling up and down the peninsula is best done with a rental car, but it can also be done by taxi or rental golf cart, scooter or, if you're a fool for sweating in the sun, by bicycle. Relax on the breezy shore at Maya Beach, at your hotel or in Placencia village. Be sure to take a walk on the Placencia sidewalk. Have a local lunch at Dawn's Grill 'n Go and by all means don't miss the gelato at Tutti-Frutti. It's authentically Italian with a tropical twist. You may also have time to in the afternoon to visit Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary or Mayflower Bocawina National Park if you haven't already done that, or take a tour to see the scarlet macaws at Red Bank village. Then, depending on where you've already dined, have dinner at Maya Beach Hotel Bistro, The Secret Garden, Rumfish y Vino or via a quick boat shuttle at Tranquilo on an island just off Point Placencia. End the evening at Barefoot Beach Bar or Yoli's.

Day 8: If you have a rental car, get an early start and drive back to Belize City to turn in your car. Otherwise, take a Tropic Air or Maya Island Air flight back to the Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport in Ladyville to connect with your flight home.

10-Day Belize Beach Trip

Day 1: Arrive at Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport near Belize City. If you feel like a little mild adventure, take a taxi into the city and see the Museum of Belize, the Fort George colonial area, the Swing Bridge and perhaps the Supreme Court, House of Culture and St. John's Cathedral. Then take a Tropic Air or Maya Island Air flight from Belize Municipal Airport to Dangriga, or go by pre-arranged shuttle or, for a true Belizean experience, take a bus via Belmopan and down the scenic Hummingbird Highway to Dangriga. From Dangriga, go by taxi to Hopkins and check in at Hamanasi Adventure & Dive Resort if it's in your budget or at Hopkins Inn or Jungle Jeanie's if not.

Days 5: Spend the day exploring Hopkins, the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary and Mayflower Bocawina National Park. Have dinner at Chef Rob's.

Days 6 and 7: Dive, snorkel and fish to your heart's content on the Belize Barrier Reef and at Glover's or Turneffe atoll. Have dinner one night at Barracuda Bar & Grill and the other night at Innies. End the evening with something cold at one of the beach bars.

Day 8: Move on to Placencia by bus, shuttle or taxi. In Placencia, among the great lodging options are Chabil Mar Villas, Maya Beach Hotel, Laru Beya and Frances Ford Coppola's Turtle Inn. For your first night, you'll probably want to eat at your hotel, and if it's Maya Beach Hotel you'll be steps from the Maya Beach Hotel Bistro, the best restaurant in Southern Belize.

Day 9: If it's whale shark season (usually March or April through June) and the timing is right, take a whale shark dive or snorkel trip to Gladden Spit. Otherwise, do a dive or snorkel trip to Laughing Bird Caye National Park and the Silk Cayes. If you're an angler, fishing for bonefish, permit and tarpon also is great from Placencia. End your evening with a big dinner at Maya Beach Hotel Bistro, The Secret Garden, Rumfish y Vino but leave room for more gelato from Tutti-Frutti.

Day 10: Explore the Placencia peninsula. Save some time to just relax on the beach. You'll want to see Maya Beach, Seine Bight, the Garifuna village, and of course Placencia village. Traveling up and down the peninsula is best done with a rental car, but it can also be done by taxi or rental golf cart, scooter or, if you're a fool for sweating in the sun, by bicycle. Relax on the breezy shore at Maya Beach, at your hotel or in Placencia village. Be sure to take a walk on the Placencia sidewalk.

Have a local lunch at Dawn's Grill 'n Go and by all means don't miss the gelato at Tutti-Frutti. It's authentically Italian with a tropical twist. Have your final dinner at your favorite restaurant on the peninsula or via a quick boat shuttle at Tranquilo on an island just off Point Placencia. End the evening at Barefoot Beach Bar, Topsy Tuna, Yoli's or all three.

Day 11: Take a Tropic Air flight back to the Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport in Ladyville to connect with your flight home.

12-Day Off-the-Beaten Path Trip

This itinerary gets you to lightly visited areas of Belize, both in the far north and far south of the country. Although you will miss some of the highlights of Belize, you'll see a side of Belize that most tourists don't see. Another advantage is that generally this is an inexpensive way to see Belize, and you won't have difficulty getting reservations even at peak times like Christmas and Easter. Of course, you can adapt this itinerary to visit just the northern or the southern destinations and plug in what interests you from other itineraries, such as visiting San Ignacio or Placencia. This itinerary can be done by bus or shuttle, or partly by air, but most of it is easiest done by rental car, which is what we recommend.

Day 1: Arrive at Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport near Belize City. Pick up a rental car at the airport and drive to Corozal Town. Spend the night at one of the inexpensive to moderate inns, such as Serenity Sands B&B near Consejo village, Coco Banana or Tony's Inn. The top end in Corozal, yet still quite affordable, is Almond Tree Resort. Have an inexpensive dinner at Patty's Bistro or pizza and drinks at Corozo Blue's.

Day 2: Spend the morning exploring Corozal Town, including the recently renovated Hoare Market, where you can get a cheap breakfast or lunch or buy fruit for almost nothing. See Corozal House of Culture and the murals at the Corozal Town Hall. In the afternoon, take a quick look at the Santa Rita Maya ruins at the north end of town and drive to the Consejo village area where a lot of U.S. and other expats live. Have dinner at Smuggler's Den near Consejo or at the Y Not Bar & Grill by the bay at Tony's Inn back in Corozal Town.

Day 3: Use a shuttle to transfer for an overnight in Chetumal, Mexico. (Your Belize auto insurance won't be valid in Mexico, and Belize rental agencies do not permit their vehicles to be taken into Mexico.) Remember, you'll have to pay the US\$18.75 per person exit fee. Stay at the tried and true Hotel Los Cocos or the inexpensive Hotel Villanueva. Walk around the town, which is safe although there's not a lot of interest to visitors. The Museo de la Cultural Maya is worth a short visit. Have a seafood dinner at one of the simple, inexpensive restaurants in Chetumal such as Marisqueria El Taco Loco, El Rincon de las Tortugas or Marisqueria Mi Viejo.

Alternative: If you like to gamble, instead of going all the way into Chetumal, drive or take a taxi to the Corozal Free Zone. You can play at the Las Vegas Casino and, if you like, stay at the casino's new hotel. It's in Belize territory, but you'll have to pay the exit fee anyway. The 54,000 square-foot casino has 600 gaming machines and 31 poker, roulette, blackjack and other live tables. You get free drinks while gambling.

Day 4: After breakfast at Miss June's Kitchen, drive to Cerros Maya site in the Cerros area near Copper Bank. You'll cross the New River on a hand-pulled vehicle ferry. Be prepared for mosquitos at the ruins. Have lunch at the small, delightful Cerros Beach Resort. You may like it so much you'll decide to spend the night here, in which case you could do the following on a day trip. If you don't stay at Cerros, drive a little further, crossing Laguna Seca on another hand-pulled vehicle ferry, to

Orchid Bay. It is a real estate development selling primarily to foreigners, but it has a decent restaurant, Tradewinds, and an inn, Crimson Orchid B&B. Spend the night at this B&B and see what you think about living in a place like this. Then drive on to Sarteneja village. If you have time in the afternoon, visit Shipstern Nature Reserve and do a short self-guided walk. Spend the night in Sarteneja, a quaint little fishing and boat-building village. Oasis Guest House and Fernando's Seaside Guesthouse are your best bets, both inexpensive. Have dinner at Nathalie's Restaurant at Backpacker's Paradise hostel.

Day 5: Get a filling breakfast of tacos, garnaches and such for a couple of dollars at Liz's Fast Food. Then drive through Little Belize and part of Mennonite country to Orange Walk Town, where you can stop for lunch at Nahal Mayab or Maracas Bar & Grill. After lunch, drive a little south on the Philip Goldson Highway to Crooked Tree village, the oldest Creole village in Belize, and Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary. For accommodations and dinner, choose either Crooked Tree Lodge or Bird's Eye View Lodge, both moderately priced.

Day 6: Take an early morning birding tour on the lagoon, watching for jabiru storks. Then drive south toward Belize City, taking the Burrell Boom Bypass around Belize City. Stop at the Baboon Sanctuary visitor center and museum and do a short howler monkey tour. If you're hungry, have lunch at Black Orchid Resort. Back on the road, stop at the gift shop at the Hattieville prison, where inmates sell their handmade items. Drive on to Belmopan and then down the scenic Hummingbird Highway, stopping at some point at the inland Blue Hole for a swim in the cool blue water and perhaps a visit to St. Herman's Cave across the road (cave tubing here is possible with a guide). There are two good jungle lodges on the Hummingbird, Ian Anderson's Caves Branch Adventure Company & Jungle Lodge and Sleeping Giant Rainforest Lodge. Both are expensive and have good restaurants for dinner, and you may want to do a night guided nature tour.

Day 7: After breakfast and perhaps a birding tour or other activity at your lodge, drive to the Marie Sharp's factory off the Hummingbird/Stann Creek District Highway near the intersection with the Southern Highway. Take the short factory tour and buy your hot sauce here, as the selection is huge. Go on to Dangriga and check out the Gulisi Garifuna Museum, Austin Rodriguez' drum shop and Pen Cayetano's studio. Then drive on to Hopkins village off the Southern Highway for a short beach break. Check in at Hopkins Inn or Jungle Jeanie's. Take a swim in the Caribbean and top off the day with a delicious meal at Chef Rob's.

Alternative: Instead of driving on to Dangriga and Hopkins or Day 7, you could extend your stay at one of the jungle lodges (see above) on the Hummingbird. That would give you time to do a cave tubing trip or jungle trek.

Day 8: Drive south on the Southern Highway to the Punta Gorda area. Stop at Big Falls village for lunch at Coleman's restaurant. Check in at a small moderately priced inn in PG, such as Coral House Inn, Hickatee Cottages or Blue Belize. Or stay at the serene Sirmoor Hill Farm B&B on a 775-acre ranch near PG. Explore the town a little, and have dinner at Asha's Culture Kitchen.

Day 9: If it's a market day in PG, see that first, buying fruit for a picnic. If not much is going on at the newly renovated market, drive north and tour the Maya sites of Lubaantun and Nim Li Punit. Come back to PG, visit the little Cotton Tree chocolate factory and shop and have dinner at Marian's Bayview, Gomier's Vegan Vegetarian Restaurant or Mangrove Inn. For a splurge, dine at the lovely but expensive restaurant at Belcampo Lodge just north of PG. At the lodge, arrive early and take the little cable car down to the river – you may see a crocodile.

Day 10: Take a full-day snorkel/dive trip to the or Port Honduras Marine Reserve or with a longer boat ride to Sapodilla Caye Marine Reserve. You'll probably stop at a small caye or two, such as West Snake Caye or Hunting Caye, for swimming or picnicking.

Days 11 and 12: Spend these days exploring the Mopan and Kekchi Maya villages in rural Toledo, including San Antonio, San Pedro Columbia, Santa Cruz, Laguna and San Miguel. If you really want to experience village life among contemporary Maya, you can do an overnight homestay or a stay at a village guesthouse. Facilities are basic at best, in some cases with no running water, indoor bathrooms or even electricity. The Toledo Cultural Trail is being developed to showcase Maya, Garifuna, Creole, Mestizo and East Indian cultures in Toledo. Try to work in time to visit Blue Creek Cave near Blue Creek village, visit a cacao farm and possibly see the Garifuna village of Barranco, birthplace of the late Andy Palacio, the punta rock musician. A good place for lunch or dinner off the newly paved San Antonio Road is The Farm Inn.

Day 13: Get an early start to return your rental car to Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport and to take your flight home.

Two-Week Adventure Trip

Day 1: Arrive at Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport near Belize City to start your big two-week adventure. Head first to a jungle lodge in the wilds of Orange Walk District. We like Chan Chich Lodge at Gallon Jug Estates, built right on top of a Maya site, and the place in Belize where you're most likely to see a jaguar in the wild, but Lamanai Outpost Lodge on the New River Lagoon is also excellent. La Milpa Field Station in the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area run by Programme for Belize is another alternative, as it's a good value for your money. You can get to any of these by shuttle or charter a small plane to Chan Chich and Lamanai Outpost. To Lamanai Outpost you also can go by boat up the New River from Orange Walk Town. For the highest-octane adventure, rent a car and drive to your lodge. You'll go through Mennonite farms, jungle with ancient mahogany trees and you may well spot brocket deer, howler and spider monkeys, tapirs, peccaries, kinkajous, coatis and all kinds of birds, butterflies and reptiles. With luck you might see one or more of Belize's five species of wild cats. Get settled in and have dinner at your lodge.

Days 2, 3 and 4: Exactly what trips and tours you do depend to some extent on which lodge you choose, but you'll certainly want to explore the Lamanai Maya ruins with their stunning setting on the New River Lagoon, the large La Milpa Maya site near La Milpa Field Station, go on a couple of jungle trekking, wildlife spotting and birding tours, including a night walk in the bush or a boat trip to see crocodiles in the New River Lagoon. Avid birders can see as many as 150 species in just a three-day trip. You can go canoeing on lagoons and horseback riding. Also, get a taste for Belize's diverse culture by visiting Mestizo and Creole villages and Blue Creek or Shipyard Mennonite communities. Most of your meals will be prepared by your lodge.

Day 5: Transfer by rental car, shuttle or small plane to the Mountain Pine Ridge or San Ignacio area. There are three great jungle lodges in the Mountain Pine Ridge: Blancaneaux, Hidden Valley Inn and Gaia Riverlodge. Or, if you want something on the cheaper side, consider a tree house at the budget Parrot Nest in Bullet Tree Falls near San Ignacio, camping at Clarissa Falls, both on the Mopan River, or a platform tent at Macal River Jungle Camp at Chaa Creek. If going by land, stop by the Belize Zoo to see any of Belize's mammals, reptiles and special birds that you might have missed in previous days. Have dinner at your lodge.

Day 6: Do a full-day guided tour of Actun Tunichil Muknal, the amazing cave in the Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve near Belmopan. Return to your lodge or hotel for a good meal, drinks and conversation with other guests.

Days 7 and 8: Take an overnight trip to Tikal in Guatemala on your own. See the Tikal Sidetrip section for details on how to do this. Stay at one of the three jungle lodges in Tikal National Park.

Hike the world's largest and best Maya site. Do sunset and sunrise tours, watching the sun set and rise from the top of a Maya temple in the lush jungle. Budget watchers can camp at the campground in the park. Take your meals and drink Gallo beer at one of the comedores in the park or at your lodge. On your return trip to Belize, make time for a visit to the charming colonial island town of Flores, or do the zipline or canopy tour at Canopy Tours Tikal near the entrance to Tikal National Park and stop at Yaxhá Maya site near the Belize border.

Day 9: Take a trip by car or on a guided tour to Caracol in the Chiquibul reserve, the top Maya site in Belize, with stops enroute at sights in the Mountain Pine Ridge including Rio Frio cave, Rio On pools and Big Rock Falls. If you've had enough Maya ruins, instead of going to Caracol, spend the day mountain biking and hiking in the Mountain Pine Ridge or canoeing the Macal River. Either way, end your day with a river or waterfall pond swim, followed by a good dinner at your lodge.

Day 10: Move on by car or shuttle van or bus to the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary in Stann Creek District, the world's first jaguar preserve. Stay at a cabin or dormitory in the sanctuary, or at the campground. While there's still daylight, hike the trails around the visitor center, perhaps cooling off with a river swim, then cook your own dinner (bring supplies with you).

Days 11 and 12: If you're in good shape, do a one- or two-night jungle trek to Victoria Peak, the second highest peak in the Maya Mountains or to Doyle's Delight, the highest peak in the country. Several guides specialize in this rugged hike. If you'd prefer something less vigorous, do the hiking trails around the Cockscomb visitor center and swim in the river. Also, visit nearby Mayflower Bocawina National Park for a hike to the waterfalls and do the longest zipline in Belize.

Alternative Jungle Adventure: An alternative to the options presented for Days 10 to 12, you could instead stay at Ian Anderson's Caves Branch Adventure Company & Jungle Lodge or Sleeping Giant Rainforest Lodge, both off the Hummingbird Highway. Ian Anderson in particular offers a variety of jungle trekking, caving, cave tubing and other adventures, as day trips, overnight trips and the ultimate four-day "Jungle Quest" expedition.

Days 13 and 14: Move on farther south to Punta Gorda, Toledo. There, you have the option of staying at a small inn in PG, such as Coral House Inn, Hickatee Cottages or Blue Belize, or in a homestay or village guesthouse stay in the Maya villages, and doing day hikes to several Maya villages and to Maya sites such as Pusilha, Nim Li Punit and Lubaantun. Also options are a trip to the caves at Blue Creek village or kayaking the Moho River or the Ranger for a Day program at the Ya'axche Conservation Trust in the Indian Creek area.

Another option is to spend one day snorkeling, diving and fishing at the pristine offshore cayes of the Port Honduras Marine Reserve or Sapodilla Cayes Marine Reserve.

If you can extend your vacation, consider the 10-day Maya Divide Trail expedition offered by guide Bruno Kuppinger of Toledo Cave and Adventure Tours near PG. Kuppinger says this trip into the Maya Mountains of Central and Southern Belize, only for the fit and hardy who can do without the comforts of civilization, probably will be the hardest 10 days of your life.

Day 15: Arise early and make your way, by car, shuttle, James Line bus or Tropic Air or Maya Island Air flight back to Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport near Belize City for your flight home.

Belize is on the Caribbean south of Mexico and east of Guatemala

Belize is on the Caribbean Coast of Central America, bordered by Mexico to the north and Guatemala to the west and south. To the east is the Caribbean Sea. In Belize waters are as many as 1,000 islands, most unpopulated specks of sand, coral or mangrove. Belize's land area is about the size of the U.S. state of Massachusetts or the country of Wales in the U.K. — 8,867 square miles — with a population estimated at around 368,000 in mid-2015, about as many people as live in metro Savannah, Ga. In addition, Belize's marine area, assuming its territory stretches out 20 kilometers or a little over 12 miles from shore, adds another 9,133 square miles, for a total land and sea area of about 18,000 square miles. From north to south Belize is less than 200 miles in length, and at its widest point it is less than 70 miles across. From popular air gateways in the U.S. including Atlanta, Charlotte, Dallas, Houston and Miami, Belize is only two to three hours. Entry and Exit Requirements

You must have a valid passport to enter Belize, valid at least during the period of your stay, according to the U.S. Embassy in Belize. However, some airlines flying to Belize, and Belize Immigration, go beyond this and say your passport should have at least six months before expiration. As a precaution, follow the latter rule. Visas are not required for citizens of the U.S., Canada, the U.K., Mexico, Guatemala, Costa Rica, British Commonwealth, Caribbean Community (CARICOM), European Union (EU) and a number of other countries. Check the Belize Immigration website (www.belize-immigration.org) for the latest visa requirements.

You should also have an onward or return ticket. Immigration in Belize won't ask for it, but the airline you fly in on may.

Entry is granted for up to 30 days at no cost. Note that says up to 30 days. The immigration officer can choose to stamp a shorter date in your passport but usually will stamp 30 days. If asked how long you are staying, say "30 days" or "about a month" even if you think you will only be in Belize for a week. Your plans might change.

Renewals of your tourist permit are permitted. Renewals cost US\$25 per month per person for the first six months, then US\$50 a month. You must apply for a permit at the nearest Immigration office or in remote areas at a police station. After six months, you may need to demonstrate to Belize Immigration why you need or want to stay. Overstaying your permit may incur a fine of US\$500, although it usually will be less, or possibly nothing. You are also supposed to have funds sufficient to cover your length of stay (currently put at US\$60 a day), but it is highly unlikely that you will be asked to prove this, and in the rare cases of being asked a credit card should be sufficient proof.

When leaving Belize by air, there is a US\$39.25 exit fee. Citizens and official residents of Belize pay a lower rate. Many airlines include the fee in the ticket price. When leaving Belize by land, at either the Mexico or Guatemala borders, there is a US\$15 border fee, plus a \$3.75 conservation fee, for a total of US\$18.75 exit fee. Currently, those leaving by water taxi/ferry pay US\$3.75. Children under 12 accompanied by parents are exempt from all exit fees.

No vaccinations are required unless coming from a yellow fever endemic area. Check with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov) for any recommended immunizations. On Belize entry or departure, currency in excess of US\$5,000 or BZ\$10,000 must be declared; if not declared it can and likely will be confiscated.

Cruise ship passengers do not need to go through Belize immigration or show a passport on stops in Belize, but cruise passengers will need a valid passport in order to board the ship at their initial port of departure. Air Travel to Belize

At present, six major airlines fly to Belize: American (which recently merged with US Airways), Avianca (formerly TACA), Copa (which in late 2015 began offering two weekly flights to Belize from Panama), Delta, United Airlines (which merged with Continental) and Southwest Airlines (which began service to Belize in late 2015). The gateways for nonstop flights from the U.S. include Atlanta, Charlotte, Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami and Newark. Avianca has service from San Salvador, and Copa has service from Panama City. In addition, Belize-based Tropic Air has service between Belize City and Cancún, Mérida, Flores, Guatemala City, Roatán, San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa. For more information on transportation to and in Belize, see the Transportation section of this guide, below. Climate

The climate of Belize has two seasons: a rainy and a dry season. Most of the year's rainfall occurs during the period June to November, the rainy season, with the driest months being February to May. The transition from dry to the rainy is usually very sharp. Mean annual rainfall across Belize ranges from 60 inches in the north to 160 inches to 200 inches or more in the south. Except for the southern regions, the rainfall varies a good deal from year to year.

Most of Belize has a sub-tropical climate similar to that of Central and South Florida. Much of Belize usually has lows in the 60s to 70s, with highs in the 80s to low 90s. Occasionally during the winter cold fronts from the north will drop temperatures into the 50s at night, and even into the 40s at the higher elevations. The entire country is frost-free, and snow has never been reported in modern times.

January sees the coolest temperatures of the year, while May has the hottest. In general, daytime temps are higher inland, due to the influence of prevailing winds from the sea on the cays and coast. The humidity is high year round in all parts of the country.

Belize National Meteorological Service (www.hydromet.gov.bz) is a good source of information both on short-term weather forecasts and longer-term climatic data. Crime and Safety

Like many developing countries in the region, Belize has a relatively high crime rate. For example, the homicide rate in Belize was around 33 per 100,000 population in 2014 and 2015. That compares with about 4.5 per 100,000 in the U.S. and 1.4 per 100,000 in Canada for the same period. Other serious crimes such as rape, robbery, burglary and theft in Belize are also generally higher than in the U.S. or Canada, although the difference is not as dramatic in most categories.

However, to put this in context, keep in mind: First, a large percentage of serious crimes including murder take place in just one city in Belize – Belize City – and within Belize City a large percentage of crimes take place in a fairly small area of the South Side. Much of this crime is due to extreme poverty in the South Side and to drug and gang activity there. Outside of this “inner city” area of Belize City, the crime rate is much lower.

Another area where crime has become more of a problem is in Cayo District along the Guatemala border, both near Benque Viejo and San Ignacio and in the Mountain Pine Ridge. The border there is long and porous, and Guatemalan bad guys can come across, do their dirty work and then slip back into Guatemala. In January 2016 a 39-year-old Chicago woman, who worked at TV station WLS, was murdered in broad daylight at a small lodge near Succotz village and the Guatemala border. In early 2014, two American citizens were kidnapped at gunpoint from a resort area near the western border with Guatemala. A Canadian filmmaker living in a small village near Spanish Lookout was killed over New Year's weekend 2015-16, and two local teenage suspects have been

charged.

Second, most violent crimes in Belize involve drugs, gang activity and family or personal feuds. Most visitors to Belize spend little time in Belize City, except in transit, and most are not exposed to the drug-, gang- and feud-related situations. Therefore, tourists in Belize are much less exposed to violent crime risk than the average Belizean resident.

Theft of personal property is a risk in Belize, as it is for most travelers anywhere in the world, but beyond that most visitors to Belize say they feel safe and express little serious worry about being the victim of crime. The author of this book has been traveling to every area of Belize for more than 25 years and has never been the victim of any violent crime and only on two occasions experienced minor thefts, totaling less than US\$50.

When in Belize, as when you travel anywhere, you should take the standard traveler's precautions: Use common sense – if something seems sketchy, it may well be; ask locally, at your hotel or elsewhere, about neighborhoods and areas that are best avoided; don't wander into unlit, unpopulated areas at night, whether it's at the beach or in a city; keep an eye on your personal possessions; don't flaunt your wealth (and by comparison with the average Belizean you are definitely wealthy) by wearing expensive jewelry or exposing wads of cash; be careful of friends you make in bars – Belizeans are very friendly, but a few are too friendly; and of course don't put yourself in situations, such as buying drugs or drinking to excess, when bad things can easily happen. In Belize City in particular, don't walk alone or even as a couple or group after dark and always take a licensed taxi (they have green license tags) anywhere you go at night.

U.S. citizens and official residents should consider enrolling in STEP, Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (<https://step.state.gov/step/>), a service of the U.S. Department of State. It provides important emergency information on your foreign destinations, helps the U.S. Embassy get in touch with you and gives family and friends a way to contact you when abroad. Practicalities and Emergencies

Belize telephone country code: 501

Belize Tourism Board: 64 Regent Street, Belize City, 501-227-2420 or 800-624-0686, www.travelbelize.org

Calling from U.S. or Canada to Belize: When calling from the U.S. or Canada to any Belize landline or mobile number dial 011 plus the Belize country code (501) and then the seven-digit Belize number.

Calling from Belize to U.S. or Canada: Calling from Belize, dial 001 plus the area code plus seven-digit number.

Calling from United Kingdom to Belize: Dial 00 plus the country code (501) and then the seven-digit Belize number.

Calling from Belize to the United Kingdom: Dial 00 plus U.K country code (44) plus city code if any (e.g., London 22) plus telephone number.

Electricity: Standard electric current in Belize is the same as in the U.S., 110 volts AC, 60 cycles, and the regular two-prong U.S.-style plug is used. Some outlets may not have the third opening for a ground. Remote jungle lodges may have direct current (DC) from batteries, especially at night but still use the two-prong U.S.-style plug.

Police, fire and ambulance emergencies in Belize: 911 (90 is another emergency number to call in Belize City only).

Public telephones: Public telephones are available all over the country but do not accept coins or currency. You will need a pre-paid Belize Telemedia Ltd. (BTL) phone card, available at BTL offices and in many shops around the country.

Time in Belize: The entire country of Belize is on the same time as U.S. Central Standard Time. Belize does not observe Daylight Savings Time.

Telephone operator assistance in Belize: Dial 114 or 115.

U.S. Embassy in Belize: Floral Park Road, Belmopan City, Cayo. Belize, C.A. During business hours, call 501-822-4011. Emergencies after business hours, call 501-822-4012. Website is <http://belize.usembassy.gov>, email embbelize@state.gov. The current U.S. ambassador to Belize, appointed in 2014, is Carlos R. Moreno, a graduate of Yale and Stanford School of Law and a former associate justice of the California Supreme Court.

Canadian Honorary Consulate in Belize: Mr. Patrick Andrews, 80 Princess Margaret Drive, Belize City, Belize, C.A. tel. 501-223-1050, email cdncon.belize@btl.net. Canada does not have a regular embassy in Belize. The Canadian Embassy in Guatemala (13 Calle 8-44, Zone 10,

Edificio Edyma Plaza, Guatemala City, Guatemala, C.A. tel. 502-2363-4348, www.canadainternational.gc.ca/) handles diplomatic matters relating to Belize.

British High Commission in Belize: North Ring Road/Belhado Parade, Belmopan City, Belize, tel. 501-822-2146, email brithicom@btl.net. Accommodations

Belize has some 800 lodging places (not including some vacation home rentals), with about 7,400 total rooms. Most of these hotels, inns, lodges and guesthouses are small, owner-operated places -- about 70% have 10 or fewer rooms. Only four hotels in the country have 100 rooms or more: the 180-room Ramada Princess Hotel & Casino in Belize City, the new 106-room Las Vegas Hotel in the Free Zone at the Mexican border in Corozal (plus additional rooms and suites in an older hotel), the 102-room Radisson Fort George in Belize City and The Placencia Hotel & Residences on the Placencia peninsula, which has about 100 condo apartments.

Travelers to Belize today can expect to find a variety of accommodations to fit almost any budget or preference. Among the special Belizean accommodations are the so-called jungle lodges. These are mostly in remote areas, but despite the remote locations you don't have to forego life's little luxuries, such as cold beer, hot showers and comfortable mattresses. The best of these places, including The Lodge at Chaa Creek in Cayo, Hidden Valley Inn and Blancaneaux Lodge in the Mountain Pine Ridge and Chan Chich in rural Orange Walk, are as good as any jungle lodge in the world.

Usually, the birding and wildlife spotting around the lodges are excellent, and they offer all the amenities you enjoy after the day's adventures are done. Many, though not all, have bay thatch cabañas built with a nod to Maya-style construction, yet done up in much more luxury and style than traditional Maya cottages. While the top places are first-class in every way, with rates to match — often US\$200 to \$500 or more a night in season — you don't have to pay much to get an authentic jungle lodge experience. Places like Clarissa Falls and Parrot Nest in Cayo and Hickatee Cottages near Punta Gorda are relative bargains.

Another delightful type of lodging in Belize is the seaside resort. At the top end, places like Victoria

House, El Pescador and The Phoenix on Ambergris Caye or Hamanasi in Hopkins have rooms and amenities that could earn a spot in Architectural Digest, with rates from US\$200 to \$500+ a night. But seaside resorts also come in more affordable categories. The best of these are sandy barefoot spots, such as Maya Beach Hotel on the Placencia peninsula, Jungle Jeanie's or Hopkins Inn in Hopkins or Treetops and OASI on Caye Caulker. Here, a couple can spend a night at the beach for as little as US\$60 to US\$100.

All around Mainland Belize you can find small guesthouses and inns with clean, safe rooms at budget prices. The Trek Stop, Aguada and Casa Blanca in Cayo, Sea Breeze in Corozal Town, Oasis Guesthouse in Sarteneja or Tipple Tree Beya Inn in Hopkins are examples. At these places you can get a nice little room for around US\$75 double or less, sometimes much less. For just a tiny step up in price, you can enjoy a delightful stay at a very reasonable price. Consider spots such as Coral Bay Inn or Blue Belize in Punta Gorda or Serenity B&B in Consejo near Corozal Town.

In a few areas, including Placencia and Hopkins on the Mainland, you can enjoy the extra space of a condo-style unit at a regular hotel-style price. These are called condotels. In Placencia, you also have the option of vacation home rentals, which range from basic cottages to deluxe villas with private pools.

Do You Need to Book Ahead?

Can you wing it in Belize? Or do you need to book hotels in advance? The answer, except around busy holidays such as Christmas and Easter, used to be that you could just wing it. Average annual occupancy at Belize hotels was generally under 40%, and rooms in all price levels were plentiful most of the time. However, beginning in the early 2000s tourism grew to record levels. Despite a large increase in the number of hotel rooms, annual occupancy has reached 47% for the latest year with data available, and in Belize City and on Ambergris Caye occupancy rates are over 50%. Quite a few hotels, especially those offering the best value or top service and location, are heavily booked in-season. When visiting Belize in-season, roughly mid-December through Easter, it's a good idea to book ahead for at least the first night or two. And definitely book in advance for Christmas/New Year's and Easter. This doesn't mean that if you arrive without reservations you'll have to sleep on the beach with the sandflies — you'll be able to find a room somewhere — but your first choices may well be booked and you may have to spend valuable vacation time hunting for a room. Tours and dive trips can usually be booked after you arrive, except possibly for high-demand tours such as whale watching.

Using the Internet to Find and Book Rooms: Belize is wired. Nearly all hotels in Belize have websites and email. You can use their web sites (listings in this book include internet addresses) to help you choose your accommodations, but remember that these sites are advertising and naturally put the best face on things. Nearly all hotels in Belize are small, and though many won't admit it for fear of alienating travel agents and travel wholesalers, they would prefer you book direct, preferably via the internet. That saves them 10 to 25% in agent commissions, plus the cost and trouble of faxing, mailing brochures and telephoning back and forth. Some, but not all, hotels offer discounts for direct bookings via the internet. Many don't advertise this, but it won't hurt to ask.

However, it pays to compare direct rates with online lodging booking companies such as Hotels.com (www.hotels.com), TripAdvisor (www.tripadvisor.com), Expedia (www.expedia.com), Priceline (www.priceline.com), Travelocity (www.travelocity.com), Vacation Rentals By Owner (www.vrbo.com) and others.

The cheapest way to communicate with hotels in Belize is via email. Unfortunately, not all hotels in Belize check their email regularly and respond to messages in a timely way. In addition, many

hotels have to deal with spam email seeking bookings, with the scam coming after the booker sends a deposit with a bogus credit card number. Also, email in Belize may be down, sometimes for several days at a time. If you don't hear back after sending an email, follow up with a second email or with a telephone call or fax. In-Season and Off-Season

Like the Caribbean islands, Mexico and some other warm-weather destinations in the region, Belize has two main visitor seasons: winter, considered in-season, and summer, considered off-season. The actual dates vary, but as a rule of thumb in-season is from around U.S. Thanksgiving week through Easter week, while off-season is the rest of the year. Many, though not all, hotels, car rental companies and other tourism operators, reduce their rates off-season by 10 to 40%. Budget hotels and guesthouses, in particular, tend to have year-round rates, although they may offer some short-term specials during slow periods. Some operators have a shoulder season, again varying in dates, but typically is from just after Easter to early June and also November through mid-December. During shoulder season rates may be reduced somewhere between the in-season and off-season levels. Nearly all hotels in Belize have a peak season, Christmas and New Year's holidays, plus the Easter holidays, when rates are at their highest, higher even than the in-season rates. Check hotel and other tourism operator websites to determine exactly when various rate levels apply over the year. Best Times to Visit Belize

Anytime is a good time to visit, but here are the "best times" for different activities and budgets:

Best time to avoid tourists: September-October

Best time to avoid rain: February-April

Best time for underwater visibility: March-June

Best time for lowest hotel prices: After Easter-U.S. Thanksgiving

Best time to visit Toledo District and the far south: February-May

Best time to visit Cayo: October-February (when it's not so hot)

Best time to visit Placencia: January-May

Best time to avoid hurricanes and tropical storms: December-June Food and Dining in Belize

We don't know who started the rumor that you can't get a good meal in Belize. The fact is, you can eat gloriously well, at modest prices.

Rice and beans is the quintessential Belizean dish, but this is not the rice and beans your momma used to fix — unless she's from Belize or perhaps New Orleans. Rice and beans (or beans and rice, which is slightly different) in Belize means spicy and smoky, with plenty of recado (also known as achote) and other seasonings, perhaps flavored with salt pork and some onions and peppers and cooked in coconut milk. Usually these are served with a chunk of stew chicken, fish or pork. The whole thing might cost just US\$5 or \$6 in a pleasant restaurant. If you're not happy in Belize, you're probably not getting enough rice and beans. You'll find Marie Sharp's hot sauces everywhere. There are now more than a dozen different varieties. You can tour Marie Sharp's small factory near Dangriga and perhaps meet Marie herself.

Lobster as served in an upscale restaurant

Along the coast and on the cayes, seafood is as fresh as the salt air. In-season (mid-June to mid-February) spiny lobster, which is a Caribbean lobster without large claws and nearly all the meat in the tail — grilled, broiled, steamed, even fried — is fairly inexpensive and good. But a big filet of snapper or grouper, prepared over a grill with lime juice, is just as tasty and even cheaper. Belizeans love barracuda, and the more-local seafood restaurants serve it. Conch, in season October to June, is delicious grilled or stewed in lime juice as ceviche, but we like it best in fritters, chopped and fried in a light batter. Shrimp in Belize are all farm-raised in the country, not harvested from the sea. There are no local oysters in Belize, because the water is too warm.

Every ethnic group in multicultural Belize has its own taste treats. Among them: Hudut, the best-known Garifuna dish, is fish usually cooked in coconut milk with mashed plantains. Sere is another Garifuna fish soup dish similar to hudut. Each of these classic dishes has several variations. Cassava bread, made with the starchy tuber that is common across Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America, is another common Garifuna item.

Boil-up is a Creole favorite, fish boiled with plantains, yams and potatoes, and served with tomato sauce and boiled bread. Cow-foot soup is another Creole dish, and yes it is made with a real cow's hoof. Stew chicken with rice and beans is served in nearly every Belizean restaurant and eaten by Belizeans of all backgrounds, although the origin probably was Creole. You can also get stew pork, stew fish and other stewed meats with rice and beans. Fryjacks (in the Kriol language you usually drop the plural, so a Belizean might just order fryjack) are fried pieces of dough, a kind of beignet without the powdered sugar. They are served at breakfast instead of toast. Journeycakes, also called Johnnycakes, are another breakfast bread, although they can be eaten at other meals. They are like a somewhat hard biscuit, traditionally cooked over an open-hearth fire but now more often baked in an oven. Creole buns are sweet breads made with coconut milk, flour, yeast, butter, brown sugar, raisins and spices such as cinnamon and nutmeg.

A few restaurants serve local game, including iguana, venison and gibnut, a rabbit-like rodent dubbed the Royal Rat because it was once served to Queen Elizabeth II.

The Maya dish most popular with visitors and most often found in restaurants is pibil, pork and other meats seasoned, wrapped in banana leaf and cooked slowly in an underground oven. Pok chuk is a Maya-style dish with strips of grilled pork, onions, green peppers, pureed beans, pico de gallo salsa and corn tortillas.

Of course, with Mexico next door, and with Mestizos making up about one-half of Belize's population, Belize has a wide variety of Mexican-derived dishes, including tamales, tacos, burritos, garnaches (corn tortillas fried and topped with beans, salsa and cheese) and panades (deep-fried tortillas filled with fish). Escabeche is a traditional Mexican soup with chicken, onions, vinegar and tortillas.

Chicken is by far the number one meat in Belize, and you will find it served nearly every way possible – in Mexican-style dishes, soups, of course stewed with rice and beans and also fried. Most of the chicken sold in Belize is raised by Mennonites, primarily around Spanish Lookout. Fried chicken is a special favorite and is found on the menus of most Belizean restaurants. It is still sometimes referred to as “dollah chicken,” even though it costs more than that today. Expat Belizeans returning home to visit family usually seek out their favorite fried chicken shack or stand, especially in Belize City.

We find most of the beef in Belize to be poor, although you can get a tasty steak in Belize if you look hard enough. If you have the choice, take a filet. By the way, hamburgers in Belize are called, appropriately enough, beefburgers.

But the pork is heavenly. Belizean pork chops are tender and flavorful, the best we've ever tasted.

Belizean bacon is a little different from most we've had but delicious with fresh farm eggs. Only brown eggs are legal in Belize, by the way, to protect Belize's chicken farmers — if you see a white egg it's an illegal alien. For breakfast, or almost anytime for that matter, fruit is the thing — fresh pineapple, mango, papaya, watermelon, banana and orange. With fryjacks and a cup of rich Guatemalan or Gallon Jug Estates or other locally grown Belizean coffee, we're set for the day.

Speaking of fruit, Belize offers a virtual cornucopia of tropical and semi-tropical fruits, some native to the region and many imported to Belize and thriving here. Among them: mangos, in dozens of different varieties, soursop, papaya, sapote (or mamey), craboo, custard apple, star fruit, ambarella (also known as golden plum), breadfruit, guava, sorrel, Malay apple, dragon fruit, sea grape, tamarind, pineapple, sapodilla, cashew fruit and apple banana, a delicious variety of banana not found in U.S., Canadian or European stores because it does not ship well.

Cacao growing and chocolate making are growing industries in Belize. The Toledo Cacao Growers Association (Main Street, Punta Gorda, 501-722-2992, www.tcgabelize.com) is an organization of around 600 farmers, 95% of which are indigenous Maya. The TCGA helps farmers market their organic product to chocolate makers in Belize and around the world. One of the major buyers of Toledo cacao is Green & Black in the U.K. Maya Mountain Cacao in Punta Gorda also sources Belizean-grown cacao from Toledo and Stann Creek districts for sale to ultra-premium chocolate makers.

In Belize, there are a number of small chocolate makers, including AJAW Chocolates & Crafts in San Ignacio, Goss Chocolate on the Placencia peninsula, Cotton Tree Chocolate in Punta Gorda, Ixcacao Maya Belizean Chocolate (formerly Cirila's) in San Felipe village, Toledo, Che'il Mayan Products at Maya Center and Belize Chocolate Company in San Pedro, Ambergris Caye.

For the most part, Belize dining isn't fancy, but even Belize is branching out in some of the newer worlds of cuisine – Thai, North and South Indian, Vietnamese, Japanese, French, Italian and more. Among our favorite restaurants in Belize – in a variety of price ranges and ambiances -- are the Bistro at Maya Beach Hotel on the Placencia peninsula, Chef Rob's in Hopkins, Asha's Culture Kitchen in Punta Gorda, Miss June's Kitchen in Corozal Town, Fuego, Guava Limb and Ko-Ox Han Nah in San Ignacio, Riverside Tavern in Belize City and, at the jungle lodges, the main dining rooms at The Lodge at Chaa Creek near San Ignacio and Blancaneaux in the Mountain Pine Ridge. The extraordinary and totally authentic Italian gelato at Tutti-Frutti in Placencia village is amazing and in a class of its own. Beer, Booze and Other Drinks

Non-Alcoholic Drinks: To drink, there's nothing more refreshing than a fresh lime juice, watermelon juice, pineapple juice, tamarind juice or other freshly made fruit juice drinks. Try a half and half watermelon and lime juice. In Belize, it's usually just the natural juice, perhaps mixed with water and without extra sugar added. For soft drink drinkers, brands bottled in Belize, including regular Coca-Cola, as in Mexico use at least part cane sugar instead of all corn syrup for sweetening, and fans claim local Coke tastes different, and better, too. Belize produces a number of brands of bottled water, with Crystal from Bowen and Bowen Ltd. (see below) being the most popular. Bowen sells soda water and tonic water (in both bitters pink and regular clear versions), too. Red Fanta, sometimes called the "national drink of Belize," Orange Fanta and other Fanta flavors, plus Sprite are also made locally by the Bowen company.

Coffee:☐☐Gallon Jug Estates Coffee is the only commercially produced coffee in Belize. Some jungle lodges and farmers grow small amounts of coffee, dry and prepare it and roast it in small batches for local use. Gallon Jug Estates Coffee is grown, harvested, processed and roasted at Bowen and Bowen Ltd.'s Gallon Jug farm in Orange Walk District. The Gallon Jug coffee is from plants imported from Costa Rica in the 1980s and shade-grown on the Bowen farm. Belize is not a major coffee producer because the best Arabica coffees are grown at 4,000 to 6,000 feet in tropical highlands areas such as those in Guatemala, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Mexico. The highest mountains in Belize are only around 3,700 feet. Much of the coffee sold in restaurants in Belize is instant. Some Belizeans just order a "Nescafé" instead of asking for coffee. *

Surprise! This travel guide focuses on Mainland Belize, and it's the only guide in print that does.

Many travelers come to Belize mainly for its islands and atolls, with their great diving, snorkeling, fishing and other marine sports. That's totally understandable.

However, many of us also value Belize for what it offers on the Mainland. There is so much to do and see on the Mainland that you can spend weeks or months exploring the 8,867 square miles of rainforest, savannah and coastal areas and still not see it all.

This is THE guide for those whose primary interest is Mainland Belize: Its rainforests, wildlife and bird encounters, its caves, rivers and low mountains, its amazing ancient Maya ruins and contemporary Maya villages, its adrenalin-pumping outdoor adventures like jungle trekking, hiking, mountain biking and cave tubing. Of course, you can also enjoy the pleasures of the beaches and the water on the mainland. In Placencia, Hopkins and elsewhere, you're only a few splashes or a short boat ride away from wonderful snorkeling, diving, fishing and other maritime activities.

Everywhere in Belize you'll encounter its greatest treasure: the Belizean people. If variety is the spice of life, Belize is red hot, because the people of Belize

come in myriad colors, races, backgrounds, religions and cultures: Mestizo, Creole, Maya, Garifuna, East Indian, Chinese, Europeans and others, and often these are mixed together in a creative gumbo of genes, languages and traditions. If they share one common thing it is a welcoming attitude. Sure, there are exceptions, but in general you won't find friendlier folks than in Belize.

If you want to visit and enjoy other parts of Belize beyond the Mainland, get one of the other guides to Belize: Lan Sluder's Guide to Belize, Lan Sluder's Guide to the Cayes, Coast and Beaches of Belize and Best Hotels and Restaurants in Belize. Sluder also has authored every edition of Fodor's Belize has written books about retiring and relocating to Belize, such as Easy Belize. Altogether Lan Sluder has done 18 books and ebooks on Belize.

If for now your main interest is Mainland Belize, you'll find this guidebook of value. It's based on a quarter century of reporting on Belize. Lan Sluder has traveled to every corner of this beautiful country. He has stayed in more than 250 different hotels, inns, guesthouses, resorts, lodges and hostels, and he has tried nearly every restaurant in the country. So you get first-hand knowledge. The "best of the best" in lodging, dining and attractions are listed in RED and those that are truly special are denoted with from one to five hearts. This makes it even easier for you to use your time wisely and to select the best hotels and restaurants.

This book covers every part of the land portion of Belize from Corozal in the north, Punta Gorda in the south, San Ignacio and Cayo District in the west, Belize City and Belmopan in the middle and coastal areas from Sarteneja to Dangriga, Hopkins, Placencia, Monkey River and Punta Negra. A bonus: This guide also has chapters on easy side trips to visit Tikal and Flores in Guatemala and Chetumal in Mexico.

Enjoy Belize! Thank you for using this new guide.

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