

MAYA REEF EXPLORER - LIGHTHOUSE

The renowned coral reefs of Lighthouse Atoll, then a journey back in time to the world of the ancient Maya

Trip Details

5 days / 5 nights

Price

\$1289

2011/2012 Departures

Dec 16

Jan 28

Feb 11, 25

Mar 10, 24

Apr 7, 21

Trip Starts and Finishes in Belize City

Activities

Sea Kayaking,

Snorkeling,

Scuba Diving (optional),

Exploring Mayan Ruins

& Rainforest

Birding,

Photography,

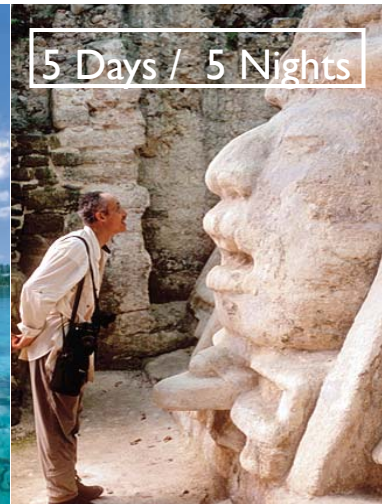
Natural History

Accommodation

1 night Hotel

2 nights Basecamp

2 nights Lodge



5 Days / 5 Nights

The Setting...

Lighthouse Reef - Our journey to Lighthouse Atoll takes us 60 miles offshore to Belize's most remote and spectacular atoll. On our way to Lighthouse we weave our way through channels and picturesque islands within Belize's Barrier Reef then, after crossing the reef wall, we enter a keyhole passage and wind through narrow mangrove lined channels to reach the eastern Coral Wall of Turneffe Atoll and then continue another 20 miles to the world renowned Lighthouse Reef Atoll and Half Moon Caye. One of only four coral atolls in the Caribbean, Lighthouse is home to the famous Blue Hole. In 1972, Capt. Jacques Cousteau and the intrepid crew of the Calypso explored and filmed this incredible atoll, exposing its amazing underwater diversity to the world for the first time.

In partnership with the Belize Audubon Society, Island Expeditions Co. has established an Adventure Camp within the Half Moon Caye Marine Reserve, opening up for the first time this spectacular wilderness to kayakers, snorkelers, and adventurers.

Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary - Located northwest of Belize City, the Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary consists of a large network of inland lagoons, wetlands, and waterways. The sanctuary provides both the abundant food sources and the safe resting areas necessary to support a large and diverse population of birds during the dry season. Those visiting in the later months of the dry season (Feb - May) are treated to a concentration of wildlife which congregate in the park's shrinking lagoons as freshwater resources across the country dry-up.



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The Mayan Sites...

Lamanai – The ruins of Lamanai lie scattered along the banks of the New River, covering an area of 950 acres of tropical rainforest in central Belize. The Mayan name Lamanai translates into “submerged crocodile”. Due in part to its location straddling a major trade route, Lamanai was one of the longest continuously occupied Mayan cities in Central America - from about 500 BC to 1675 AD.

The first major excavation was undertaken by the Royal Ontario Museum. During a series of field seasons beginning in 1974, they mapped 718 structures stretching out along the shore of the lagoon. Lamanai's importance is reflected in the large imposing late Pre-Classic temple-pyramids built over top of earlier temples. On site researchers found, buried deep inside a 600 AD temple, a well preserved Pre-Classic temple dating back 700 years prior to 100 BC.

Altun Ha – Translates into “stone water”, which comes from the ancient Mayan reservoir or aguada that Belizeans call “rock stone pond”. Altun Ha was an important Classic Period site situated to take advantage of the trading that occurred between the waters of the Caribbean and the deep interior of the Mayan Civilization. The entire city covered three square miles and the population is estimated to have been 8,000 to 10,000 people at its peak. Within the central portion of the site there are more than 275 structures. Altun Ha has become famous for a large jade head representing the sun god Kinich Ahau which was discovered in the main temple. This head is the largest Mayan jade artefact ever discovered, weighing 10 lbs. It is now the national symbol of Belize and seen on the corner of every Belizean banknote.

Recommended Tour-books:

Belize: The Rough Guide
London Penguin
Publishers

Perottet, Tony
Belize: Insight Guide
Singapore Houghton
Mifflin Publishers
Great photographs and
written by a Belizean!

Recommended Reading:

Rabinowitz, Alan Jaguar,
One Man's
Struggle to Establish the
First Jaguar Sanctuary



Notes on Ecology...

Sea - The Mesoamerican Reef stretches from Cancun, Mexico through Belize to Honduras. It is the largest reef in the western hemisphere and second largest in the world. In Belize this reef is a well formed wall extending 185 miles (300 km) along the coastline. Approximately 35 miles beyond the Barrier Reef lies one of Belize's most spectacular atolls – Lighthouse Reef Atoll. These circular shaped reef systems climb up from the ocean floor and surround a central lagoon. The reef structure is primarily made up of two kinds of coral, the hard hydro-coral (reef-forming) such as brain coral, and the soft corals, such as sea fans and feather plumes. The lagoon shelters one of the world's most diverse sea environments harboring an extensive community of fish, shellfish, and patch reefs. One mile off the eastern shore of the atoll and the shallow waters of the lagoon the reef wall drops precipitously over 3000 feet to the ocean floor below. The interaction between the deeper open waters of the Caribbean and the sheltered lagoons of the atoll results in a diversity and abundance of marine life, which is unsurpassed for kayaking, snorkeling, and diving.

Inland - While we are inland we are immersed in the rich savannah, grassy lowlands, lagoons, and broadleaf rainforests of Central Belize. Within the lowland habitats of Belize the dominant plant species is the Caribbean pine, but there also exists an abundance of other species such as grasses, palms, palmettos to cecropias and miconias. Although this ecosystem vegetation is not as diverse as the broadleaf tropical rainforest, it does possess a unique system that relies on specific ecological influences. Fire is the major ecological influence, which contributes to the continuous dominance of this system. This can be seen throughout the savannah zones as charred stumps and burned bark on many of the trees. This may seem like a destructive force to the untrained eye however, this is an important factor in the region's ongoing re-

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newal. The cycle of burns renews growth in the region and certain species cannot release their seed without fire! The lagoons and river environments of the lowlands also harbor an tremendous diversity of plant-life, which ranges from small thin bole trees to large kapoks along the floodplain.

While traveling in the Crooked Tree Sanctuary of northern Belize, we have great opportunities to view a diverse array of wildlife. Travelers flock to the region to see the abundant bird life found throughout the savannah and marshlands; over 250 different species have been spotted in this region. During the dry season, when the birds tend to congregate in shrunken pools and riverbeds, it is not uncommon to see one hundred species or more in a day. Some of the birds seen are: the jabiru stork, the belted kingfisher, the tri-colored heron, boat-billed heron, the snail kite, tiger heron, the osprey, and the black-collared hawk. While traveling along the river or lagoons we are also likely to spot some of Belize's interesting land creatures, such as the Morelet's crocodile, turtles, and iguanas.

Typical Daily Itinerary:

Day 0: Arrive at the Belize International Airport where you are met by an Island Expeditions' representative and transferred to the Biltmore Plaza Hotel on the outskirts of Belize City. This is your day to relax after your journey and acclimatize to your new environment.

Accommodations: Hotel **Meals:** Dinner is **not** included on this night

Day 1: We meet in the lobby of the Belize Biltmore Plaza Hotel and a short transfer to our motor charter that takes us to the cayes. We travel through white sand cayes and mangrove ranges, past the main Barrier Reef to Lighthouse Reef Atoll at the furthest edge of the Belize Reef System, 60miles offshore of the mainland. On reaching Half-moon Caye your guide team will orient you to our new island setting and settle you into your accommodations and camp. To begin our activities the guides provide instruction; teaching the fundamentals of sea kayaking, snorkeling, and water safety on the sea. Then we enjoy a late lunch and an afternoon snorkel or kayak around Half-moon Caye.

Accommodation: Half-moon Caye Basecamp **Meals:** B, L, D

Day 2: Perhaps an early swim or, before breakfast, participate in a yoga session with our resident yoga instructors (yoga is not available on all departures - please check our website or call the office for a current schedule of trips with yoga instructors). After a healthy Belizean breakfast we gather to plan the day's activities. From this point we venture forth into a world that most of us can only dream of - turquoise waters, solitary beaches, and a remarkable abundance of marine life surrounds us wherever we are.

Accommodation: Half-moon Basecamp **Meals:** B, L, D

Day 3: For our last day at Lighthouse the choice is yours - don a mask, snorkel, and fins for a visit to a favorite patch reef, enjoy walking the island trails, or beach comb along the island beaches before the motor charter arrives to pick us up for the return boat trip back to the mainland late in the afternoon. We are then picked up and brought to the lodge where we are staying right within the Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary.

Accommodation: Lodge **Meals:** B, L, D

What's Included...

- All meals (fully catered) at our Half-moon Caye Basecamp
- Unlimited use of our equipment and facilities
- Professional guide and sports instruction services with full guide services.
- All accommodations including hotel on 'Day 0'
- Lighthouse Reef Park fees of \$10US per person
- Belize 12.5% sales tax
- Belize 9% hotel tax
- Comprehensive pre-trip information document
- Financial support for Conservation and Education programs in Belize

What's Not Included..

- Gratuities
- Airport Departure Tax
- Extra costs due to late arrivals and other circumstances beyond our control



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Day 4: A full day of exploration as we travel overland and by river to the Mayan ruins of Lamanai. With the very best Lamanai guides we explore the many temples, plazas, palaces, and museums within the park boundaries. In the afternoon we depart Lamanai by river boat where we have tremendous birding and wildlife opportunities: iguana, parrots, toucan, aracari, and Morelet's crocodile are usually seen as we travel along the New River, returning to our lodge along the banks of the Crooked Tree Lagoon.

Accommodation: Lodge

Meals: B, L, D

Day 5: With an early morning coffee and binoculars in hand, we enjoy the waking wilderness and the many hundreds of birds feeding along the shores of the Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary Lagoons. The protected area was created in 1984 primarily to preserve resident and migratory birds, and consists of a network of inland lagoons, swamps, and waterways that shelter one of the world's largest flying birds, the jabiru (jabiru mycteria.). After breakfast we enjoy a morning boat tour in the lagoons and then depart to the Mayan site of Altun Ha. Considered one of the major Mayan ceremonial centres of Belize, Altun Ha also functioned as an important trading centre between the interior and the Caribbean Sea during the classic period (250-900 AD). Within the site, there are more than 275 structures and there are up to 250 to 300 unexcavated mounds. Our trip finishes in the afternoon and we can drop you off directly at the Belize International Airport in time to connect with your flight home, or at the Belize Biltmore Plaza Hotel on the outskirts of Belize City.

Accommodation: None

Meals: B, L

Important Note: For those who are connecting with their flights on the last day of the trip it is important your flight is scheduled to depart after 1pm. If you are planning on staying an extra night in Belize we can make reservations for you at the Biltmore or add on an extra night at our lodge at Crooked Tree. Please make sure you talk with our reservations staff (1 800 667 1630) to coordinate details for the last day of the trip before booking your international flights.

Accommodation...

On 'Day 0', we will be staying at the Belize Biltmore Hotel in Belize City. This is a modern and comfortable hotel located 3.5 miles north of Belize City, with a lovely central courtyard and swimming pool to relax and unwind.

On Day 1 & 2 at Half-moon Caye, we are "Basecamping", sleeping in tent-walled cabanas. These spacious safari-style tents have ample headroom to walk around and are on raised wooden floors with double or single beds, with all linen provided. On the island, we have a fully equipped kitchen, fresh-water collection system for drinking water, fresh-water showers, and modern composting toilets. We also have a large dining area and resource library lounge.

On Day 3 & 4 we are staying at Bird's Eye View Lodge, situated on the water's edge of the Crooked Tree Lagoons. This comfortable Belizean style hotel offers private bath and lakeside views. Over top of the hotel there is a deck and bar, which is a perfect place to catch the evening breeze, watch the tropical birds over the wetlands, and reminisce over your recent discoveries.

Transportation...

At the start of the trip we pick you up on arrival at the Belize International Airport on Day 0. On the last day of the trip we can drop you off directly at the Belize International Airport (flights departing later than 1pm) or the Biltmore Plaza Hotel. All transportation by land and water from Day 0 to Day 5 on the trip is included.



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School Trips: www.educationaltrips.org

Hey Teachers & Parents! Did you know Island Expeditions Co. has been operating custom educational trips for high schools and colleges for close to a decade! For more information, please visit: www.educationaltrips.org

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