

Sale Si Puede Jungle Expedition

(pronounced: sal-eh see pweh-day)

Duration: 7 Days / 8 Nights

Begin From: Belize City
End In: Dangriga / Belize City

Activities: Hiking, River Travel, Whitewater,
Cave Exploration, Birding, Photography,
Natural History Interpretation

Accommodation: Tropical Education Center, Camping,
B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner

Group Size: 6-13

Guides: 2-3 North American and Belizean Leaders

2003 Dates: Jan. 11, Feb. 8, Mar. 3, 29, Apr. 14, 2003

The Setting...

On this trip we explore an unparalleled range of natural and cultural environments in the interior of central and southern Belize, ending our epic journey at a beautiful seaside lodge. On our first night we stay within a tropical pine forest at the Tropical Education Center. Then on our way to the Mayan cave of Actun Tunichil Muknal (*Cave of the Stone Sepulcher*) we hike through broadleaf and cohune palm forest. The cave itself is set amongst an area of extensive karst and limestone geology within the Roaring Creek valley. This landscape of rolling forested hills, punctuated with small villages and farms, is pierced with caves that hold many geological wonders. The caves are also natural museums with an astonishing variety of centuries old Mayan artifacts preserved within.

As we travel south along the coastal plain, the jagged peaks of the Maya Mountains rise to the west, with the landscape dominated by Victoria Peak, a 3,675 ft. granite summit capped in dark quartzite. Victoria Peak and the Cockscomb range are believed to be Central America's oldest geological formations and for centuries these distinctive peaks have been a welcoming landmark for sailors. The lower slopes and river valleys which are covered in lush tropical rainforest are part of a continuous wilderness of over 400 square kilometers. Our area of travel encompasses a sweeping mountainside basin draining many rivers and creeks. The area became a Forest Reserve in 1984, and the world's first and only Jaguar Reserve in 1986. This area is known as The Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary and has been protected because of the remarkable diversity and profusion of wildlife found within. The reserve supports the highest concentrations of jaguars (*Felis onca*) north of the Amazon Basin. The village of Maya Center, at the base of the Cockscomb Sanctuary, is the staging area for our journey into the rainforest. As guests of the village we learn about the history of the park and the traditional uses of the area through the eyes of Mayan villagers.

We finish the trip in a comfortable seaside lodge where a gentle, warm sea breeze and the soothing sounds of the ocean bring us to the ultimate Belizean state of relaxation.

Flora...

Tropical broadleaf forest, or rainforest, covers approximately 70% of Belize's wooded area. The year-round growing season, heavy rainfall during the rainy season, and untold generations of evolution have yielded this area with the most complex and diverse range of plant-life found on the planet. A hidden mass of roots, fungi, bacteria and microorganisms that rapidly break down organic material make up the forest floor. Each plant fulfils its own ecological niche, as the continuous recycling of the decayed plant matter feeds the diverse range of plant-life, from the huge buttress-trunked ceiba trees to the smallest of fungi. Looking up from the forest floor, often a 100 feet and more overhead is the unique world of the rainforest canopy. This high canopy environment, with intense sunshine, torrential rainfall and strong winds is habitat to many plants and animal species that are rarely if ever seen in the shaded understory and forest floor.

Fauna...

Perhaps on this trip more than any other, we have exceptional opportunities to experience the wildlife of inland Belize as we travel through some of the most pristine rainforest wilderness in all of Central America. The range of life we see can vary from the ubiquitous spiny-tailed iguana (large males can reach 4 feet in length) sunning on a riverside fig tree, to circling great black hawks, tiny red-eyed tree frogs, and the ever elusive wild cats. We will likely see keel-billed toucans, flying from tree to tree in search of fruit or a flock of scarlet macaw, with their strikingly colorful plumage. There is also an assortment of falcons and hawks that may be glimpsed scavenging and hunting the under-story and forest floor. In the specific areas we are traveling there are healthy populations of forest mammals, the largest being Belize's national animal, the baird's tapir, or mountain cow. This is an animal unique to the tropical rainforest with a large pig-like body and a long prehensile snout, much like an armadillo. This, along with the white-lipped and collared peccary, the jaguar, and the puma are some of the larger mammals which we have a chance of seeing during our trip.

Typical Daily Itinerary:

Day 0: Arrive at the Belize International Airport where you will be met by an Island Expeditions representative and transferred to the Tropical Education Center, adjacent to the Belize Zoo. Here we are able to explore the surrounding savannah and pine forest through a network of interpretative trails and wildlife viewing platforms. Onsite is also an excellent wildlife center, which details the diverse ecology of Belize, and is an ideal starting point for the adventure ahead. After checking into our research center accommodations, we enjoy a BBQ dinner and have a chance to meet our fellow travelers. *This day is your day to arrive before the trip starts, meet your fellow travelers and acclimatize to your new tropical environment.* Transfers from the airport, lodging and dinner are included.

Accommodations: (Lodge)

Meals: Dinner is included on this night

Typical Daily Itinerary:

Day 0: Arrive at the Belize International Airport where you will be met by an Island Expeditions representative and transferred to the Tropical Education Center, adjacent to the Belize Zoo. Here we are able to explore the surrounding savannah and pine forest through a network of interpretative trails and wildlife viewing platforms. Onsite is also an excellent wildlife center, which details the diverse ecology of Belize, and is an ideal starting point for the adventure ahead. After checking into our research center accommodations, we enjoy a BBQ dinner and have a chance to meet our fellow travelers. *This day is your day to arrive before the trip starts, meet your fellow travelers and acclimatize to your new tropical environment.* Transfers from the airport, lodging and dinner are included.

Accommodations: (Lodge)

Meals: Dinner is included on this night

Day 1: We rise early to begin our remarkable journey back through time into the dark underworld of the Maya. Our destination—Actun Tunichil Muknal—the *Cave of the Stone Sepulcher* (burial vault) is reached after driving ten miles of back roads, hiking a bush trail and fording waist deep creeks. Once at the cave entrance we gear up with helmets and waterproof lights, then wade into the clear, cool water that flows out from the cave mouth. Inside the cave we follow the creek bed to the entrance of a massive chamber that holds an astonishing array of Mayan artifacts; our light beams illuminate ceramic bowls and vases, stone tools, carved slate altars and eerie calcified skeletons of what are believed to be sacrificial victims dating back centuries to the terminal classic period of the Mayan civilization. To the ancient Maya the caves were the entrances to Xibalba (*shil-balba*), a place inhabited by demonic spirits and powerful gods, an underworld of untold fears and dreams where Mayan shaman, in supposition to the gods, ventured into darkness to conduct their secretive rituals. In our experience the remarkable cave of the Stone Sepulcher is one of the most profound archaeological experiences in the Americas. At the end of this epic day we travel to the village of Maya Center at the base of the Cockscomb Jaguar Reserve where we stay at a comfortable village Guesthouse. This evening, after dinner, we meet our Mayan guides and learn about the Mayan community and the Cockscomb Wildlife Sanctuary in preparation for the next stage of our journey into the Swasey River.

Accommodations: (Guesthouse)

Meals: B,L,D

Day 2-3: We rise early, driving to the trailhead where we begin our hike into Sale Si Puede (translated: “Leave if you can!”) camp. With light packs we enter the rainforest and for the next day and a half we hike a ridge-top trail overlooking an unbroken rainforest canopy stretching as far as the eye can see. While we hike, porters carry our camp gear, so that, with light packs (15-20 lbs.) we travel lightly and quietly, sensitive and aware to the abundance of life all around us. By mid morning on our second day of hiking we reach the broad river valley and our put-in. After lunch we load our inflatable kayaks to begin our incredible river journey.

Accommodations: (Camping)

Meals: B,L,D

Day 4-6: We travel by inflatable kayak on the Upper Swasey River. Each bend in the river brings a new discovery: wildlife, delicate and rare orchids, flocks of scarlet macaw and schools of feeding fish; these are sure signs that we are some of the few people fortunate enough to have a chance to explore this unspoiled paradise. We leave the broad, fertile valley that is the heart of the watershed and enter into a forested canyon. The river narrows and we take our time to apply our newly acquired boat handling skills; we navigate sections of rapids interspersed with calm jungle green pools. Each hour we are drawn deeper into the canyon. Without question, these days can best be described as pure adventure: paddling, swimming in mountain clear pools, hiking up side creeks and enjoying some of the most beautiful riverside camps you can ever imagine.

Accommodations: (Camping)

Meals: B,L,D

Day 7: On our last day of river travel, we exit the canyon and then it is only a few hours being carried downstream with the current before we reach a small Maya village on the riverbanks. Once at our take-out, it is a short drive to the coastal town of Dangriga where showers, fresh linen, and a fine seafood dinner await us at a comfortable lodge by the sea. A fitting celebration to mark the end of a grand adventure. The next morning the choice is yours: continue the adventure with one of our sea kayak expeditions, spend a few days relaxing by the sea, or fly north to the Belize International Airport to connect with your flight home. The return flight to Belize or to connect with your next trip is included in the trip cost.

Accommodations: (Hotel)

Meals: B,L,D

Special Note: This trip takes place in a remote wilderness region of Belize. **There is a 15 mile hike to the put-in point on the Upper Swasey River, which is accomplished in two days. Participants are expected to carry their personal gear into the river, and need to be ready for the unexpected.** Weather conditions can greatly affect water levels and access into the river and may increase the level of difficulty. Trip itineraries can vary significantly depending on water levels. We also believe that the remoteness and variability of conditions are what make this trip the best of its kind.

What's Included...

- Comprehensive pre-trip information package
- All meals, accommodation, and transfers described in the tour
- Unlimited use of our Equipment
- Use of waterproof dry bags during kayak trip
- Accommodation on the day before the trip ('Day 0') and the final night.
- Professional Guiding Services (both North American Leaders and Belizean Guides)
- Transportation back to Belize City, the day after the trip ends

What's Not Included...

- Gratuities
- International Flights and Airport Departure Tax
- Extra costs due to late Arrivals, lost baggage and circumstances beyond our control

Accommodation...

On 'Day 0', we will be spending the night at the Tropical Education Center, in a rustic lodge accommodation. The Education Center harbors Belize's largest collection of tropical animal specimens, a fantastic interpretative center, and has a great network of cut trails and wildlife viewing platforms, perfect for exploring the pine savannah setting.

On day 1, we will be staying at a comfortable Guesthouse in the village of Maya Center; here we have a unique opportunity to interact with the contemporary Maya people in their traditional community.

On days 2 to 4, we will be camping in the remote wilderness of the Cockscomb Basin Jaguar Reserve in the Stann Creek District. We are practicing minimum impact camping to ensure the pristine state of the wilderness remains for future visitors. We will be keeping our weight and volume to a minimum, carrying our gear by porter or in our kayaks from site to site. We will be staying in three person Walrus tents, which provide more than enough room for two people and our gear. As we travel down the river, we use pre-determined camping areas to minimize our impact on the forest floor. However, we also give ourselves some flexibility to adjust our schedule to different conditions.

The final night of the trip is spent in the seaside village of Dangriga at a comfortable hotel. Here, we enjoy the comforts of a soft bed and bathroom and shower.

Getting back to Belize City...

Included in your trip cost is a connecting flight from Dangriga to Belize City or the transportation required to connect you to another Island Expeditions trip. Your return flight to Belize City is automatically scheduled for the morning of the day after your trip. If you decide to stay longer in Dangriga you may use this flight at anytime after the trip as long as we are notified prior to your arrival in Belize. Please remember that you must request us to reschedule your return flight to Belize City at least one week prior to the trip commencement if you plan to stay in Dangriga beyond the morning of the day following trip completion.

Thinking about seeing other parts of Belize with Island Expeditions Co?

The Sale Si Puede Expedition combines very well with a trip exploring the barrier reef and atolls. The Glovers Reef & Mayan Caves gives you a flexible itinerary, with a multi-sport basecamp, from which you can explore the atoll. The Coral Islands offer a 7 day classic sea-kayaking tour, traveling from cay to cay, exploring the many patch reefs and the inner and outer walls of the barrier reef.

Thinking About Traveling Independently, Before or After Your Trip?

With over 15 years of exploration in Belize, our knowledgeable reservations staff can offer you a wealth of travel information. However, we do recommend that you read up on Belize and find what interests you. Once you find an area of interest, give our international office a call, and we can help you plan the best vacation possible!

Recommended Tour-books:

Eltringham, Peter. 1999. Belize: The Rough Guide. London. Penguin Publishers.
Perottet, Tony. 1997. Belize: Insight Guide Singapore. Houghton Mifflin Publishers.
-Great photographs and written by a Belizean!