

ULTIMATE ADVENTURE

A multi-sport adventure that combines the best that Belize has to offer!

Trip Details

9 days / 10 nights

Price

\$2469

Trip Starts & Finishes

Belize City

2011/2012 Departures

Nov 25

Dec 2, 9, 16, 23, 30

Jan 6, 13, 20, 27

Feb 3, 10, 17, 24

Mar 2, 9, 16, 23, 30

Apr 13, 20

Activities

Sea Kayaking
(paddling & sailing),
Snorkeling, Scuba Diving,
Fishing, Caving,
Whitewater River Paddling,
Hiking, Birding, Photography,
Natural History
Interpretation

Accommodations

1 night Forest Cabanna
2 nights Island Lodge
2 nights Glover's Basecamp
1 night Jungle Lodge
3 nights Jungle Camping



Setting...

On this adventure, we experience the very best Belize has to offer. From the Belize International Airport we take you directly to our accommodations situated alongside the Tropical Education Center and Belize Zoo. From here we journey into the interior to visit an ancient Mayan ceremonial cave, then travel east to the main Barrier Reef and beyond to Glover's Atoll. The Mesoamerican Coral 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 and extends 185 miles (300 km) along the coastline. Spread along the reef are over 200 cayes, ranging from small sand fringed islands perched along the reef's edge, to larger islands of mangroves and coconut palms.

After two nights on the main reef, we travel by motor launch twenty miles further offshore to Glover's Atoll--a remote ring of corals and small islands rising from the deep waters of the Caribbean. Glover's Atoll, with an unparalleled diversity and abundance of marine life and with reef strewn waters, offers some of the best snorkeling in Belize. Our island Basecamp is the perfect setting from which to actively explore the surrounding waters, which contains over 700 patch reefs. The waters of Belize have long been known as the richest in the Caribbean Sea and Glover's is one of the best in Belize!

After our exploration of the Barrier Reef and Glover's Atoll we return to the mainland and transfer to the 'Wild South' of Belize, the homeland of the Kekchi Maya, and into one of the finer accommodations in the country - the Lodge at Big Falls. The next day, we travel by van to our river put-in. We begin our river journey by teaching water safety and paddling techniques before paddling into some of Belize's most remote and pristine wilderness. Once on the water, we are immersed in the experience of traveling through exciting rapids and pour-overs by day and camping at night in the lush tropical rainforest. For our last night's accommodation, we drive overland and then fly to Belize City and finish up at the Belize Biltmore Plaza Hotel.



ULTIMATE ADVENTURE

A Note about the Ecology...

Flora... The Belizean coast is a rich combination of coral reefs, sand flats, mangroves ranges, and coral sand islands. The Barrier Reef structure shelters the Belizean coast from the open waters of the Caribbean Sea. It acts as a huge breakwater to the incoming swells which, as they break on the reef, erode the corals and deposit coral sand. From this action we get beautiful sand fringed islands and remarkable shallow water patch reefs. Also, this "breakwater" protects the diverse ecosystems of the mangroves and turtle grass, which cover much of the coast. These mangrove forests provide rich feeding and nursing grounds for many marine creatures and countless birds.

Broadleaf rainforest covers approximately 60% of Belize's wooded area. The year-round growing season, plentiful precipitation during the rainy season (May- November), and millennia of evolution have yielded this area with a complex and tremendous diversity of plant life. A spongy mass of roots, fungi, bacteria, and microorganisms carpets the forest floor which rapidly breaks down any organic matter. Each plant fulfills its own ecological niche, as the continuous recycling of the decayed plant matter fuels new growth. With this rich nutrient cycle a diverse range of plant life, from the huge buttressed Ceiba trees to the smallest of fungi, thrives. High above the forest floor is the enchanting world of the broad-leafed canopy. The canopy may tower 100 ft or more, with massive hardwoods like Santa Maria, Mahogany, and Sapodilla trees forming a broad canopy, and in turning supporting many species of Epiphytes (air plants). This habitat provides for a unique community of wildlife and many species will spend most of their life inhabiting the roof of the rainforest.

Fauna... While traveling along the Barrier Reef we will have the opportunity to view a variety of sea-life and tropical birds. Paddling from caye to caye and over the many patch reefs, we will see fish like barracuda, bonefish, angel and parrot fish, stingrays, conger, moray eels, and goatfish, just to name a few. Trailing a fishing line from our kayaks, we also may get a chance at a tug from barracuda, grouper, or snapper. Birds do well on the cayes - we will see osprey, royal terns, brown-footed boobies, frigate birds, mangrove warblers, and sapsuckers. Throughout the Barrier Reef and along the coast there are nesting sites for loggerhead, green and hawksbill turtles - if we're lucky, we may see them while we are out snorkeling. We will definitely have a chance to see and sample the main staple for Belizean fishermen, the spiny lobster (when in season) and the queen conch, a Caribbean delicacy.

In the rainforests of Belize we have great opportunities to view wildlife. Hiking or paddling we see iguanas resting in the branches of fig trees or we may hear the grunts and snuffling as a herd of peccary (wild pigs) passes close by. Large tropical birds are frequently sighted. We see toucans with their oversized bills, flying ungainly from one fruiting tree to the next. High overhead loud squawking alerts us to the presence of scarlet macaw. Once in view, the size of the bird and the splendor of their red and blue plumage is unmistakable. There is also a multitude of falcons, hawks, and vultures scavenging and hunting from the sun-bright upper canopy down to the mottled light of the forest floor. Also found in the southern Belizean rainforest are a number of often bizarre mammals. The largest of these being Belize's national animal, the Baird's tapir - locally known as the mountain cow. It has a large hippopotamus like body and a long snout, much like the fabled aardvark. The tapir, along with the white-lipped and collared peccary, and the jaguar are some of the larger mammals that inhabit the river valleys and forests where we travel.

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. After checking into our accommodations we enjoy a welcome dinner and have a chance to meet our fellow travelers. We are able to experience the surrounding tropical pine savannah habitat through a network of trails and raised wildlife viewing platforms. We also have a unique and exclusive nocturnal tour of the Belize Zoo with one of the senior zookeepers, which helps us understand the diverse ecology of Belize and is an ideal starting point for the adventure ahead.



Recommended Tour-books:

Eltringham, Peter
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
New York Island Press.

Thinking about traveling independently, before or after your trip?

With 25 years of exploration in Belize, our very knowledgeable and experienced office staff can offer you a wealth of travel information to help you plan the best vacation possible! However, we do recommend that you read up on the country and find what interests you. Once you find an area of interest, give our office a phone call.

ULTIMATE ADVENTURE

Day 0 Itinerary cont'

This day is your day to arrive before the trip starts, meet your fellow travelers, and acclimatize to your new tropical environment. Scheduled transfers from the airport to the lodging are included.

Accommodation: Lodge **Meals:** Dinner is included

Day 1: We rise early to start today's extraordinary journey which takes us deep into the Mayan underworld known as Xilbalba (*shil-balba*), a mythical realm inhabited by 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. As we venture underground into the caves, we learn from our guides how the caves played an important role in the ancient Maya civilization and about ongoing archaeological research taking place underground in Belize. After our cave visit we travel the Hummingbird Route to meet up with our motor charter on the coast by the town of Dangriga. We head out to the Southern Barrier Reef and arrive at Paradise Lodge on Tobacco Caye in time to settle in, have dinner, and plan our next two days on the Barrier Reef.



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

Days 2: We rise early for a breakfast on the beach. We then focus on our introduction to sea kayaking and get comfortable with the gear. We start by teaching and reviewing the fundamentals of sea kayaking and introduce everyone to ocean touring techniques. We test our new found skills with a paddle out to the main reef to snorkel along the inner reef wall or patch reefs. Depending on sea conditions, a snorkel along the outside reef edge may be possible. Our paddle back to Tobacco Caye takes us past mangrove ranges and protected lagoons. Out on the reef, our guides share their knowledge of Belize, the marine environments, and local culture.

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

Day 3: After breakfast and a morning of paddling and snorkeling, our motor charter returns to take us 20 miles east of the main Barrier Reef to Glover's Reef Atoll, a National Marine Park and designated World Heritage site. We land at park headquarters on Middle Caye, with boats rigged and ready to sail. We sail our kayaks along the eastern reef wall to our Basecamp at Southwest Caye at the southern end of the Atoll, surrounded by rich coral reefs and beautiful turquoise waters. Tonight we enjoy an island feast of mixed grilled fresh seafood and vegetables topped with Belizean coconut baking and tropical fruits.

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

Day 4 & 5: Glover's is one of only four atolls in the Caribbean Sea and is truly one of the most spectacular marine environments in Belize. Due to its isolation from the mainland the waters are exceptionally clear with an incredibly rich reef system that offers some of the best kayaking, snorkeling, and diving in the Caribbean. Our days are flexible in order to respond to both group and individual desires and abilities. Activities include: sea kayaking, snorkeling the inner and outer walls of the reef, and kayak sailing. For those who are certified divers we can also arrange dives on the outer walls. If all this sounds a little too busy, you always have the choice of just kicking back in a hammock and relaxing with a good book and a cold drink. On the afternoon of Day 5 we transfer back to the mainland and continue south to our Jungle Lodge in the Toledo district of Belize to begin the next leg of our journey.

Accommodation: Basecamp/Lodge at Big Falls (www.thelodgeatbigfalls.com) **Meals:** B, L, D

Day 6, 7, 8: The Lodge at Big Falls is situated on the banks of the Rio Grande river in Belize's southern Toledo District, a region of isolated villages lying amongst an unspoiled tropical wilderness. Our location is superb. The lodge property is located on a meander of the river with almost a mile of river frontage. There are views towards the Maya Mountains to the northwest while the south eastern bank faces the small village of Big Falls. In the afternoon we drive further south from Big Falls to our put-in point on the Moho river, stopping for lunch at the traditional Maya village of Santa Theresa. Once on the river our guides provide a brief boat and river orientation, and we take as much time as we need to learn and practice our new boat-handling skills, enabling us to safely navigate the rapids and pour-overs. We then begin our journey along one of Belize's most beautiful rivers through some pristine rainforest to our first river camp.

For these next days we break contact completely with the outside world and become a part of the mist-shrouded rainforest as we follow the Moho River through canyons and lush rainforest. Each bend reveals the dynamic nature of the river - from calm meandering water that reflects the intense green of the jungle to stretches of rapids, pour-overs and spectacular waterfalls as the river descends from the Maya Mountains to the sea. Depending on water levels, some days we may reach our bush-camp by mid-afternoon and switch to land based activities. Hiking through the forest, birding, plant and animal identification, and photography are some of the many activities we engage in. During the trip, with our Mayan guides and North American leaders, we emphasize understanding the ecology of the rainforest, learning about the habits of the wildlife, and gaining an appreciation for the rich Mayan folklore which adds so much to our experience in the jungle.

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

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO RESERVE THIS TRIP, CALL TOLL-FREE 1.800.667.1630 VISIT: ISLANDEXPEDITIONS.COM

ULTIMATE ADVENTURE

Day 9: We continue paddling downstream and arrive to the river pull-out in the afternoon, where we are met by IEC staff. We have a final lunch in the Mayan Mennonite village of Jordan, followed by a transfer back to Dangriga. Here we board a domestic flight to the Belize Municipal Airport and then proceed to our accommodations to enjoy a well deserved hot shower.

Accommodation: Hotel (Biltmore Plaza Hotel—www.belizebiltmore.com) **Meals:** B, L

Note: This is one of our most adventurous trips. It takes place in remote wilderness regions of Belize. Weather conditions can greatly affect water levels and may increase the level of difficulty. Due to the changing nature of water levels, the river we run on the inland component of trip may vary. We also believe that the remoteness and variability of conditions are what make this trip the best of its kind in Belize.

Accommodations...

On 'Day 0', we will be spending the night at the Tropical Education Center, spending one night in our 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 Days 1 and 2 we stay at Paradise Lodge, on Tobacco Caye - a small Belizean owned lodge with a beautiful view over the central Belize Barrier Reef. These rustic cabanas are clean and comfortable with en-suite bathrooms. Each cabana is perched over the waters edge, giving you unobstructed views of the Belize Barrier Reef and unparalleled access to kayaking and snorkeling.

On Days 3 and 4 at Southwest Caye on Glover's Reef, we are "luxury camping" in tent-walled cabanas. These spacious safari-style tents have ample headroom and are outfitted with wood floors and wood-framed beds. On the island we have a fresh-water collection system for drinking water, access to fresh-water showers, modern composting toilets, a fully-equipped kitchen including refrigeration, a large dining area complete with resource library, and a field marine lab including microscope and hand lenses.

On Day 5 we will be staying at The Lodge at Big Falls in the southern Toledo district. Our accommodations beside the banks of the Rio Grande river are spacious cottage style cabanas within a rich tropical setting. The cabana roofs are traditionally thatched with bay-leaf palm. The floors are beautifully tiled and each fully-screened room has a ceiling fan and full en-suite bathroom providing hot and cold water. The carefully landscaped surroundings have been designed to attract birds and butterflies close to the cottages where guests can comfortably enjoy the view from their own private verandah.

On Days 6, 7, 8 we are camping in the remote wilderness of the Moho River in Southern Belize. We practice minimum impact camping to ensure that the pristine state of the wilderness remains for future visitors. We will be keeping our weight and volume to a minimum, carrying our gear in the kayaks from camp to camp. We stay in three-person Mountain Hardware & MEC tents, which provide ample room for two people and gear. As we travel down the river, we use pre-determined camping areas to minimize our impact on the forest floor, but give ourselves the flexibility to adjust our schedule for different conditions.

On the final night, we will stay at the Biltmore Hotel. This is a clean and comfortable hotel outside the city center. Here you have a chance to get a good night's sleep after your adventure, maybe take a dip in the pool, and prepare to fly out or continue on independently.



What's Included...

- Comprehensive Pre-Trip Information Package
- All meals, accommodations, transfers described in the tour
- Unlimited use of our Equipment
- Use of waterproof dry bags and thermo rests on the river part of the trip
- Accommodation on the day before the trip (Day 0) and the final night
- Professional Guiding Services
- Domestic flight DGA to TZA
- Water Caye Reserve, Glover's Reef, and Nich/Cave Entrance Fees.
- 9 % Belize hotel tax
- 12.5 % Belize sales tax

What's Not Included...

- Gratuities
- International Flights
- Fishing licenses.
- Extra costs due to late Arrivals, lost baggage and circumstances beyond

Getting back to Belize City ...

On the Ultimate Adventure, IEC provides transportation back to Belize City after the river at the end of the tour. Accommodation is at the Belize Biltmore Hotel and transportation to the airport the next day is by taxi and is not included.



Toll-free: 800.667.1630
Phone: 604.452.3212
Fax: 604.452.3433
Email: info@islandexpeditions.com
Website: www.islandexpeditions.com
School Trips: www.educationaltrips.org

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO RESERVE THIS TRIP, CALL TOLL-FREE 1.800.667.1630 VISIT: ISLANDEXPEDITIONS.COM