

## CORAL ATOLL & MAYA RAINFOREST

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

### Trip Details

8 days / 8 nights

### Price

\$2129 Based on Double

Trip Start/Finishes in Belize City

### 2014 Departures

Jan 26\*, 28

Feb 5\*, 7, 9\*, 11

Mar 5\*, 7, 25\*, 29\*

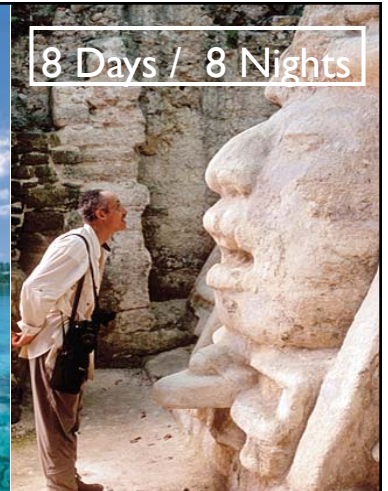
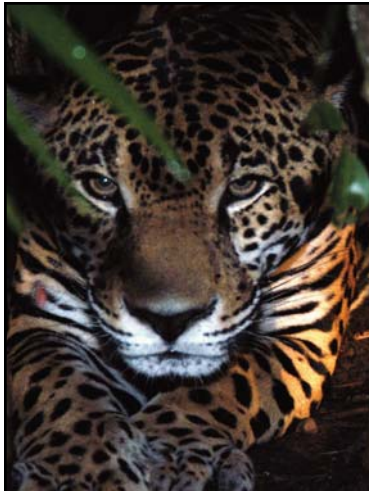
\*Itinerary operates in reverse - Inland followed by Reef.

### Activities

Sea Kayaking, Snorkeling, Scuba Diving (optional), Stand Up Paddleboarding, Exploring Mayan Ruins & Rainforest, Birding, Photography, Natural History

### Accommodation

1 night Hotel  
4 nights Basecamp  
3 nights Lodge



8 Days / 8 Nights

### The Setting...

**Lighthouse Reef** - Our journey to Lighthouse Atoll takes us sixty 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. 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. We continue another twenty 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.

In partnership with the Belize Audubon Society, Island Expeditions 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 is 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 rare concentration of wildlife which congregates 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 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 imposing late Pre-Classic temple-pyramids built over top of earlier temples. 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 people dwelling by the waters of the Caribbean and those living in 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!

### Reading:

Rabinowitz, Alan Jaguar,

One Man's

Struggle to Establish the

First Jaguar Sanctuary

New York. Island Press.



## 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, 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

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may seem like a destructive force to the untrained eye however, this is an important factor in the region's ongoing renewal. 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 a tremendous diversity of plant life, which ranges from small thin bole trees to large kapok or Cotton trees 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 at the Biltmore Hotel

**Day 1:** This morning we travel by chartered water taxi to Lighthouse Reef Atoll. Our route takes us past numerous white sand and partially submerged mangrove cayes until we cross Belize's Barrier Reef. From here, we enter the narrow passages within the Turneffe Islands before crossing the blue water to Lighthouse Atoll. On reaching our Half Moon Caye basecamp on the edge of paradise, your guide team will orient you to your new setting and accommodations. On our first day your guides provide thorough instruction; teaching the fundamentals of sea kayaking, snorkeling, and safety on the sea. In the afternoon we sea kayak and snorkel within the marine reserve.

**Accommodation:** Half Moon Caye Basecamp      **Meals:** B, L, D

**Day 2 - 4:** Perhaps an early morning swim or sunrise yoga. After a healthy Belizean breakfast we gather to plan the day's activities. The waters of Lighthouse Reef Atoll are exceptionally clear with a fabulously rich reef system that offers some of the best kayaking, snorkeling, and diving in the Caribbean. Throughout your stay, you'll get to try a variety of activities as you explore this remote and magical part of Belize. A snorkel at the 'Aquarium' is one of the favorites, with its profusion of tropical fish and towering coral formations. We'll also take you on a snorkeling excursion to the renowned Blue Hole, an underwater cave and sinkhole in the middle of the Lighthouse lagoon made famous by legendary explorer Jacques Cousteau. In the mornings and evenings a favorite activity is to walk to the red-footed booby nesting colony to watch boobies as they come in from the sea to tend their nests and feed their chicks.

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

**Day 5:** For our last day at Lighthouse there are a variety of activities to choose from - don mask, snorkel, and fins and swim to a favorite patch reef, circumnavigate Half Moon Caye by kayak or enjoy walking the island trails, and beach comb along the island beaches. Our water taxi arrives later in the afternoon to take us back to the mainland and then by land to our comfortable lodge, located 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
- Half Moon Marine 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 6:** 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 Lagoons. The protected area was created in 1984 primarily to preserve resident and migratory birds, and consists of a network of inland lagoons, wetlands, and waterways that shelter one of the world's largest flying birds, the jabiru stork. On this day, we enjoy boat tours in the protected lagoons and a tour to the Mayan ruins of Altun Ha. Considered one of the major Mayan ceremonial centres of Belize, Altun Ha functioned as an important trading centre between the peoples of the interior and the coast during the classic period (250-900 AD). Within the site, there are more than 275 structures and up to 250 to 300 unexcavated mounds.

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

**Day 7:** A full day of exploration as we travel overland and by river to the Mayan ruins of Lamanai. With the very best 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 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 Lagoons.

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

**Day 8:** This last morning is yours to enjoy within the Crooked Tree Sanctuary. Explore the nearby village, wander the lagoons edge. Our trip finishes with a drop-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

## Single Traveler Pricing

Many of our guests travel on their own. Our style of trip is ideal for single travelers combining the benefits of group camaraderie and group security with lots of individual flexibility in what you want to do each day. Single supplement options vary by trip style. Standard trip pricing is based on double occupancy. Solo guests can request either to share twin accommodations with another traveler or request single accommodations for an additional fee. If you are willing to share and we are able to match you up - no problem and no extra cost. If we cannot match you up then we have a simple, affordable \$45 supplement fee. This fee will be applied at the time of booking, but will be reimbursed just before your departure if we are able to match you up.

Should you prefer private accommodations, we can provide you with your own room and the following charges apply. Note that the number of single rooms available on most departures is limited, and may not be available at each location. If we are not able to provide your own room throughout the trip, we will pro-rate the supplement fee. Single Supplement Fee - \$300

## Accommodation...

### Biltmore Plaza Hotel

A comfortable hotel located 3.5 miles north of Belize City, with a lovely central courtyard and swimming pool to relax and unwind.

### Half Moon Caye Basecamp

While out 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 showers, and modern composting toilets a large sheltered pavilion that is our dining area and library/ lounge.

### Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary

Inland 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 about your recent discoveries.



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## Hey Teachers & Parents!

Did you know Island Expeditions has been operating custom educational trips for high schools and colleges for two decades

For more information, please call our office at **1-800-667-1630**.  
**www.educationaltrips.org**

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