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Belize: A short plane ride to paradise



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Scarlet Macaws near Redbank

Now is the time to see and do, and do nothing if you please. Belize is a collection of giant palms, a long coral barrier reef and side trips to more Mayan Ruins than you can ever hope to see. I decided to spend a couple of days in Belize City itself to get a feel for local city life. Most tourists transfer straight from the airport to another location, such as the populous Ambergris Caye or off to a more southern coastal resort. I stayed at the comfortable first class Radisson Fort George Hotel and Marina (www.Radisson.com/belizecitybz).

We were introduced to some of the aviary diversity the county has to offer and Belize City sights. A transfer to Hopkins at Stann Creek brought us to two seaside resorts. Hamanasi Dive and Adventure Resort (www.hamanasi.com) hosts two-story accommodations

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Cocktails served at the Jaguar Reef pool by King

Only separated from the surf by an infinity edge swimming pool, surrounded by lush vegetation. Private luxury tree house accommodations are a reservation favorite. The Main plantation style house encloses a reception area with limited Internet wifi, a gift shop, bar and inside/outside dining around the ample veranda. Hamanasi and its on-site dive shop offer scuba lessons and snorkel trips, along with additional tours.

Tours are a good way to take in the country's abundant agricultural sights of banana plantations and scores of citrus orchards. The Southern Mayan Tour visits the ruins of Nim li Punit and Lubaantun, where the legendary but missing crystal skull was discovered in 1926. The last Indiana Jones movie centered around this artifact.



Beware when tour descriptions says rigorous - they are. The trip through St. Hermana's Cave was a harrowing two-hour, sweaty, dark, perilous trek no one will forget. The hike up Red Bank mountain to see the early morning migration of Scarlet Macaws is another rigorous uphill march. But it was worth the trek by seeing rare Scarlet Macaws fly toward fruit trees through lush valleys and over verdant mountain tops.

Close by Hamanasi is Jaguar Reef Lodge, (www.jaguarreef.com), which has a more open view of the ocean and a main house where the dining room is embraced by palms and tranquil surf. The spectacular views of ocean and surf are only surpassed by the immaculate care the ground keepers exhibit with their careful and artistic raking of the sand, which surrounds the property. This exotic detail can be carried over to your large studio accommodations, where your welcome is spelled out in flower blossoms on your bed spread.



Both resorts offer delectable meals, with buffet breakfasts, light lunches and evening delights. Each has a much-appreciated complementary welcome drink upon arrival. Check out their web sites where typical menus are available. If you like shrimp and seafood, you have found your place in Belize. A short stroll next door is the condo-style Almond Beach, where its infinity pool and swim upbar is a welcome dip for Jaguar Reef guests. Between Jaguar and Hamanasi is the resort of Belizean Dreams with its appealing seaside open air restaurant. There is too much to experience in Belize to be stationary for too long.

Belize is known for its welcoming populous. While Oklahomans are cautious about using our car horns, you will find in Belize, a brief toot is a way indigenous drivers greet their fellow Belizean pedestrians. While we were there in late January, the country was deep into its national election campaigning, which added spice to our cultural observations.



Belize is beautiful in both its landscape and friendly people. And being a short airplane ride away; makes it all too appealing to make it only once in a lifetime. For more information contact - www.travelbelize.org.

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