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# THE VANCOUVER SUN



## Six months pregnant in paradise

### Beautiful Belize provides distraction and luxurious leisure for expectant parents

BY MHAIRRI WOODHALL, SPECIAL TO THE VANCOUVER SUN APRIL 21, 2012

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In the midst of all the doctor appointments, purchases and planning involved with welcoming our first child into the world, my husband and I set aside some time for our last pre-parenthood holiday. Given that I was six months pregnant, travel time, comfort, safety and access to modern medicine were as important to us as sunshine, pampering and relaxation. Belize, the Central-American country famous for its phenomenal diving, Mayan ruins and incredible selection of eco-activities, might have seemed an unlikely choice for a Babymoon, but its great beauty, diverse landscape, warm people and five-star amenities won us over in an instant. Wanting variety, we spent our time exploring four unique areas, but for a more lei-surely trip limit yourself to one or two regions. Wanting variety, we spent our time exploring four unique areas, but for a more leisurely trip limit yourself to one or two regions.

#### PLACENCIA

Barefoot perfect describes the brown sugar-sand beaches that fringe the colourful village of Placencia, on the Southern peninsula of Belize's Staan Creek district. This once quiet fishing community has transformed itself into a burgeoning destination that thank-fully retains its traditional charm. To immerse ourselves in the vibrant local culture, we bypassed the large-scale luxury resorts flanking Placencia to stay at the Nirvana Beach Suites in the heart of the village. Owners Evan and Barbara Hall, Belizean-Americans who vacationed in Placencia as children, were lured back by the friendly village lifestyle and opened this beach-front property in 2011.

The couple's pride of ownership shines in every aspect of Nirvana, from the spotless suites with gleaming wood floors and stunning Caribbean Sea views to the immaculate beach, which is meticulously groomed each morning. While Placencia offers an array of adventure activities, including snorkelling among whale sharks and manatees, we opted to lounge on the beach, pamper ourselves at the Secret Garden Spa and

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indulge in local cuisine.

We fell in love with Rumfish Y Vino, a Central American-style gastro pub owned by the American husband-and-wife team John and Pamela, and we're still dreaming about the crispy conch fritters and beer-battered fish tacos.

Another favourite find was the hand-crafted gelato at Tutti-frutti, which rivals the scoops we sampled in Italy.

## HOPKINS

North of Placencia, on the Caribbean coast, is Hopkins Village, an ideal location for anyone looking to experience the pristine natural wonders of Belize. Voted as the 'Friendliest Village in Belize' by Belize First Magazine, this small traditional fishing village inhabited by the Garifuna (descendants of African slave-ship survivors) is rich in both history and culture.

Hopkins is also home to the Hama-nasi Adventure and Dive Resort, which is ranked by TripAdvisor's Travellers Choice 2012 as the top hotel for service in Central America and No. 2 in the world. After spending time at this boutique eco-luxury beach property, with its Tree house suites and ocean views, we immediately understood why guests return year after year.

Beyond the extensive selection of reef and rainforest activities and incredible dining (care of executive chef Sheridan Polanco who recently had the honour of cooking for Prince Harry on his March 2012 trip to Belize), the Hama-nasi offers something that is extremely rare - truly genuine appreciation and caring for its guests.

Throughout our stay we felt as if each member of the resort staff were part of our own extended family, from Golden who toured us through Hopkins Village to the ever-smiling waitress Pau-line who has worked at the resort since it opened more than 11 years ago.

Although the Hamanasi is renowned for its diving and adventure packages, which at six months pregnant I couldn't participate in, we happily spent our time walking the beach, exploring Hopkins, sunning ourselves poolside and visiting the neighbouring Butterflies Spa for couples massages and relaxation treatments.

IF YOU GO

Belize, an English speaking country best visited during the dry season

(December through May) has a simple 2-to-1-currency conversion from Belizean dollars to U.S. With no language barrier, and multiple daily com-muter flights within the country, travel throughout Belize is extremely easy.

Flights back to Canada tend to arrive around midnight, so we extended our Babymoon by overnighing at the Fairmont Vancouver airport Hotel. After a long flight the five-minute commute to our plush room for a restful sleep, followed by a delicious breakfast buffet was the perfect ending to the last romantic trip we may experience for a while. For more information, visit [www. arrivalstravel.com](http://www.arrivalstravel.com)