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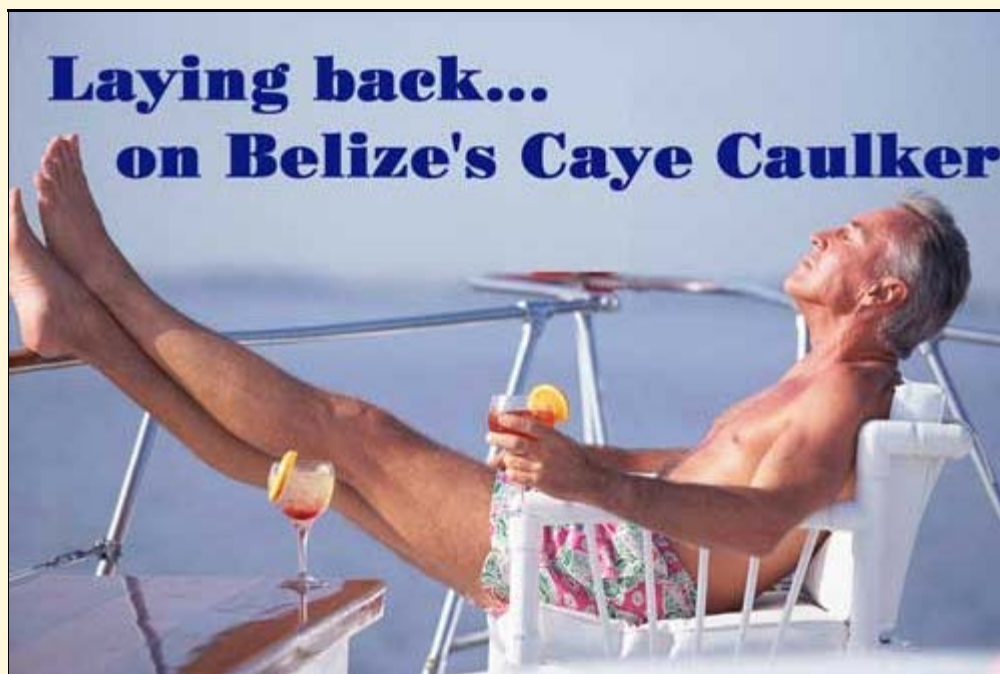
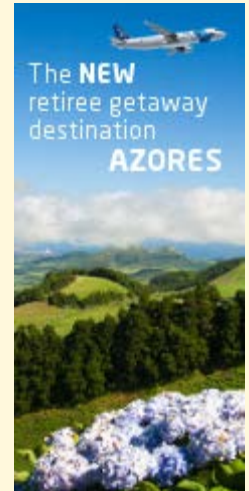
International Destinations

Beautiful Belize

If you are looking for a laid-back escape from the pressures of modern life, the tiny island community of Caye Caulker, Belize is likely to fit the bill. The friendly village of about 900 people has a long history of welcoming foreigners who are ready to exit the fast lane, whether for a few hours, a couple of weeks or even permanently.

"Our streets are soft, white sand and our taxis are golf carts," says islander Dane Dingerson. "Many people get around by bicycle or stroll barefoot."

Only four miles long, Caye Caulker is part of a chain of palm-shaded islands that follow a coral barrier reef along the eastern edge of Belize. At this point the reef is less than a mile offshore, providing excellent opportunities for snorkelling, diving and fishing. The area has warm, crystalline waters that are also superb for windsurfing, sailing, and sea kayaking. Another activity is observing endangered West Indian manatees.



Founded by English pirates and coconut growers, Caye Caulker is today home to a rainbow mix of residents descended from African, Maya, Mexican and European ancestors. This has yielded a tolerant and easygoing local culture whose customs and language reflect diverse traditions. Besides tourism, fishing is the primary economic activity.

Accommodations are available in every price and amenity range, one possibility is the Lazy Iguana Bed and Breakfast, located in a four-story private home at the north end of the village, which offers a panoramic 360-degree view of Caye Caulker and the Caribbean beyond from its roof-top palapa deck. Rates for the Lazy Iguana's four guest rooms, with air conditioning and a private bath, range from US \$75 U.S. to \$100 per night during the Spring and summer.

Most restaurants in Caye Caulker are along the beach, and as you would expect, seafood is a specialty. Several outfitters offer diving, snorkelling, fishing, sailing and wildlife observation trips. Nightlife centres around the island's several bars, some of which have live music on occasion. Many visitors simply relax, often with a rum punch in hand, and enjoy the intensely bright stars in the tropical sky.

For more information about Caye Caulker, see www.cayecaulker.net.

Elsewhere in Belize. . .

How about taking up residence in a jungle tree house? Hamanasi Dive and Adventure Resort, located near Hopkins in Belize's Stann Creek District, features four deluxe tree houses completed this spring. The luxuriously appointed tree houses are raised 12 feet, surrounded by a variety of trees, flowers and birds, and situated for more maximum privacy. The property has 12 other beachfront rooms and suites, a pool, bar, restaurant and full-service dive facility. It also offers dive and snorkel trips and inland tours.

Looking for something a little more up-tempo? Ambergris Caye is the largest and most popular of Belize's islands. This summer several resorts are offering special package deals. Xanadu Resort is on an inviting palm-lined beach within easy walking distance of the island's main town of San Pedro. Until November 15, they are offering guests staying a minimum of seven nights an extra night free, or they can stay four nights and receive a 10 per cent discount.

Accommodation is in two-bedroom condominiums with large shaded decks that overlook the Caribbean. Rates are US \$125 per day from May to November, US \$165 per day from November to May. Other resorts, including the Banana Beach Resort, Belizean Shores and Coral Bay Villas are offering discounted rate packages from US \$82,50 per night. For more information on these or other Belize packages, see www.belizespecials.com.

For all types of information about Belize call the Belize Tourism Board's toll-free number, 1-800-624-0686 or see their website, www.belize.net.