PACK LIGHTLY

THE REEF AND THE JUNGLE, IN ONE SMALL COUNTRY

Belize

The second-largest barrier reef on earth, the Great Blue Hole, jungle Maya ruins and river caves, and an English-speaking country you can cross in a day.

p.7 Cayes or jungle: the one decision that shapes a Belize trip, and how to split the two

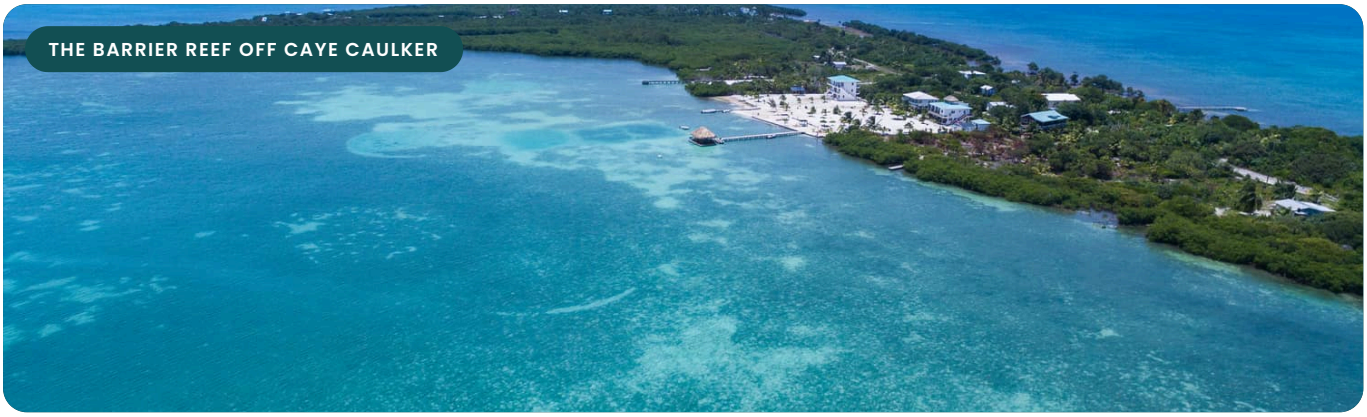
p.12 The Great Blue Hole and the outer atolls, and whether the famous dive is worth the boat ride

p.14 Snorkeling the barrier reef from a car-free island for the price of a taxi

35 PAGES USD PRICES ENGLISH-SPEAKING EDITION 2026.07

Start here

the shape of a Belize trip, what it costs, what to sort first


THE BARRIER REEF OFF CAYE CAULKER

Belize is small, English-speaking, and cleanly split into two trips that share a border: the cayes and reef on the water, and the jungle and Maya ruins inland. Most visits do both, anchored on a car-free island for snorkeling and diving, then a few nights in the Cayo district near San Ignacio for caves, ruins, and rivers. Prices run higher than neighboring Guatemala and Mexico because the Belize dollar is pegged to the US dollar, but the trip is easy to plan and easy to travel. Five days covers a reef base plus one jungle trip. Eight to ten does both sides properly.

The shape of a trip

Split the trip in two. The cayes, Caye Caulker for backpackers, Ambergris for a little more comfort, give the reef, the snorkeling, and the diving. The mainland, based in San Ignacio, gives jungle caves, Maya ruins, and rivers. The southern coast around Placencia and Hopkins adds Garifuna culture and quieter beaches. A short flight or a bus and boat connects them.

What a day costs

Budget travel runs near 55 USD a day: a caye guesthouse or a Cayo hostel, local diners, water taxis, and shared shuttles. Midrange sits around 120 with a private room, restaurant meals, and one dive or tour. Belize is the pricier of the region because the currency is pegged to the dollar. The full receipt is on page 25.

Sort before you fly

US and EU citizens need no visa for tourism up to 30 days, extendable. English is the official language, so there is no language barrier. The Belize dollar is fixed at two to one against the US dollar, and US cash is accepted almost everywhere. Page 17 covers the fast facts that trip up first-timers.


XUNANTUNICH MAYA RUINS NEAR SAN IGNACIO


GOLF CARTS ON CAYE CAULKER'S SAND STREETS

HOW THE LINKS WORK

Some booking links earn Pack Lightly a commission, at no extra cost to you. Full disclosure is on the last page.

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tap a line to jump straight there

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QUICK JUMPS

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01

The country

The trip on one page, the scorecard, and the single decision that shapes a Belize trip: how to split your nights between the cayes and the jungle.

IN THIS CHAPTER

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Belize at a glance 06

Cayes or jungle: the one decision 07

Your trip on one page

8 days recommended · 55 to 300 USD/day · best Nov to Apr

The classic Belize trip fly into Belize City, boat straight out to a caye for the reef, then cross back to the mainland for the jungle around San Ignacio. The route below runs that split with a southern-coast add-on. No rental car needed: water taxis, shuttles, and one short domestic flight do the work.

THE REEF-AND-JUNGLE ROUTE

Caye Caulker — day 1-3

45m boat

Belize City — transit

2h shuttle

San Ignacio — day 4-6

3h shuttle

Hopkins or Placencia — day 7-8

flight

Belize City, fly out — day 8

BUDGET PER DAY

Budget	55 USD
Midrange	120 USD
Luxury	300 USD

BOOK FIRST

01	Flights into Belize City, 6 to 8 weeks out	Aviasales
02	Accommodation, lock caye stays early	Booking.com
03	eSIM, install before departure	Saily

BEST MONTHS

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

best: dry, calm seas, best visibility · shoulder: warm, building rains, fewer crowds · peak rain and hurricane risk

Belize at a glance

scores 0-100 · pack-lightly country-comparison data

SCORECARD

Nature	85
Friendliness	85
Active vacation	80
Relaxed vacation	75
Budget friendly	70
Food and drinks	60

Budget travel	55 USD/day
Mid-range	120 USD/day
Luxury	300 USD/day

REEF DIVING JUNGLE RUINS NATURE

source: country-comparison tool, 2026-07

QUICK STATS

Capital	Belmopan
Language	English
Currency	Belize dollar, 2:1 to USD
Timezone	Central, UTC-6, no DST
Best months	November to April
Days needed	8 recommended, 5-12 flexible
Power	US plugs, Type A/B, 110V
Tap water	bottled on the cayes
Tipping	10 to 15%, and dive guides

Cayes or jungle: the one decision

how to split your nights, and what each side gives you

Belize is two trips that share a border, and the whole plan comes down to how you split your nights between them. The reef side is car-free islands, snorkeling, diving, and slow water time. The jungle side is caves, Maya ruins, rivers, and wildlife, based inland in the Cayo district. Most trips do both. The only real question is the ratio, and that comes down to whether you came for the water or the forest.

The cayes and reef

Caye Caulker for backpackers, Ambergris for comfort. Snorkel and dive the barrier reef, and reach the outer atolls for the Blue Hole. Slow, sandy, no cars.

The Cayo jungle

San Ignacio is the base for the ATM cave, the Caracol and Xunantunich ruins, cave tubing, and the Mountain Pine Ridge. The adventurous inland half.

The southern coast

Placencia and Hopkins add mainland beaches, Garifuna culture and drumming, and the jaguar reserve at Cockscomb. The quieter, longer-trip add-on.

Getting between them

Water taxis link the cayes to Belize City; shuttles run inland to San Ignacio; a short domestic flight saves a long drive south. No rental car needed.



THE SPLIT SWIMMING SPOT ON CAYE CAULKER

CAVE TUBING IN THE CAYO JUNGLE

GO DEEPER

Where Belize sits and how the reef and mainland connect on the location and map page, the standout spots in the most beautiful places rundown, and a passport-by-passport check on the Visa Checker tool.

02

Where to go

The northern cayes, the Cayo jungle, the Garifuna south, and the outer atolls that hold the Great Blue Hole.

IN THIS CHAPTER

The northern cayes 09

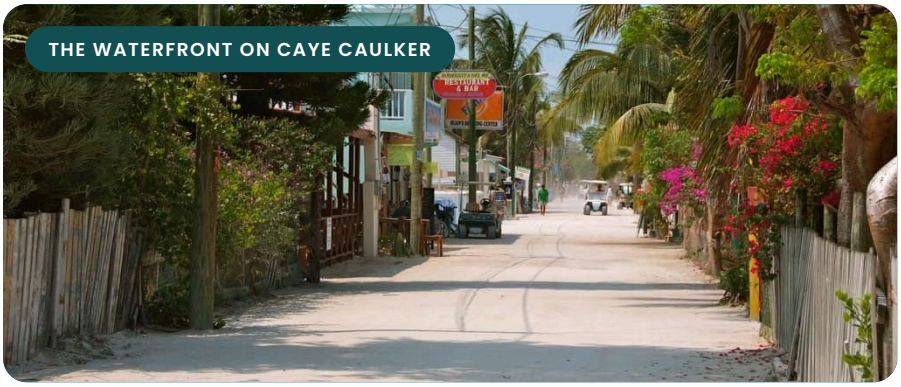
San Ignacio and the Cayo jungle 10

The southern coast 11

The atolls and the Great Blue Hole 12

The northern cayes

reef islands · base for 3-4 nights · best Nov to Apr



The two headline islands sit a short water-taxi ride off Belize City, both on the barrier reef. Caye Caulker is the backpacker favorite: sand streets, golf carts, no cars, and a swimming cut called the Split. Ambergris Caye and its town, San Pedro, are bigger and pricier, with more dive shops and the Hol Chan Marine Reserve on the doorstep. Both put snorkeling and diving in reach of a five-minute boat ride. Start a first trip here.

Skip: San Pedro's golf-cart traffic strip if the goal is quiet. Caye Caulker keeps the pace slow and the prices lower.

Water taxis from Belize City run on a set timetable, not on demand. Check the last boat back before a mainland day trip.

Caye Caulker

Car-free, backpacker-priced, with the Split and easy reef snorkeling.

San Pedro (Ambergris)

The bigger island, more dive shops, and the Hol Chan Marine Reserve.

Hol Chan and Shark Ray Alley

The reef-cut reserve for snorkeling with rays and nurse sharks off Ambergris.

Tobacco Caye

A tiny southern reef island for those who want fewer people and more water.

GO DEEPER

Snorkeling the barrier reef in the Caye Caulker write-up, the marine reserve in the San Pedro page, and all the reef islands in the islands rundown.

San Ignacio and the Cayo jungle

jungle and ruins · base for 2-4 nights · year round

THE ATM CAVE RIVER ENTRANCE NEAR SAN IGNACIO

The mainland half of the trip runs on the jungle around San Ignacio, the friendly hill town in the Cayo district near the Guatemalan border. It is the base for the ATM cave, a river-and-cavern trek to Maya sacrificial chambers; the ruins of Xunantunich and the far larger Caracol; cave tubing on the Mopan; and the pine forest and waterfalls of the Mountain Pine Ridge. Two nights is a minimum here, three if the ATM cave and Caracol both make the list.

The ATM cave bans cameras entirely, after a tourist dropped one on a skull. Go for the experience, not the photo, and book a licensed guide.

Caracol is a long, rough drive deep to the border zone, run only as a full-day guided trip. Xunantunich is the easy half-day alternative.

The ATM cave

A river-trek into Maya sacrificial chambers, the crystal maiden skeleton at the end.

Xunantunich

A hilltop Maya ruin reached by hand-cranked ferry, an easy half-day from town.

Caracol

The largest Maya site in Belize, deep in the forest, a full guided day out.

Mountain Pine Ridge

Pine forest, waterfalls, and swimming holes, paired with the Barton Creek cave.

KEEP READING The ATM cave and Caracol in the San Ignacio write-up, the pine forest reserve in the Mountain Pine Ridge page, and the sacred canoe cave in the Barton Creek rundown.

The southern coast

beach and Garifuna culture · base for 2-3 nights · dry Nov to Apr


THE BEACH AT PLACENCIA PENINSULA

Below the cayes and the jungle, the southern coast is the quieter, longer-trip half of Belize. Placencia sits on a thin peninsula with the country's best mainland beaches and a laid-back village at the tip. Hopkins is the Garifuna cultural heart, known for drumming and a strong local food scene. Inland from Hopkins, the Cockscomb Basin protects the world's first jaguar reserve. This coast rewards travelers with a week or more and a taste for slow days.

Skip: the south on a short trip. It is a three-hour-plus haul from the cayes, best paired with a domestic flight or reserved for a second visit.

Hopkins is the place to hear live Garifuna drumming and eat hudut. Ask a guesthouse when the next session runs.

Placencia

The peninsula with Belize's best mainland beaches and a slow village at the end.

Hopkins

The Garifuna cultural village, drumming, hudut, and a long quiet beach.

Cockscomb Basin

The first jaguar reserve on earth, jungle trails and waterfalls inland from Hopkins.

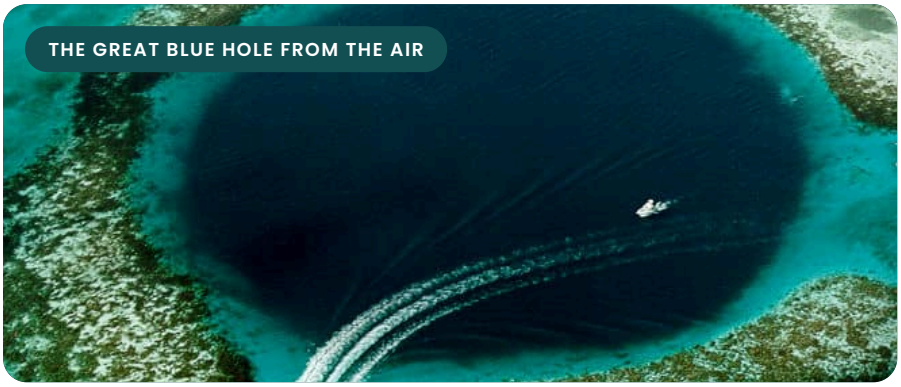
Dangriga

The Garifuna capital and the gateway to Tobacco Caye and the southern reef.

READ ON The peninsula beaches in the Placencia write-up, Garifuna culture in the Hopkins page, and the jaguar reserve in the Cockscomb Basin rundown.

The atolls and the Great Blue Hole

outer reef · day trip or liveaboard · best Nov to Apr



THE GREAT BLUE HOLE FROM THE AIR

Beyond the barrier reef sit three coral atolls, and one of them holds the image on every Belize postcard: the Great Blue Hole, a 300-metre sinkhole ringed by reef. The real note is that the Blue Hole itself is a deep, dark dive for the descent and the giant stalactites, not the colorful fish; the reef around Lighthouse and Glover's atolls is the better wildlife dive. Reach them on a long day boat from Ambergris or Caye Caulker, or on a liveaboard for serious divers.

⚠

The Blue Hole is a bucket-list descent, not a reef dive. Book it for the sinkhole and stalactites; book Half Moon Caye wall for the marine life on the same trip.

The day trip is two hours each way by fast boat. Snorkelers can join, but the Blue Hole itself only pays off with scuba depth.

The Great Blue Hole

The 300-metre sinkhole, a deep scuba descent to giant stalactites.

Lighthouse Reef

The atoll that holds the Blue Hole plus the Half Moon Caye wall dive.

Glover's Reef

A remote atoll for kayaking, snorkeling, and a genuine off-grid escape.

How to reach them

Long day boats from the cayes, or a multi-day liveaboard for dedicated divers.

THE FULL PICTURE

Every signature dive site in the diving rundown, the outer atoll in the Lighthouse Reef page, and the remote atoll in the Glover's Reef write-up.

03

What to do

The reef gets its own page, because it is the reason most people come. Then the jungle caves and ruins, the food, and the fast facts.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Diving and snorkeling the reef 14

Maya ruins and jungle caves 15

Food: rice, beans, and the reef 16

Fast facts before you fly 17

Diving and snorkeling the reef

the Belize signature · snorkel to liveaboard · best Nov to Apr

The barrier reef is why most people book Belize, and it delivers from the shallow end up. Snorkelers get rays, turtles, and nurse sharks at Hol Chan and Shark Ray Alley for the price of a boat ticket. Divers get wall dives off the cayes, the atoll reefs, and the Blue Hole descent. It is a rare place where a total beginner and a technical diver both leave happy.

Hol Chan and Shark Ray Alley

The starter reserve off Ambergris. Snorkel with rays and nurse sharks in waist-to-chest depth, no certification needed. The best value on the reef.

Learn to dive here

Caye Caulker and Ambergris are among the cheaper places to earn an Open Water certification, with warm, calm reef water to train in.

The wall dives

The reef drops off in steep walls close to the cayes. Turneffe and the atolls hold the best of them for certified divers.

Whale sharks, in season

Around the full moons of spring, whale sharks pass the southern reef off Placencia. A seasonal, weather-dependent bucket-list swim.

Visibility is best in the dry season, November to April. The rainy months stir up the water and cancel more boat days.

Wear reef-safe sunscreen or a rash guard. The barrier reef is protected, and the chemical creams do real damage over a season.

SNORKELERS WITH A NURSE SHARK AT HOL CHAN

A REEF WALL DIVE OFF AMBERGRIS CAYE

ON THE WEBSITE

Every dive site rated in the diving guide, and the top snorkeling spots in the snorkeling rundown.

Maya ruins and jungle caves

the inland half · guided day trips · year round

The mainland's draw is the Maya world and the caves the Maya held sacred. Belize sits at the heart of the ancient Maya lowlands, and its sites are quieter and more jungle-wrapped than the crowded headline ruins across the border. Pair a temple with a river cave for the fullest version of the inland half.

The ATM cave

The standout: swim and scramble into a river cavern to Maya pottery and the calcified crystal maiden skeleton. Licensed guide only, no cameras.

Caracol and Xunantunich

The largest Maya city in Belize, deep in the forest, and the easy hilltop temple reached by hand-cranked ferry near San Ignacio.

Lamanai

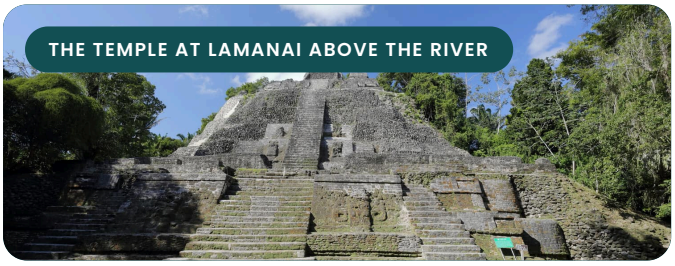
Reached by a jungle river boat from Orange Walk, with howler monkeys and crocodiles on the way to the temples.

Barton Creek and cave tubing

Float a canoe or an inner tube through Maya river caves, the gentler cave day out of San Ignacio.

The ATM cave caps daily visitor numbers and books out in high season. Reserve a licensed guide a few days ahead, not on the day.

Lamanai works as a day trip from Orange Walk or the north, not from the cayes. Match it to where you sleep.



THE TEMPLE AT LAMANAI ABOVE THE RIVER



THE HILLTOP TEMPLE OF XUNANTUNICH

Food: rice, beans, and the reef

Creole, Garifuna, and the day's catch · 3 to 30 USD

Belizean food is Creole at heart, built on stewed chicken, rice and beans, and whatever came off the reef that morning. It is simple and filling rather than showy, with Garifuna dishes on the southern coast and fresh conch and lobster in season on the cayes. Prices below are per plate, local diner to caye restaurant.

RICE AND BEANS WITH STEW CHICKEN

Rice and beans, stew chicken

USD 6-11 · the daily plate

The national plate: coconut-cooked rice and beans with stewed chicken. Order it at any diner.

FRY JACKS

Fry jacks

USD 3-6 · breakfast

Puffed fried dough for breakfast, filled with beans, cheese, or egg. The morning staple.



CONCH FRITTERS

Conch fritters

USD 6-11 · in season

Battered conch, a caye bar staple during the open season. Ceviche is the fresher option.

HUDUT

Hudut

USD 8-14 · Garifuna coast

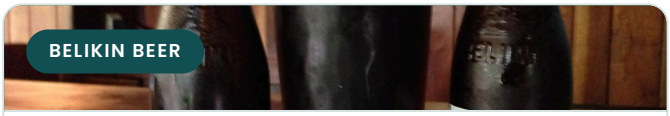
Garifuna fish in coconut broth with mashed plantain. Best in Hopkins and Dangriga.

BELIZE LOBSTER

Spiny lobster

USD 15-30 · in season

Fresh reef lobster, grilled simply on the cayes during the open season, June to February.



BELIKIN BEER

Belikin

the beach default

The national beer, cheap and everywhere, the default order at any caye bar.

ON THE WEBSITE

The full dish list with prices in the food and drinks rundown, and what a full day of eating costs in the budget breakdown.

Fast facts before you fly

eight things that trip up first-time visitors

WORTH KNOWING BEFORE DAY ONE

- [ ] US and EU citizens get 30 days visa-free on arrival, extendable at an immigration office for a fee.
- [ ] English is the official language, so signage, guides, and menus need no translation.
- [ ] The Belize dollar is fixed at two to one against the US dollar. US cash is accepted almost everywhere.
- [ ] No rental car is needed. Water taxis reach the cayes, shuttles run inland, and domestic flights save the long southern drive.
- [ ] The ATM cave bans cameras and phones entirely. Go for the experience, and book a licensed guide ahead.
- [ ] Reef-safe sunscreen matters here. The barrier reef is protected, and chemical creams do real damage.
- [ ] There is a departure tax on international flights, often bundled into the ticket price. Check before you assume it is due at the airport.
- [ ] Book caye stays and the ATM cave early in high season, December to April; both cap out.

source: pack-lightly Belize tips dataset, captured 2026-07

04

Routes and itineraries

The reef-and-jungle route drawn on the map, a tight seven-day version pairing the cayes with Cayo, and the tours worth booking ahead.

IN THIS CHAPTER

The reef-and-jungle route, mapped 19

7 days: cayes and Cayo 20

Tours worth booking 21

The reef-and-jungle route, mapped

out to the reef, back to the jungle, no rental car

The country is small enough to draw the whole route on one map. Fly into Belize City, boat out to the cayes for the reef, then cross back and run inland to San Ignacio for the jungle. The south is the flight-assisted add-on. Water taxis and shuttles handle every leg below.



THE LEGS

- [ ] Belize City to Caye Caulker: 45 min water taxi
- [ ] Caye Caulker to Belize City to San Ignacio: 45 min boat plus 2h shuttle
- [ ] San Ignacio to Hopkins or Placencia: 3h shuttle
- [ ] Placencia to Belize City: 20 min domestic flight or 4h drive

7 days: cayes and Cayo

reef first, jungle second, both sides done well

The most balanced week in Belize: a reef base on Caye Caulker, then the jungle around San Ignacio, with the two big set-pieces, a reef trip and the ATM cave, booked ahead. It never needs a rental car and never asks for a long haul south.

1	**Caye Caulker** day 1-3	Water taxi out, snorkel Hol Chan and Shark Ray Alley, and slow days at the Split.
2	**To San Ignacio** day 4	Boat back to the mainland, shuttle inland, an afternoon walk up to Xunantunich.
3	**The ATM cave** day 5	The full-day guided river-cave trek, the trip's inland highlight, booked ahead.
4	**Mountain Pine Ridge** day 6	Waterfalls, swimming holes, and cave tubing, then back toward Belize City.
5	**Fly out** day 7	Last morning near Belize City, a final swim or market stop, and the flight home.

WORTH A READ

The week mapped stop by stop in the 7 day itinerary, and the two-week version that adds the south in the 14 day itinerary.

Tours worth booking

top-rated local operators, filtered to group trips, sorted toward backpacker prices

A handful of things here need booking ahead, mostly the capped cave trips and the boat dives. The cards below fill in from live, top-rated group tours once the tour data runs. Match them to the route on the previous pages.

WHAT TO BOOK AHEAD

- [ ] The ATM cave, a licensed guide, capped daily numbers
- [ ] Hol Chan and Shark Ray Alley snorkel trips from the cayes
- [ ] The Great Blue Hole and atoll dive day from Ambergris or Caye Caulker
- [ ] Caracol full-day guided trips from San Ignacio
- [ ] Lamanai river-boat trips from Orange Walk
- [ ] Whale shark swims off Placencia, in season, around the spring full moons

Live Viator tours load here once the tour data runs. Prices captured at build time, ratings from verified bookings. Some links earn Pack Lightly a commission at no extra cost.

05

When to go

Warm year round, so the split is dry-season calm seas against wet-season storm risk. Reef visibility follows the same line.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Weather, dry season, hurricane season 23

Weather, dry season, hurricane season

warm year round · the split is calm seas and storm risk

Belize stays warm all year, so the seasonal split is dryness and sea conditions rather than temperature. November through April is the dry high season with the calmest water and the best reef visibility. The rains build from June, and the Atlantic hurricane risk peaks August through October, when boat days cancel more often and the humidity climbs. Reef trips follow the same calendar as the weather.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

best: Dec–Apr, dry, calm seas, best visibility

shoulder: May–Jul, Nov, warmer, building rains

avoid or storm: Aug–Oct, peak hurricane risk

source: pack-lightly best-travel-time dataset, captured 2026-07

Best: Dec–Apr

Dry, calm water, the best reef visibility, and the fewest cancelled boat days. Peak crowds and prices.

Shoulder: May–Jul, Nov

Warm with building afternoon rains, fewer tourists, and lower prices. Diving is still good between showers.

Avoid or storm: Aug–Oct

Peak hurricane window, more cancelled boats and murkier water. Book refundable and track forecasts.

CALM DRY-SEASON WATER OFF THE CAYES

WET-SEASON CLOUDS OVER THE JUNGLE INTERIOR

06

Practical

What a day costs, what to pack for reef and jungle, and where to sleep across the cayes and the mainland.

IN THIS CHAPTER

What a day really costs 25

Packing checklist 26

Where to stay: cayes and mainland 27

What a day really costs

itemised, budget vs midrange · pricier than its neighbors

Belize costs more than Guatemala or Mexico, mostly because the currency is pegged to the US dollar and much is imported. The cayes run pricier than the mainland, and dive days add up fast. The two receipts below itemise a full day at each level.

A DAY IN BELIZE

* budget *

bed, hostel or guesthouse	18-28
food, local diners	12-18
water taxi and shuttle	6-12
one snorkel or tour	10-20
drink	2-4
TOTAL / DAY	**50-70 USD**

budget-calculator data, July 2026

A DAY IN BELIZE

* midrange *

bed, private room	45-70
food, restaurants	25-35
transfers and taxis	15-25
a dive or guided tour	40-70
drinks	8-15
TOTAL / DAY	**110-150 USD**

budget-calculator data, July 2026

⚠ Dive days are the budget-breaker. A two-tank boat dive runs well above the daily budget line; plan around a set number of them.

Eat where locals eat, the diners and market stalls, and drink Belikin over imports. It halves the daily food line.

THE FULL BREAKDOWN

Category by category detail in the budget and saving write-up, or run the numbers for your own trip length on the Trip Budget Calculator.

Packing checklist

five groups, for reef days and jungle caves in one trip

DOCUMENTS

- [ ] Passport valid six months, plus a proof of onward travel
- [ ] Travel insurance with dive cover if you plan to scuba
- [ ] Dive certification card, if you hold one
- [ ] A card that reimburses ATM fees, plus US cash as backup

CLOTHING

- [ ] Lightweight, quick-dry layers for reef heat and jungle humidity
- [ ] Sturdy shoes or sandals that can get soaked in the ATM cave
- [ ] Long sleeves and trousers for jungle bugs and ruins
- [ ] Swimwear plus a rash guard for reef and cave days
- [ ] A light rain layer for the afternoon showers

HEALTH AND SUN

- [ ] Reef-safe sunscreen, oxybenzone free, required over the barrier reef
- [ ] Strong insect repellent for the jungle and coastal evenings
- [ ] Motion-sickness tablets for the reef and atoll boat trips
- [ ] Prescriptions in original packaging and a basic first aid kit
- [ ] A refillable filter bottle for the mainland

TECH

- [ ] No adapter needed, US Type A/B plugs, 110V
- [ ] A local eSIM or roaming plan set before departure
- [ ] Portable battery for long boat and cave days
- [ ] Waterproof pouch or a dry bag for reef and river trips

REEF AND WATER

- [ ] Your own mask and snorkel, cheaper than daily rental
- [ ] Microfiber towel that dries in humid air
- [ ] Water shoes for rocky caye and cave entry
- [ ] A dry bag for phone and wallet on boats

GO DEEPER The full packing list at the packing list page, and what to wear where in the dress code write-up.

Where to stay: cayes and mainland

getting around · no rental car, water taxis and shuttles do it all

Belize is one of the easiest countries to travel without a car. Water taxis link Belize City to the northern cayes on a fixed timetable, tourist shuttles run inland to San Ignacio and south to the coast, and cheap domestic flights save the long drive to Placencia. Base on a caye for the reef and in San Ignacio for the jungle; add the southern coast only with extra days. Book caye stays early in the December to April high season, when the good rooms fill first.

Caye Caulker

The backpacker reef base, sand streets and easy snorkeling off the dock. See what a room costs on the island, or find the dorm scene through Hostelworld.

San Pedro (Ambergris Caye)

The bigger island for more dive shops and the Hol Chan reserve. Live prices in San Pedro town, and Hostelworld for the budget end.

San Ignacio (Cayo)

The jungle base for the ATM cave, the ruins, and cave tubing. Check what a room costs in town or browse Hostelworld.

Placencia or Hopkins

The southern-coast bases for beaches and Garifuna culture. See prices on the Placencia peninsula, or check Hopkins live.

Guesthouses, cabanas, and dive lodges across the cayes and mainland, with free cancellation while plans are still moving.

Find Stays on Booking.com

07

Safe and smart

The tourist corridor runs calm and easy. The real risks are the water and the road, not the crime the country score implies.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Staying safe 29

Do and do not 30

Staying safe

the tourist corridor is calm; the water and the road matter more

The tourist corridor, the cayes, San Ignacio, Placencia, and Hopkins, runs calm and friendly, and English makes everything simpler. Belize City is the one place to keep sharp: pass through it rather than linger, and skip its rougher neighborhoods after dark. For most visitors the real risks are practical, boat conditions, currents on the reef, and the caves, not crime. Use licensed guides for the ATM cave and the atoll dives, and the trip runs smoothly.

Belize City

Treat it as a transit hub, not a destination. Move between the water taxi terminal and the bus in daylight, and skip walking the back streets at night.

The water and the reef

Book reef and atoll trips with reputable operators, mind currents when snorkeling off the boat, and do not dive beyond your certification.

The caves

The ATM cave and river caves need a licensed guide, both for safety and to protect the site. Do not attempt them independently.

Hurricane season

June through November carries storm risk, peaking August to October. Book refundable stays and track the forecast before those months.

A LICENSED DIVE BOAT LEAVING THE CAYE

THE WATER TAXI TERMINAL AT BELIZE CITY

CHECK BEFORE YOU GO

Current conditions by area on the Travel Safety Map tool, required jabs in the vaccinations write-up, and coverage options in the budget and saving page.

Do and do not

five to follow, five to avoid

DO

Split your nights, reef and jungle

Both sides are the trip. A caye base plus San Ignacio is the balanced week.

DO NOT

Base yourself in Belize City

It is a transit hub, not a destination. Pass through it to the cayes or the jungle.

DO

Book the ATM cave ahead

Daily numbers are capped and it sells out in high season. Reserve a licensed guide early.

DO NOT

Expect the Blue Hole to be colorful

It is a deep, dark descent for the sinkhole. Pair it with a reef wall for the marine life.

DO

Snorkel Hol Chan first

Rays, turtles, and nurse sharks in shallow water, the best-value reef trip in the country.

DO NOT

Use chemical sunscreen on the reef

The barrier reef is protected. Wear reef-safe cream or cover up with a rash guard.

DO

Eat rice and beans at the diner

The local plate is filling and cheap, and it keeps the daily food line down.

DO NOT

Rush the south on a short trip

Placencia and Hopkins are a long haul. Save them for a second visit or a flight-assisted week.

DO

Carry small US bills

US dollars work everywhere at a fixed two-to-one rate. Small notes ease the sand-street shops.

DO NOT

Assume dive days fit a low budget

A two-tank boat dive breaks the daily budget line. Plan around a set number of them.

08

Tools and reference

The live tools this guide draws from, the questions readers ask most, and where every number in this edition comes from.

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Take the live tools with you

scan to open · data updates after this PDF was printed

This guide is a snapshot; the tools behind it keep updating. Scan a code or type the short URL, each one preloaded with the same Belize data this guide was built from.



Trip Budget Calculator

Belize: 55 USD/day budget, 120 midrange, 300 luxury.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/budget-calculator/



Packing List Generator

A custom list for reef days and jungle caves in one trip.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/packing-list-generator/



Best Time to Travel

Best: November to April. Month by month weather for 140+ countries.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/best-travel-time-worldmap/



Travel Safety Map

Current conditions by area, before a night in Belize City.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/travel-safety-map/

Frequently asked questions

the eight questions that come up most

The short answers to what readers ask before booking. Longer detail on each sits in the matching chapter.

Cayes or mainland, which first?

Do both. A caye base for the reef plus San Ignacio for the jungle is the balanced trip. The ratio depends on whether you came for water or forest.

Do I need a visa?

US and EU citizens get 30 days visa-free on arrival, extendable at an immigration office for a fee.

Is the Blue Hole worth it?

For certified divers chasing the descent and stalactites, yes. It is not a colorful reef dive, so pair it with a wall dive on the same trip.

Do I need a car?

No. Water taxis reach the cayes, shuttles run inland, and cheap domestic flights save the long southern drive.

Is English really spoken?

Yes, English is the official language. Kriol and Spanish are also common, but everything works in English.

Is Belize expensive?

Pricier than Guatemala and Mexico, since the dollar is pegged and much is imported. Budget from 55 USD a day, more with dive days.

Can non-divers do the reef?

Absolutely. Snorkeling at Hol Chan and Shark Ray Alley gives rays, turtles, and nurse sharks without any certification.

When is the best time to visit?

November to April for dry weather, calm seas, and the best reef visibility. August to October is the peak hurricane window.

Image credits

every photo, its author and license

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1. **Barrier reef / turquoise water off**. Dronepicr, CC BY 3.0, CC BY 3.0.
2. **Beach on the Placencia peninsula**. Philip Larson from McLean, VA, US, CC BY-SA 2.0, CC BY-SA 2.0.
3. **Belikin beer**. Nolabob, CC BY-SA 4.0, CC BY-SA 4.0.
4. **Conch fritters**. Bob B. Brown, CC BY 2.0, CC BY 2.0.
5. **Great Blue Hole aerial view, Belize**. U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Public domain, Public domain.
6. **Lamanai Maya temple above the jungle**. Martin Falbisoner, CC BY-SA 4.0, CC BY-SA 4.0.
7. **Sand street / golf cart /**. CarlosVanVegas from England, CC BY 2.0, CC BY 2.0.
8. **The Split swimming spot**. Dronepicr, CC BY 3.0, CC BY 3.0.
9. **Xunantunich Maya ruin near San Ignacio**. Kaldari, CC0, CC0.

Tour data and prices: Viator Partner API, captured July 2026. Author portrait and brand marks: Pack Lightly.

A note on the links in this guide

disclosure and sources · why this guide is free



WRITTEN BY

Wouter van Kemenade

Founder of Pack Lightly. Performance marketing background, data led travel research. Every number in this guide is verified against a source listed below; if a price moves more than 15 percent, the next edition flags it.

This guide is free because some of the booking links inside it are affiliate links. When a reader books a stay, a flight, or an eSIM through one of those links, the merchant pays Pack Lightly. The reader pays the same price either way.

The pick comes before the partner. A caye, a base, or a transport option is chosen for the trip it makes, and where a partner link exists for it that link is used; where none does, the plain link still points there. The commission funds the guide, it does not choose for it.

Questions, corrections, or a place you tested that belongs in the next edition: write to hello@pack-lightly.com.

Partners linked in this edition: **Aviasales** · **Booking.com** · **Saily** · **Hostelworld** · **Stay22** · **GetYourGuide** · via **Travelpayouts**

SOURCES USED IN THIS EDITION

1. Budget figures: pack-lightly budget-calculator dataset, captured July 2026.
2. Country scores and vacation type tags: pack-lightly country-comparison tool, captured 2026-07.
3. Seasonal weather bands: pack-lightly best-travel-time dataset, captured 2026-07.
4. Food prices: pack-lightly local food and drinks dataset for Belize, captured 2026-07.
5. Pack Lightly Belize cluster pages, retrieved 2026-07: the hub · budget · diving · islands.

What changed in edition 2026.07: first release on the v2 design standard for Belize. Not covered here: liveaboard dive logistics, extended Toledo District routes, cruise stopovers.