



## CAVING

For a truly over-the-top adventure, there's only one way to place to send your clients: underground. Caving in Belize is an exhilarating and educational experience, as the maze of subterranean marvels underfoot will amaze even the most seasoned spelunkers. Belize has the largest cave system in all of Central America and offers travelers options for any level of difficulty. Some are lit by the sun and others require hiking, wading, swimming, floating on an inner tube, climbing, rappelling or squeezing through narrow openings, so pre-planning is important.

But the scenery is will worth the effort. Awe-inspiring stalactites and stalagmites grow down from the ceilings and up from the ground, respectively, in the limestone caves and give way to glistening pools and magical chambers. The caves' magnificence so enthralled the Mayans—who believed they were portal to the underworld realm—they held religious ceremonies in them and artifacts still remain.

### **Rio Frio Cave**

First-time spelunkers and older travelers will find this half-mile cave, with 65-foot opening and stream running through it, a good starting point. Visitors can see from end-to-end, diminishing the intimidation factor.

- » LOCATION: Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve in Belize's Cayo District

### **Ben Loman Cave**

This cave is also recommended for novices, though a great deal of walking is required. The payoff: the area is known for its lagoons with large populations of manatees.

- » LOCATION: Gales Point in southern Belize

### **Barton Creek Cave**

Once used by the ancient Maya for rituals involving human sacrifices, bloodletting and fertility rites, this easy-to-reach cave is distinguished by its cool, dark caverns.

- » LOCATION: In the small Mennonite community of Barton Creek in the Cayo District

### **Che Chem Ha Cave**

A 45-minute uphill trek leads to this historic gem that features an entrance decorated with Maya motifs, hidden chambers accessible by ladder and an impressive collection of fully intact Maya pottery inside. Exploring the cave with a guide is required.

- » LOCATION: About 16 miles from San Ignacio in the Cayo District

### **Actun Tunichil Muknal Cave**

Intrepid travelers will enjoy the 45-minute hike through Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve and its streams, a short swim into the cave and a guided trek to see one of Belize's most renowned Maya sites. Ceramics, stoneware, a monkey pot (one of only four found in Central America) and even skeletal remains cemented in limestone await travelers.

- » LOCATION: About a 45-minute drive from San Ignacio in the Cayo District to begin the hike



### St. Herman's Cave

Tucked away in the dense tropical forest of Blue Hole National Park, this cave is one of the most accessible in Belize and offers a glimpse into the Maya Classical period.

» LOCATION: About 12 miles southeast of Belmopan on the Hummingbird Highway in the Cayo District

### Tiger Cave (or San Miguel Cave)

An exhilarating 1.5-hour nature hike to this impressive cave with a guide offers amazing views of the rainforest and Maya farming practices. The return trip can be made on a canoe.

» LOCATION: Near the village of San Miguel in the Toledo District



### Hokeb Ha Cave

The 20-minute hike from the village of Blue Creek and a cool swim to enter the cave is worth the effort to see the ceramics and ceremonial altar used by the Maya.

» LOCATION: Near the village of Blue Creek in the Toledo District

### Caves Branch

Comprised of three caves—Footprint, Waterfall and Petroglyph—this cave systems offers varying experiences, from hiking to tubing to rock climbing to negotiating tight spaces. The underground waterfalls are a sight to see.

» LOCATION: South of the capital city of Belmopan in the Cayo District

### CLIENT TIPS

- Accompaniment by an approved guide is recommended—and mandatory in most cases
- Read all waiver forms
- Wear hardhats
- Use lights and hardhats at all times
- Watch for low ceilings and hanging cave formations
- Avoid jumping, which may cause stones to roll
- Do not stray off of designated path and stay with your party
- Keep voices to a minimum to lessen impact on the protected area
- Do not touch or remove artifacts found in the cave
- Do not touch, break or lean on any cave formation
- Lighting fires and smoking are strictly prohibited
  
- What to pack for caving:
  - » Sturdy and comfortable shoes
  - » Long-sleeved shirt
  - » Long pants
  - » Insect repellent
  - » Sunscreen
  - » Flashlight and extra batteries