



## DIVING, SNORKELING & WATER SPORTS

Home to the second-largest barrier reef in the world, the 185-mile-long Belize Barrier Reef beckons to diving and snorkeling enthusiasts alike with pristine waters and exotic marine life. The importance of this underwater ecosystem was recognized by UNESCO, which named seven areas within the reef World Heritage sites.

For divers and snorkelers, the waters off of Belize are a mesmerizing coral landscape of floating stingrays, frolicking turtles and awe-inspiring sharks. Legendary oceanographer Jacques Cousteau named Belize "one of the four must-dive locations on this blue planet," and readers of Scuba Diving magazine agree. They ranked Belize the second best overall dive destination in the Caribbean and Atlantic in 2013. Dive boats, training, certifications and equipment are readily available.

### **Belize Barrier Reef**

Second only to Australia's Great Barrier Reef in size, the Belize Barrier Reef extends 185 miles along the entire coast, from the northern tip of Ambergris Caye to Sapodilla Cayes in the southern region. Dives range from 30 feet to 90 feet, and there are thousands of snorkeling sites of varying depths along the reef. All levels of divers and snorkelers are accommodated and underwater explorers will encounter nurse and reef sharks, hawksbill and loggerhead turtles, parrotfish and endangered elkhorn and staghorn coral.

- » LOCATION: Access from coastal destinations throughout Belize at varying distances

### **The Blue Hole**

The Blue Hole, a circular sinkhole 1,000 feet in diameter and 412-feet deep, is Belize's most famous diving spots and a globally recognized underwater wonder—even visible from space. Recommended for advanced divers, this UNESCO World Heritage site is home to some of the largest midnight parrotfish, spotted eagle rays, Caribbean reef sharks and barracudas, as well as tunnels, caverns and stalactites reaching up to 130 feet. Dives go as deep as 130 feet and best views of underwater life are found from 60 to 100 feet down near the lip of the crater.

- » LOCATION: In the Lighthouse Reef Atoll, an approximate two-hour boat ride from Ambergris Caye or Caye Caulker

### **The Atolls**

In addition to Lighthouse Reef Atoll, where divers find the famous Blue Hole, two other true coral atolls are located on the edge of Belize Barrier Reef. At Turneffe Islands Atoll, the Elbow wall is where divers encounter majestic eagle rays, hammerhead sharks and hawksbill and loggerhead turtles. Glover's Reef Atoll boasts a shallow lagoon with vibrant coral patches.

- » LOCATION: Turneffe Islands Atoll is just under 1 hour by boat from Belize City and there are a few resorts within the islands. Glover's Reef Atoll is 2.5 - 3 hours by boat from Belize City and also offers several resort options

### Hol Chan Marine Reserve

The barrier reef off of Ambergris Caye is home to Hol Chan (loosely translated from Mayan as "little channel"), a protected marine reserve that does not allow anchoring, touching of coral or fishing, creating a pristine environment for divers and snorkelers to explore. The depth is 30 feet and the current is strong but it's worth it to see schools of grouper, snapper and barracuda darting among the colorful coral. Nearby Shark Ray Alley allows snorkelers to swim with sting rays and nurse sharks—a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

- » LOCATION: Four miles south of San Pedro on Ambergris Caye, roughly 15 minutes by boat, or 30 minutes by boat from Caye Caulker



### South Water Caye Marine Reserve

The largest marine reserve in Belize features an underwater cave with a 10-to-15-foot-wide mouth called Hell Hole and beckons to divers and snorkelers with impressive stalactites, stalagmites, moray eels, dolphins and more. It's also home to a Smithsonian research facility. Island resorts in the area offer splendid off-the-beach snorkeling.

- » LOCATION: About 15 miles east of Dangriga off the southern coast, roughly 45 minutes by boat

### Gladden Spit

Massive whale sharks are the draw at Gladden Spit, where divers and snorkelers alike are treated to the awesome sight of seeing these creatures in their natural spawning ground during the months of April, May and June—with sightings also in the fall and winter.

- » LOCATION: Due east of Placencia, a little over an hour's boat ride

### Laughing Bird Caye

This national park encompasses more than 10,000 acres of protected sea and is accessible from Placencia. Sandy beaches with picture-perfect palms, shallow swimming areas and diving in the deep channels around the caye provide myriad opportunities to view exotic marine life.

- » LOCATION: About a 45-minute boat ride from Placencia

### Port Honduras Marine Reserve

A marine reserve in the southern end of Belize where seven jungle rivers converge, Port Honduras

encompasses 160 square miles of coastal waters and 135 mangrove islands. It's a habitat for endangered West Indian manatees and a favorite spot for snorkelers.

- » LOCATION: Just north of Punta Gorda. Diving and snorkeling excursions can be arranged by local tour operators

### Sapodilla Cayes Marine Reserve

Snorkelers revel in the shallow-water reefs around the sandy mangrove cayes in this 48-square-mile preserve.

- » LOCATION: About 40 miles east of Punta Gorda, roughly 1.5 hours by boat

### CLIENT TIPS

- All travelers wishing to SCUBA dive must present an agency certification card (C-card) to prove they have successfully completed dive training and are permitted to rent air tanks or obtain air fills.
- Qualified dive instructors are available in Belize for training and certification.
- Divers must wait 18 to 24 hours from their last dive before flying, so please plan accordingly.

## OTHER WATER SPORTS

While the Belize Barrier Reef takes center stage—making this seaside paradise a favorite of SCUBA divers and snorkelers—the crystal-clear Caribbean and inland waterways provide many options for enjoying other water sports. For clients who love to soak up unique wet-and-wild experiences, Belize will delight and amaze.

### RIVER TOURS

As water travels from the mountains through the jungles and limestone caves to the Caribbean Sea, it carves glistening rivers and lagoons, propelling travelers through a moveable feast of jungle scenery and Maya wonders. Guided river day trips and overnight excursions are readily available throughout Belize. The most popular destination for river trips is the Cayo District.

### CANOEING & KAYAKING

#### Mopan River

A paddle through jungle scenery and small villages offers a glimpse into the quiet everyday life of Belizeans.

» LOCATION: Cayo District

#### Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary

The sanctuary, which is a jaguar reserve, provides a glimpse of incredible wildlife, including howler monkeys, pumas, armadillos and 290 bird species, as visitors explore the basin's rivers.

» LOCATION: Stann Creek



#### Sibun River Basin

Thrills abound as kayakers experience limestone gorges and challenging rapids, as well as relax in pools at the base of waterfalls.

» LOCATION: Cayo District

### CAVE TUBING

Inner tubes are the preferred mode of transportation as guided groups float in and out of Belize's limestone caves, an exhilarating experience. Best-known tours are along the Caves Branch River, Barton Creek Cave and Crystal Cave in the Cayo District.

### RIVER FISHING

Lines are cast for tarpon, snook, jacks, groupers and cubera in the rivers and streams throughout Belize. Top fishing spots in central Belize include Black Creek, Belize River, Sibun River, Manatee River and the waters around Belize City. In southern Belize, anglers enjoy Deep River, Monkey River, Moho River, Rio Grande, Temash River and Sarstoon River.