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Belize Worldly Wonders



Astrum Helicopters tours The Blue Hole, a popular Belizean landmark.

Spectacular natural sites pair with personalized lodgings in this one-of-a-kind destination.

With an awe-inspired blue hole and stunning barrier reef right off its coast, plus world-class fishing, diving and snorkeling, Belize is an active vacationer's ideal destination. Landlubbers will be just as satisfied in this eco-rich country, as they can hike jungle trails, spot exotic birds and seek out elusive animals in their natural habitats.

You can rough it in Belize, but you needn't. Hotels and resorts offer every comfort. Simpler lodgings have crisp beds in air-conditioned rooms and pristine swimming pools. Other resorts are all-out eco-lodges, where beds have fine linens and restaurants serve awe-inspiring meals — yet excursions to the sea and inland treasures are easily arranged by friendly staffers. Belize is an English-speaking country, making your travels that much easier.

While visitors can explore beautiful Belize by ground transportation, they'll get another kind of thrill entirely seeing the country's most spectacular sites from the air. **Astrum Helicopters** offers adventures over country and water to those eager for an aerial view.

Astrum will customize itineraries to your request, but many customers enjoy one of the most popular routes. Fly over the Blue Hole, which is the world's largest ocean sinkhole, and two of Belize's three atolls: the Lighthouse Reef Atoll and Turneffe Islands. For a cultural diversion, see the ancient Maya ruins of Altun Ha and Lamanai, taking a private tour on land of the structures. For a thrill, take a waterfall sightseeing flight

combined with canopy tours, cave tubing or horseback riding in the Jungle Mountains. Ambergris Caye, San Pedro and the city of Belize are other options.

In addition to sightseeing, Astrum Helicopters helps travelers reach their hotels. Its fleet of Bell 206 helicopters flies to private heliports all over the country, cutting travel time significantly. 888-ASTRUM4, astrumhelicopters.com

AMBERGRIS CAYE

While many Belizean hotels are tucked into jungle and along remote shorelines, a large concentration is on Ambergris Caye. The center of this tourist hub is San Pedro, a laid-back area filled with every service you can imagine, from fishing charters to grocery stores to golf-cart rentals.

Ramon Nunez, a San Pedro native and legendary host of **Ramon's Village Resort**, welcomes you to a true Belizean getaway. Sixty-one palm-thatch cabanas shaded by coconut palms and surrounded by lush tropical foliage afford beachfront views of the western Caribbean and the world's second largest barrier reef. Newlyweds and families often opt for suites, which have yet more space plus kitchenettes.

Guests gather around the 80-foot pool, a lagoon-style meanderer overseen by a 12-foot stone statue resembling a Maya god. "Rey Ramon" is hand-carved from stone blocks. The Restaurant at Ramon's is another central spot. Chef Rommy Kie prepares dishes with local flavors — as well as American, Asian,

Cajun and others — and hosts weekly beach barbecues and Sunday buffets.

You'll have quite the appetite after diving. Ramon's Village Resort is a PADI Gold Palm IDC facility with a full staff of professional instructors. The Pro 42 dive boat *The Miss Gina* brings guests to spectacular scuba locations. Sport fishing and bonefishing are also led by expert guides. Above the surface, windsurfing, sailing, glass-bottom-boat tours and jet skiing are great ways to enjoy the Caribbean sea. Ramon's also has its own 420-foot pier, home to two dive shops, several dive boats, a swim platform and four thatched-roofed palapas with comfortable seating. 800-MAGIC-15, ramons.com

A group of lifelong friends who adore Belize opened **Tranquility Bay** in 2006. They designed the Ambergris Caye resort to be the kind of place they like to stay in themselves — romantic yet family-friendly; top-quality yet casual.

Tranquility Bay is intimate, with only 11 cabanas to choose from on its 12 picturesque acres. The hotel is the only one inside the new Bacalar Chico National Park and Marine Reserve, offering world-class fishing, diving and snorkeling out the front door. The one-bedroom/one-bath units and the two-bedroom/two-bath ones give a true Belizean feel, with Caribbean-inspired furniture, hand-painted Mexican tiles and Belizean hardwoods. Beds are topped with pillow-top Simmons Beauty Rest mattresses, and linens are 100-percent Egyptian cotton. Terrific food and ice-cold drinks can be enjoyed in the over-the-water Tackle Box Sea Bar.

Tranquility Bay's staff members are experts at helping guests enjoy Belize's outdoor activities. They'll take you fishing,

Desk, experienced concierges will arrange water and land excursions upon request. 800-820-1631, sunbreesesuites.com

One of the destination's newest escapes, the **Belize Legacy Beach Resort** is tranquil and luxurious, ideal for romance and family fun. Each of its 32 lodging facilities is an air-conditioned suite with its own kitchen and living area, plus one or two bedrooms. Private verandas, TVs, DVD players and California king beds are standard. The Garden Villas at Legacy will debut just in time for the holiday season, 2008. These elegantly constructed units boast five single-story, one-bedroom/one-bath villas and seven two-story, two-bedroom/two-bath accommodations. The Garden Villas at Legacy offers the feeling of closeness to Belize's tropical wealth, with the tranquility of the beach a few yards away.

Located only 7.2 miles North of San Pedro, the Belize Legacy Beach Resort is chock-full of activities. Guests can help themselves to the hotel's complimentary ocean kayaks, paddle boats, canoes and bicycles. For a change from the beach and the large child-friendly swimming pool, spend some fresh-air time on



Caye Casa

the 300-foot pier, equipped with palapa and deck chairs. The Suya Tour and Dive Center is on-property for diving, snorkeling, fishing and a wide variety of inland adventures. And for delicious meals in a gracious setting, dine at Mama Caribe's Restaurant & Grille, where you'll find American favorites and Caribbean specialties. After a long day of adventure, relax and unwind at the Katanga Beach Bar overlooking the pristine Caribbean Sea. 866-210-2267, belizelegacy.com

Live the dream at **Caye Casa**, a boutique hotel that blends escapism with modern conveniences.

Caye Casa is tiny, boasting only three two-bedroom villas, two one-bedroom casitas, and two classic hotel rooms. Its look is rustic. Thatch-roof porches and wooden hurricane shutters combined with traditional Spanish- and British-Colonial touches create authentic Belizean charm. You won't want for comfort, though. The hotel is air conditioned, and villa kitchens have limestone counters and stainless-steel appliances as well as cable television and wireless Internet access.

Tune in. Tune out! Spend your day relaxing on your thatch-covered porch, swimming in the ocean or waterfall pool, or lounging on the private sandy beach. Take a 10-minute

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