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PLAN YOUR TRIP

YOUR PLANNING TOOL KIT

Photos, itineraries, lists and suggestions to help you put together your perfect trip

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UNDERSTAND BELIZE

GET MORE FROM YOUR TRIP

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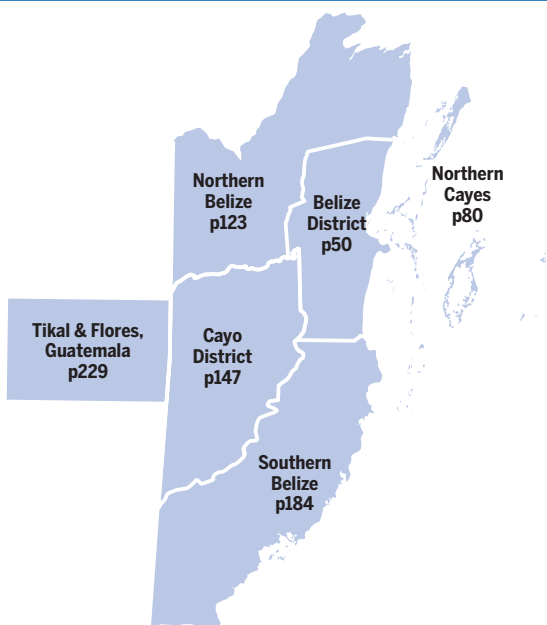
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THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

Mara Vorhees, Joshua Samuel Brown



Look out for these icons:



Our author's
recommendation



A green or
sustainable option



No payment
required

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Blue Hole Natural Monument

Belize's most famous natural wonder (p121)

Glover's Reef Atoll

See Belize from the seat of a kayak (p194)

Hopkins

Beautiful beach and Garifuna vibe (p195)

Placencia

Sun and fun on a beach-lined peninsula (p203)

Nohoch Che'en Caves

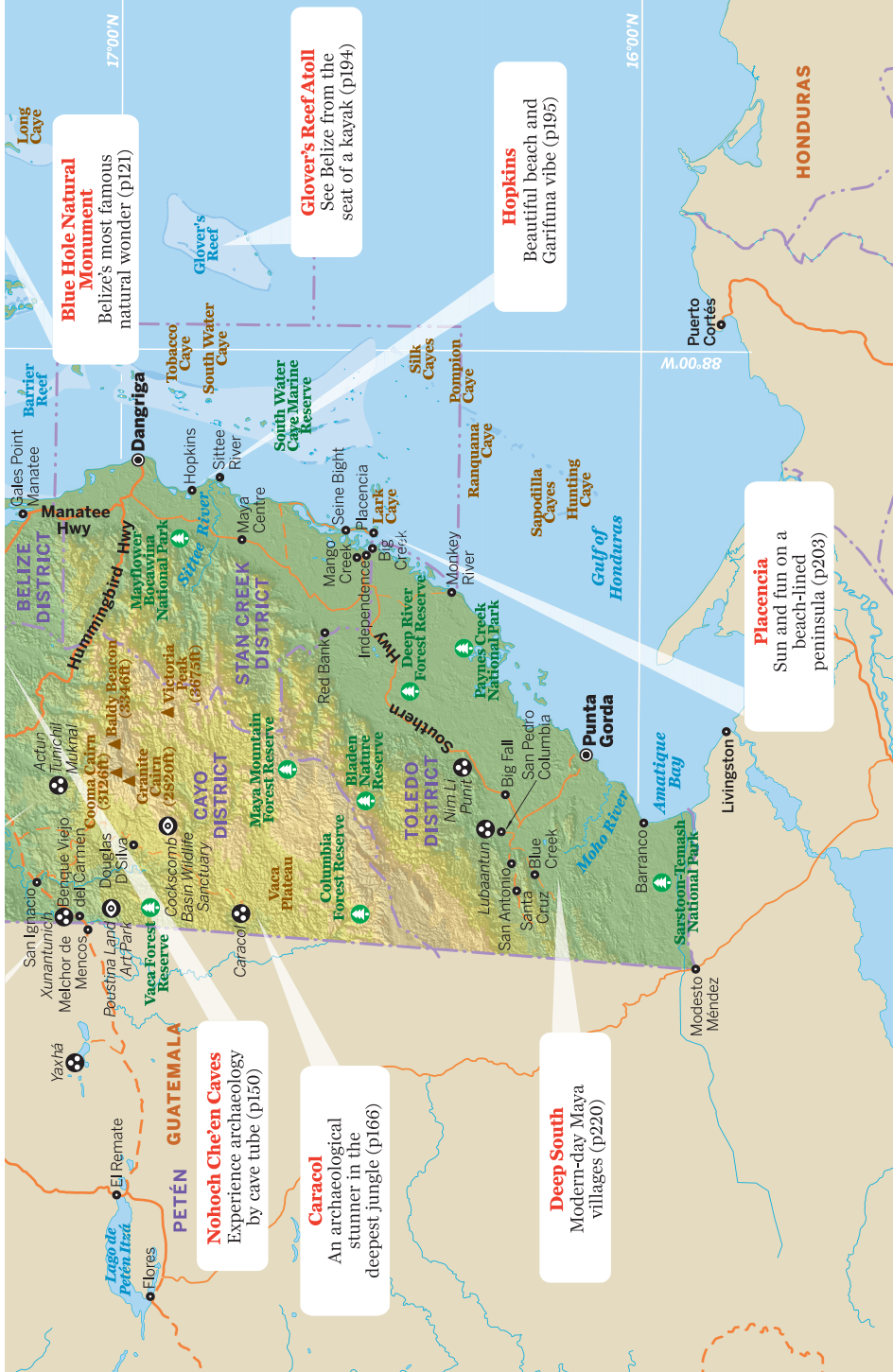
Experience archaeology by cave tube (p150)

Caracol

An archaeological stunner in the deepest jungle (p166)

Deep South

Modern-day Maya villages (p220)



itineraries

Whether you've got three days or 30, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to lonelyplanet.com/thorntree to chat with other travelers.



Five Days Deep South

Exploring Belize's Deep South takes time, so give yourself at least five days. **Punta Gorda** is a chilled-out town and natural spot to begin your trek. If you'd like to experience some luxury, book yourself in at **Cotton Tree Lodge** or **Machaca Hill Lodge**, among the finest ecolodges in Belize. Wherever you stay, don't miss a meal at **Earth Runnings'**. Punta Gorda is blessed with one of the country's best information centers, so stop by the **Belize Tourism Board** and get the latest info on Maya Village homestays and guesthouses. Next, head to **San Pedro Columbia** and use it as a base to explore nearby **Lubaantun**. If drumming interests you, visit Emmeth Young's **Maroon Creole Drum School**. Later, head further still to the small Maya villages of **San Antonio**, **Santa Cruz** and **Santa Elena**, stopping for a hike and a swim at beautiful **Río Blanco National Park**, or caving at **Blue Creek**. If you want to go into the deepest south, visit **Jalacte** – the end of the road, for now!



One Month

The Whole Enchilada: From Corozal to Punta Gorda

Belize is small enough that you might see the whole country in a month. This itinerary leads the way, starting in the quaint Mestizo town of **Corozal**, just south of the Mexican border. Spend one day in **Orange Walk**, where you can cruise the New River and explore the Maya ruins at **Lamanai**. Then head east to the small fishing village of **Sarteneja** for some amazing wildlife watching at **Shipstern Nature Reserve**.

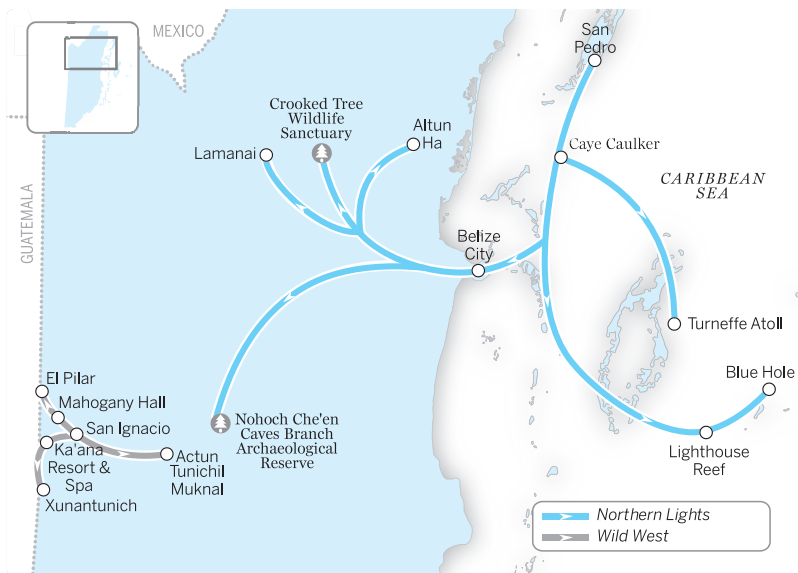
From Sarteneja, catch the fast ferry to **San Pedro**. Whether you stay on **Ambergis Caye** or **Caye Caulker** it doesn't matter, but allow yourself at least four days to chill out in a hammock, kayak out to the reef, frolic with the fish and feast on fresh seafood.

When you head back to the mainland, don't bypass the animal-lovers' sights in the Belize District, including the **Community Baboon Sanctuary** and the **Belize Zoo**. If you're into birds, spend a night or two around the **Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary**. Further west in Cayo, take four or five days and choose your own adventure, whether it be delving deep into the caves at **Actun Tunichil Muknal** or **Barton Creek**, horseback riding at **Mountain Equestrian Trails**, climbing the tall temples at **Caracol** or **Xunantunich**, or all of the above.

Backtrack east to the beautiful Hummingbird Hwy, which carries you south across the thickly forested northern foothills of the Maya Mountains. Stop at **Ian Anderson's Caves** **Branch Jungle Lodge** for some cave exploration, jungle expeditions and abseiling down bottomless sinkholes.

By now you have been away from the water for way too long, so spend a few days in the coastal village of **Hopkins** to absorb some Garifuna rhythms. From here, you can hike the beautiful jungle trails at **Mayflower Bocawina National Park** or **Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary**.

If you're still thirsting for sun and fun, you have a choice. If you're looking for something civilized, head south to **Placencia** to enjoy lovely sandy beaches, lively bars and lots of water sports. If you're looking for something uncivilized, indulge your tropical-island fantasies at **Glover's Reef**, which has an irresistible low-key vibe and brilliant diving and snorkeling. Finish up in **Punta Gorda**, the southernmost town in Belize.



One Week Northern Lights

If you only have a week to spare, there is no sense moving around too much. However from your base on one of the Northern Cayes, you have access to an impressive array of activities on land and sea.

Choose **Caye Caulker** or **San Pedro**, as they are closest to the mainland. (We prefer Caye Caulker – not only for its easy-going vibe, but also for its easy access to **Belize City**, which is only 45 minutes away by water taxi.) From here, you can take snorkel or dive trips to **Turneffe Atoll** and **Lighthouse Reef**, the latter home to the amazing **Blue Hole**.

You can also use either of these islands as a base for day trips to the mainland. Spend a day in the Belize District to spy on birds at **Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary** or to see the Maya ruins at **Altun Ha**.

It's also an easy trip to eastern Cayo District, where you can go cave-tubing in the **Nohoch Che'en Caves Branch Archaeological Reserve** or zip-lining through the forest canopy. You can also head north to the Maya ruins at **Lamanai**, enjoying a peaceful boat ride on the New River along the way.

Three Days Wild West

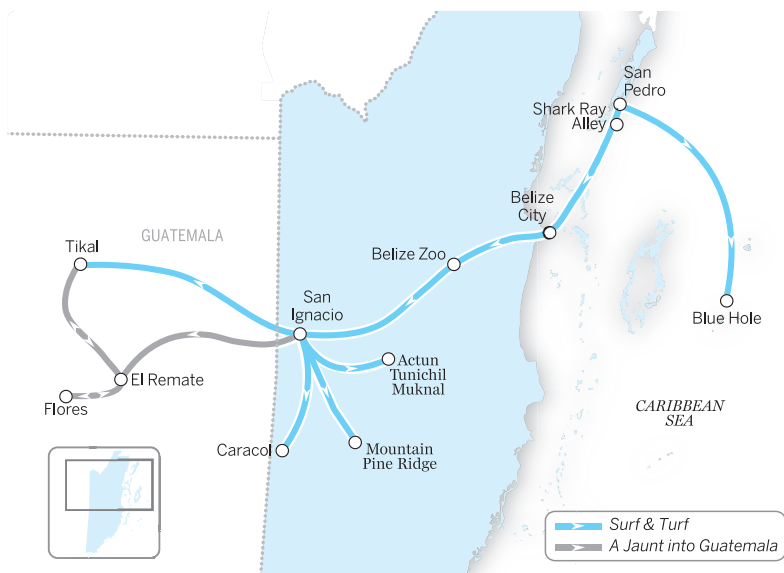
On day one head to **San Ignacio** to get a feel for the town, perhaps visiting nearby Maya site **Cahal Pech** and having a great meal at **Ko-Ox Han-nah**. San Ignacio has plenty of good midrange hotels, so save your money for a night at a really good ecolodge later. Make sure you arrange a tour to explore the amazing ritual cave of **Actun Tunichil Muknal**, which, travel time included, will take up all of your second day. Don't check out of your hotel though, as you'll no doubt be exhausted when you get back to San Ignacio.

On your third day, wake up early and do a half day trip to either **Xunantunich** or **El Pilar** before checking into one of the better hotels or ecolodges in western Cayo: **Mahogany Hall** is closest to El Pilar, and has an amazing pool, patio and rushing river, while the fabulous **Ka'ana Resort & Spa** is closer to Xunantunich. Ka'ana has a full spa where the knots in your back, arms and legs from all that hiking, exploring, temple-climbing and caving will be kneaded until all that is left are fond memories of three days well spent.



BRANDON COLE/MARINE PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY

- » (above) Diver and elephant ear sponge
- » (left) Residents of Shark Ray Alley off Ambergris Caye



Two Weeks Surf & Turf

This traditional Belize sampler gives you the best of both worlds – a taste of the jungle and a glimpse of the sea – all within your two weeks of vacation time.

Start your trip at holiday central: **San Pedro** on Ambergris Caye. Snorkel or dive among coral gardens and observe the inhabitants of **Shark Ray Alley**. Use San Pedro as your launching pad for dives at **Blue Hole** and other atoll sites.

After a week of sun and fun, make your way to dry land and head out along the Western Hwy. Stop on the way to visit the recovering and rescued animals at the **Belize Zoo**.

In Cayo, base yourself at a luxurious jungle lodge or a more affordable hotel in **San Ignacio**. From here, you can explore caves loaded with ancient remains, such as **Actun Tunichil Muknal**; travel by canoe or inner-tube along jungle rivers; dip beneath the waterfalls of the **Mountain Pine Ridge**; or explore Belize's greatest Maya site, **Caracol**.

If you have the time and inclination, venture over the border into Guatemala, where you can visit the region's most significant Maya archaeological site at **Tikal**.

Five Days A Jaunt Into Guatemala

Across the border and within easy reach lie the glory and splendors of the ancient Maya world: scores of ancient ruins surrounded by lush rainforests, and a few really lovely towns thrown in for good measure. Taking it all in would take months, so allow us to suggest a five-day compromise.

Leaving San Ignacio on the morning of the first day, head directly to **El Remate**. The lakefront town makes a lovely base and has accommodations in all budget ranges. Head to **Tikal** early the next morning and spend the day exploring this fascinating ancient Maya city. Having made arrangements to spend the night at one of Tikal's three hotels, you can enjoy the sunset from the top of **Temple IV** at your leisure. Spend the first half of the third day exploring Tikal further (it's worth it) before heading back to El Remate to relax.

On your remaining days, hang out in **Flores** and soak up the town's island ambience, perhaps taking a half-day trip to one of the parks, villages or smaller ruins that are in the area.



OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



Mara Vorhees

Coordinating Author, Belize District, Northern Cayes, Northern Belize Mara first visited Belize as a student of international development, when she traveled the country on a backpacker's budget, researching the outcomes of US-sponsored foreign aid projects. She fell in love with the reef, the rasta guys, and the rice and beans (although she was not so enamored of US development policy).

The pen-wielding traveler has since taken to seeing and saving the world by other means. Besides this book, she has worked on *Costa Rica*, and a slew of other titles for Lonely Planet. Her articles and photographs of Central America have appeared in the *Boston Globe* and the *Miami Herald*, among other national newspapers. Follow Mara's latest adventures at www.maravorhees.com.



Joshua Samuel Brown

Cayo District, Southern Belize, Tikal & Flores, Guatemala Professional nomad, failed sage and aspiring warlock Joshua Samuel Brown is the author of *Vignettes of Taiwan* (Things Asian Press, 2006) and coauthor of seven other Lonely Planet titles. When not working on guidebooks for Lonely Planet, Joshua can be found traveling in circles throughout Asia, North and Central America, writing prose and planning for life in the postindustrial future that awaits us all. Usually

erudite, occasionally opinionated, and sometimes bizarre, Snarky Tofu is Joshua's scratch-pad borne from a life spent largely on the road. Read it at www.josambro.blogspot.com. Contact him at josambro@gmail.com.

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