

# Welcome to Belize

*With one foot planted in the Central American jungles and the other dipped in the Caribbean Sea, Belize combines the best of both worlds.*

## Under the Sea

You've heard that the Belize Barrier Reef is the second longest in the world. But have you heard that this reef is home to more than 100 different kinds of coral and some 500 species of fish? This alluring underwater world is undoubtedly the top attraction in Belize. Snorkelers swim through translucent seas, gazing at a kaleidoscope of coral, fish and turtles; divers go deeper, investigating underwater caves and walls and the world-renowned Blue Hole.

The turquoise waters are inviting even for those who choose to remain above the surface. Kayakers glide from one sandy, palm-dotted islet to another; windsurfers and sailors skim across the surf by the power of the breeze; sunbathers lounge on the dock, lulled into relaxation by the gentle lapping; and foodies feast on delectable fresh fish, spiny-tailed lobster and other creatures of the sea.

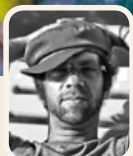
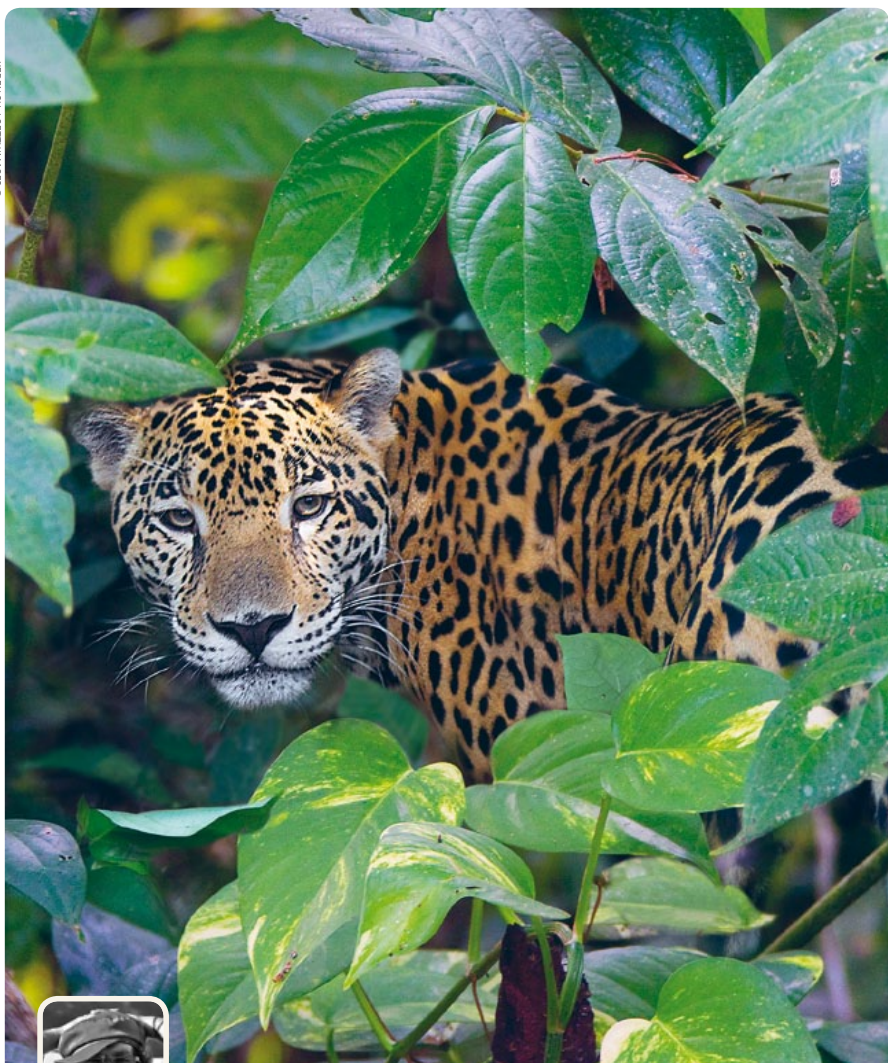
## In the Jungle

Inland, a vast network of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries offers a safe haven for wildlife, which ranges from the industrious cutter ants to the national animal of Belize, Baird's tapir. Bird-watchers aim their binoculars at some 570 species, which roost along the rivers and lagoons and in

the broadleaf forest. Of course, many of these birds and animals are elusive, but keen-eyed visitors can easily spot spider monkeys and howler monkeys, peccaries, coatimundis, *gibnuts*, American and Morelet's crocodiles, green iguanas and countless species of birds. Even the showy keel-billed toucan – the national bird of Belize – occasionally makes an appearance in public.

## In the Land of the Maya

If that's not enough adventure for you, Belize is also home to one of the world's most mysterious civilizations – the ancient Maya. The country is sprinkled with archaeological sites that date to the Maya heyday, known as the Classic Period (AD 250–1000). Enormous steps lead to the tops of tall stone temples, often yielding 360-degree jungle views. Curious climbers can explore excavated tombs and examine intricate hieroglyphs, while adventurers can descend deep into natural caves to see where the Maya kings performed rituals and made sacrifices to the gods of their underworld.



## Why I Love Belize

By Joshua Samuel Brown, Author

With its Spanish-speaking neighbors to the south and west and the laid-back Caribbean to the east, Central America's youngest nation offers a cultural *mélange* – including Maya, *mestizo*, Garifuna, Creole, Mennonite and more – unrivaled in Central America. Belize is home to verdant jungles, from the Maya Mountains in the southwest to the Shipstern Nature Reserve in the northeast, not to mention ancient ruins, remnants of bygone days as part of the greater Maya kingdom. Then there are the beaches, miles of white sand and blue sea dotted with a nigh-uncountable number of islands big and small. So what's not to love?

**For more about our authors, see page 320**