

Go Adventuring in Ambergris Caye

Just a ten-minute flight from the capital, with lush wilderness and serene lodges, Belize's largest island feels a world away.

By Matthew Monagan Published Apr 13, 2016 [Comment](#)



(Photo: Courtesy of Belize Sailing School)

Where to Stay

Leave the real world behind at **The Victoria House** (from \$199), a cluster of casitas, suites, and private villas overlooking the Caribbean Sea. Reserve a one-bedroom cottage with a thatched roof, Belizean palm furnishings, and a private veranda; once settled, head to Admiral Nelson's Bar on premises for a rum punch (\$5) and fresh avocado-and-guajillo-peppered lobster ceviche (\$14). Indulge in a deep-tissue massage (\$90) at the two-person spa; it's perched just over the sea, so you'll hear the waves beneath you as you Zen out.



Enjoy your own private hideaway in a villa at El Secreto.
 (Photo: Courtesy of El Secreto)

Get cozy at **El Secreto** (from \$250), a retreat of 13 villas on the quieter, eastern edge of Ambergris Caye. The cottages — ranging from two to four bedrooms — are tucked along a saltwater lake, white-sand beach, and the surrounding tropical forest; all come equipped with LED lighting, outdoor Jacuzzis, shower patios, and a private pool. Be sure to take advantage of the resort's shuttle to nearby snorkeling spots; those willing to splurge can hop aboard a private helicopter ride above Belize's Great Blue Hole.

Experience a more intimate approach to luxury at **Mahogany Bay Village** (\$175). Set to be fully operational by fall, the 60-acre property will feature private homes, a four-star hotel, a beach club, and a spa, all set along an expansive beach. Don't expect resort shtick: The village aims at a more low-key vibe, with a general store, a rum-and-coffee café, and a series of canals connecting one end of the property to the other. Rooms have a rustic-elegant feel, with custom-crafted furniture made using Belizean wood from the country's sustainable forests.

Where to Eat



From arepas to ice cream, there's something for every taste at the Truck Stop.
 (Photo: Courtesy of the Truck Stop)

Navigate the narrow streets of San Pedro to local favorite **Blue Water Grill**. Start off with a Belikin (\$3) — Belize's light, toasty national beer — while snacking on black-bean-battered coconut shrimp (\$13) or hoisin-glazed Mongolian-style ribs (\$24). Dig into fresh seafood dishes like cashew-crusting snapper and Cajun snook with dirty rice and fried okra (\$24); there's a variety of sushi on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The proceeds from your meal may go to good local causes, like helping to build a new playground at a local elementary school.

Cross Ambergris Caye's lone toll bridge to the recently opened **Rain**. Reserve a seat on the roof to get a 360-degree view of the isle, then dig into conch fritters (\$10) and imaginative takes on Caribbean cuisine like the chef's "reconstructed rice and beans" (\$20), or slices of fried chicken stuffed with beans, cheese, fried plantain, and coconut rice in the manner of a sushi roll.

Restaurant-hop at **The Truck Stop**, a collection of four shipping containers transformed into separate eateries: Rasa, a Southeast Asian spot; Arepa (Latin American); an ice-cream shop; and a full-fledged bar. Order the hefty El Diablo sandwich (\$14) from Arepa — shrimp with habanero lime, hogao tomato sauce, and pickled cabbage — and grab an El Duderino (yes, that's a White Russian) from the bar, and mingle with locals at the Stop's picnic tables. Save room for a maple-bacon ice-cream cone (\$3), and eat it out back while watching a Sunday horseshoe tournament.

What to Do



Explore Belize's lengthy barrier reef and its wildlife with Belize Pro Dive.
 (Photo: Courtesy of Belize Pro Dive)

Take an ecofriendly approach to hunting on a **Lionfish-spearing excursion** (\$185). The invasive species disrupt the reef system by eating small fish and crustaceans, so the island offers PADI-certified divers the opportunity to catch them. Tours take you 50 to 60 feet below the surface with a small spear or net to trap the mane-adorned creatures. You may not get a bounty (as some Belizean fisherman have been gifted by the government), but most hotel restaurants will filet and cook your catch, so you can reap, and eat, the rewards of your hard work.

Face your fears by swimming with sharks and searching out crocodiles. **Belize Pro Dive** (\$40) will take you on a guided snorkeling trip to explore parts of the country's 180-mile-long barrier reef, the second largest in the world. At your first stop, the Hol Chan Marine Reserve, you'll see barracuda, sea turtles, and schools of groupers; then, swim side by side with nurse sharks and giant eagle rays at Shark Ray Alley. When night arrives, join up with **CSI: Belize's** crocodile night tour (\$50). "The Swamp Thing," a 20-foot skiff, will take you through the mangroves around San Pedro searching for the rare saltwater reptiles and other nocturnal wildlife (you may even get to help the guides with tag-and-release crocodile-wrangling).

Sail across the water with a **kiteboarding lesson** (\$50 to \$150). Beginners can take a three-hour intensive within the safety of the mangroves, learning how to set up the kite, attach the harness, and judge the ever-changing Caribbean winds. More experienced riders can go out to sea straight away with an expert and jump 20 to 30 feet into the air, performing tricks and kite loops just above the clear blue waves. **KiteExplorer**, a company founded by a member of the international kite team, will even set you up on 60-to-100-mile rides along the barrier reef.

Expert's Tips



For a laid-back day trip, visit Caye Caulker.
 (Photo: Victoria Reay, via Flickr)

Jo Sayer, a London expat, opened San Pedro's Belize Chocolate Company in 2012.

There are plenty of hidden gems among restaurants in the area: For lunch, **Caprice** does a fabulous Belizean fish soup called Cha Chac. If you're looking to hear some local music, go to Black and White Bar for some Garifuna drumming and the hudut (a local Garifuna fish soup).

For a day trip, **Caye Caulker** is the best nearby island to visit. You can get to it easily by boat (about 25 minutes) or Tropic Air (it's a five-minute flight!). It's how San Pedro used to be: sandy streets and a really laid-back atmosphere.

My favorite snorkeling spot is just off the barrier reef at **Tranquility Bay Resort**. The water is super-clear, and it's never crowded. Eels, sea urchins, and lobsters all congregate here.

Resources

Written by an opinionated expat from New York, **San Pedro Scoop** is the go-to blog for news about all the new hotels, restaurant reviews, and happenings in Ambergris Caye and throughout mainland Belize.

If you're bringing a significant other, **Romantic Travel Belize** suggests the best couple dive sites, waterfalls, restaurants, and cave expeditions for two.

Ambergris Today's "Pic of the Week" section offers a look at what's happening on-island through beautiful imagery.

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