

Belize Trip Provisional Itinerary and Extension Trip



July 26-Airport pick-up and transfer to Crystal Paradise 1 1/2 to 2 hrs drive with a stop at the Belize Zoo. Groups will be sent as you arrive. You will check in to your assigned rooms at Crystal Paradise and attend an orientation to the facilities and staff. We will also have our first evening discussion and presentation.

OVERNIGHT - Crystal Paradise

July 27-Xunantunich Maya site and Chechem Ha Caves

After breakfast we will drive to Xunantunich (shu-nan-tu-nich), a Mayan site that was a major ceremonial center across the Mopan River in San Ignacio. Xunantunich is located in the Mayan village of San Jose Succotz, about 40 minutes by car from Crystal Paradise. A hand-cranked ferry takes us across the Mopan River followed by a mile drive uphill to the archaeological site.

Lunch at a top of a hill overlooking the Macal river valley before our ½ hr hike to the Chechem Ha Caves. This complex cave system was discovered in 1989 by the Morales. Exploring the caves will allow you to view large stalactite formations, intact ancient artifacts such as large storage vessels, plates, burial grounds and mysterious stelae. These caves have been abandoned since the Pre-Classic 600 B.C - 800 A.D.

Evening Discussion on Culture and Environment, Geology of Belize, and Leaf Cutter Ants

OVERNIGHT - Crystal Paradise

July 28-See the Mountain Pine Ridge, Rio Frio Caves, Big Rock falls, pools and temperature evergreen forest.

Depart after breakfast.

Even with its recent bout of forest devastation due to the Southern Pine Boring Beetles (*Dendroctonus frontalis*), the attractions of Mountain Pine Ridge are still captivating and worth a visit. The reserve is home to some of the most beautiful waterfalls in the country such as Big Rock Falls, Hidden Valley Falls, and Butterfly Falls. There are the granite rock formations dating back 300 million years. The Rio Frio Caves, a large cavern with openings on both sides, has a creek flowing and echoing through the cave. The Big rock falls is a popular place to go swimming and jumping off the rocks into the larger natural pool of water below the falls.

Evening Discussion Cave biology, Pine Forests, Limestone or Karst topography and biology

OVERNIGHT - Crystal Paradise

July 29-30-Overnight trip to Tikal in Guatemala. After Breakfast we head to the Tikal site. Located in the Peten lowland of Guatemala, 1 ½ hrs from the Belize border, this huge Classic Period Maya site, rich in jungle flora and fauna is considered one of the world's premier Archaeological Reserves. The park consists of 225+ square kilometers of jungle, the first reserve in Central America and a World Heritage Site. Our accommodations there are at the Tikal Inn in the Park walking distance from the actual site. There will an excellent opportunity to do a dawn tour of the ruins and monkey watching.

Discussions will continue back in Belize.

July 31-Tikal-Pre-breakfast walk up to the site to see the sunrise, toucans, monkeys etc from the top of the temples. After a late breakfast, there is plenty opportunity to explore the museum and go shopping for Guatemalan textiles etc. Return to Belize and our accommodations at Crystal Paradise.

OVERNIGHT - at Crystal Paradise.

Discussions on Tikal, succession, reclamation, epiphytes, and cultural relations with land use.

August 1-market day in San Ignacio and cave tubing-yea for water!

After breakfast we drive 10 minutes to san Ignacio spend a couple of hours checking out the town exploring shopping, looking at the market, etc. After the market we drive 1hr to 1 1/2 to Caves branch. We change into our swim wear grab an inner tube and headlamp, and we hike upstream through valleys of limestone hills along the river as we lead you to one of the many entrances of the intricate Caves Branch System.

You will learn about the plants along the trail as well as the cave geology, and enjoy a cool swim and an easy float through a series of caves back to where you started.

OVERNIGHT - at Crystal Paradise

Riparian Ecology and Caves

Aug 2-Cave of Actun Tunichil Muknal

After Breakfast we drive 1.5 hours, hike 40 minutes and at times walk in water while exploring this cave. Over 200 ceramic vessels adorn the chambers of Actun Tunichil Muknal. The culture, history and geological formations create an unrivalled natural museum. A gallery like one has never seen before! Travel back in time as we explore this large cave, untouched since the Maya last visited centuries ago. Located in the heart of the Tapir Mountain Nature reserve, 6,700 acres managed by the Belize Audubon society, a huge entrance in a limestone hill welcomes you at the end of your 45-minute walk through lush, undisturbed jungle vegetation. A short swim at the entrance is followed by a couple of hours wading in waist-deep, 73-degree, crystal-clear water, and a short climb up a winding passage brings you to the main chamber measuring 350 meters. While exploring the cave you view many artifacts, both pottery and human remains, not to mention the intricate stalactite and curtain formations.

OVERNIGHT - at Crystal Paradise

Evening Discussion Ecotones and true Rain Forest.

Aug 3 –Volunteer Project.

We will be working with the local community at the [Green Hills Butterfly Farm](#). We will be assisting them in projects once we tour the facilities. Some additional volunteer work may be done at a local church.

OVERNIGHT - at Crystal Paradise

Discussion-value of community work and volunteerism.

Aug 4-Macal River Canoeing

Enjoy an easy 4 ½-mile float down the beautiful Macal River (2 to 4 hours). Take along a guide or set out on your own. Either way we pack your favorite beverage. Take it slow and enjoy the view. While canoeing you can see an array of birds and insect species. Many iguanas sunning themselves on the rocks. Optional stops while canoeing include the Blue Morpho Butterfly Farm, local lodges and the Natural History Center.

OVERNIGHT - at Crystal Paradise

Discussion Entomology

Aug 5-Free day to canoe, explore town, or swim at the local pools etc

Closing Discussions

Aug 6-Transfer back to Belize city to meet water taxi for the Cayes after our tours and activities in Belize. Individuals not continuing on to the Cayes will be taken to the airport.

Optional Trip

August 6-8-We will be at Caye Caulker for snorkeling and reef observation. We will depart the **8th** to return to the US.

This will allow you two full days on the beach.