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FREE

Vol. 12 #02



My
Beautiful **Belize**
TRAVEL PUBLICATION



Belize in Full Color

From the Editor: Tamara Sniffin



Tamara with longtime friends, Juan and Abelina Cho

Belize in Full Color

There are some stories that stay with you.

I remember the first time we shared Ixcacao Chocolate with our readers. It wasn't elaborate, just a simple visit that felt genuine. Watching cacao prepared by hand, hearing the story behind it, and of course tasting it, you quickly understood it was about more than chocolate. It was about family, tradition, and a real connection to the land.

Coming back to that story now feels a bit like catching up.

A lot has grown and evolved over the years, but the heart of it is still the same. That is something you notice right away, and something you appreciate even more the second time around.

As this issue came together, I started to see that same thread throughout. In Hopkins, mango season brings a kind of easy, lively energy where everything feels local and welcoming. Along the coast, lobster festivals are as much about the people as they are about the food. And on Ambergris Caye, stepping off the beach opens the door to experiences that feel a little more personal and unexpected.

Inland, the pace shifts again. At The Lodge at Chaa Creek, there is a chance to slow down, take in the surroundings, and enjoy Belize from a different perspective.

What ties all of these together is that sense of connection. Belize is not just a place you visit, but a place you experience through its people, its traditions, and the moments that stay with you.

I hope you enjoy exploring them, and we welcome you to *My Beautiful Belize*.



Welcome Message
Gualberto "Wally" Nuñez
San Pedro Town Mayor

Welcome to our beautiful island of Ambergris Caye, La Isla Bonita.

From the moment you arrive, we hope you feel the warmth of our people and the easy rhythm of island life. We are honored to share our island and our way of life with you. San Pedro is a community shaped by its culture, strong spirit, and the natural beauty that surrounds us.

The months of May, June, and July bring the start of summer and a lively season on our island. We celebrate Mother's Day by recognizing the women who guide our families and community. Soon after, Lobster Fest brings people together to enjoy our local flavors, music, and traditions by the sea.

This time of year also brings an increase in sargassum along our shores. It is a natural challenge across the region, and we are taking action. Our teams work daily to manage the impact while continuing beach restoration efforts. These actions support cleaner coastlines and help protect the health of our marine environment.

Throughout the season, we remain focused on improving daily life for residents and the visitor experience. We continue to work to protect our environment, strengthen services, support safety, and maintain our infrastructure so that growth remains responsible and balanced.

We invite you to explore beyond the beach and discover the heart of San Pedro. Spend time in our neighborhoods, enjoy our traditions, and connect with our people. Visitors are welcomed as part of our extended community, and we are proud to share what makes our island special.

Thank you for choosing Ambergris Caye. We hope your stay is joyful, meaningful, and memorable. We are glad to share Our Island, Our Home with you.

Where do you Read



Merida, Yucatan, Mexico



Colette Kase from Mérida, MX, takes time to read *My Beautiful Belize* while visiting the chapel at Hacienda Santa Lucía Kantoyná in Conkal, Yucatan, Mexico. The colonial-era hacienda, likely dating back to the 17th or 18th century, is roughly 200–300 years old. It has been beautifully restored, offering a romantic, garden-filled setting ideal for luxury weddings, private events, and tranquil boutique stays.

Have a great picture reading this publication? Send it to us at hello@mybeautifulbelize.com to be featured!



While staying at the Sukau Rainforest Lodge in Borneo, Adam and Jackie Feldman from Livingston, Montana, USA, and Brittney O'Daniel from San Pedro Town, Belize, share a copy of *My Beautiful Belize* with a Malaysian-heritage dance group.

Traditional Sabah dance unfolds in graceful, birdlike movements to the rhythm of gongs, offering a beautiful and intimate glimpse into Borneo's living cultural heritage.

Beyond the Beach

Land Adventures on Ambergris Caye



By Tamara Sniffin

Ambergris Caye is best known for its sun-drenched days, turquoise waters, and endless reef adventures, but sometimes, a break from the salt and surf reveals a different side of island life. When you are ready to trade your fins for firm ground, the caye offers a variety of enriching land-based experiences that are just as memorable. From spotting vibrant birdlife across mangroves and lagoons, to savoring locally crafted spirits, to connecting with rescued wildlife and the stories behind them, these experiences invite you to explore beyond the shoreline. Whether you are seeking nature, culture, or something a little unexpected, here are three land adventures on Ambergris Caye that offer something for everyone.



Island Birding on Ambergris Caye

Ambergris Caye offers a refreshing take on birding in Belize, where coastal beauty meets remarkable biodiversity. With over 200 recorded species, the island's compact mix of mangroves, lagoons, beaches, and littoral forest creates an ideal setting for spotting both resident and migratory birds with ease. Unlike dense inland jungles, birding here is open and accessible, often just minutes from your stay while on your golf cart.

Positioned along a key migratory route between North and South America, Ambergris Caye becomes especially lively during peak migration periods in October and November, and again from April to May. During these months, warblers, shorebirds, and other seasonal visitors arrive in impressive numbers, stopping to rest and refuel.

Keep an eye out for highlight species such as resident frigatebirds soaring overhead, brown pelicans diving along the shoreline, and ospreys scanning the sea for fish. Along the coast and mangroves, black hawks are often seen perched or gliding low, while the vibrant mangrove warbler flits through coastal thickets. In calmer lagoon areas, herons, egrets, ibis, cormorants, wood storks, and even the striking roseate spoonbill can often be seen feeding in the shallows. You may even spot an American Crocodile, a special treat!

For a deeper experience, guided outings with licensed tour guide Rochelle Hancock of Island Birding Adventures offer expert insight into local habitats and species identification. Tours can be arranged directly via email at islandbirdingadventures@gmail.com or by phone or WhatsApp at +501 610-5036, making it easy to plan a personalized birding excursion.

Continued on Page 4

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In the heart of San Pedro Town, Tiburon Rum Tasting Room invites guests to savor the spirit of Belize through an intimate rum and tequila tasting experience. Located on Barrier Reef Drive, this family-owned brand produces small-batch rums aged in bourbon barrels, known for smooth notes of vanilla, spice, and oak.

The guided tasting lasts about an hour and features a knowledgeable host who brings the distilling process to life. Guests sample signature selections, including the bold WHITE TIP 92-proof rum, ideal for cocktails and infusions, as well as their carefully crafted dark rums and creative infused blends featuring local flavors like coffee, chocolate, and tropical fruits. Their 8 Reserve Blend highlights a unique process of blending rums from barrels of varying ages, then re-casking for a second maturation. Tequila is sourced from Mexico, where strict regulations ensure its authenticity and require it to be made from blue agave.

The tasting room also offers creative Tiburon merchandise, bottles available for purchase, and convenient shipping to 42 states across the USA. The approximately 45-minute

tastings cost \$25 (BZ) and include four samples and a souvenir shot glass. Reservations are recommended. Open daily 10AM–7PM. Contact +501 614-2213 or visit www.tiburonrum.com.

Beyond San Pedro, visitors can also enjoy the experience at Tiburon Tasting Rooms in Caye Caulker and Placencia, which offer the same welcoming atmosphere and flavorful journey. Open hours may vary at these locations.

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12

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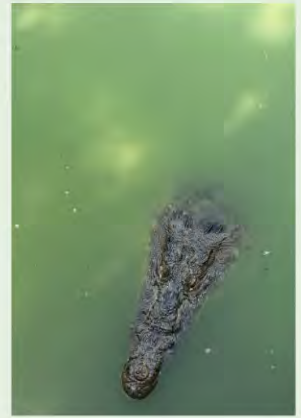
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Located north of San Pedro Town, ACES Wildlife Rescue offers an educational on-site tour that connects visitors with Belize's native wildlife and the people who protect it. This non-profit organization provides 24/7 emergency response for injured, orphaned, and displaced animals, playing a vital role on a rapidly developing island. ACES is especially known for its work with the American Crocodile, a critically endangered species in Belize. Through rescue, relocation, monitoring, and education, the team helps reduce human-wildlife conflict while supporting long-term conservation.



What makes the experience special is its authenticity. This is not a zoo, but a working rescue facility where each resident has a story. Some animals remain in permanent care due to injury, imprinting, or human interaction. Guests may meet Finise the crocodile, Wabbles the osprey, and Turbo the turtle, along with iguanas, ducks, rabbits, parakeets, and other birds. Suitable for all ages, the tour is engaging and enlightening, with knowledgeable guides sharing conservation stories. Tours run Monday through Saturday at 11AM and 3PM, last about an hour, and are donation-based. Located in Tres Cocos, reservations are not required for small groups.



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By
Tamara Sniffin



FROM BEAN TO LEGACY: THE ENDURING JOURNEY OF IXCACAO CHOCOLATE

As we reflect nearly two decades later, Ixcacao stands as a reminder that chocolate in Belize is more than a product. It is heritage, resilience, and a living connection to the land.

In May 2008, *The San Pedro Sun Visitor Guide*, now *My Beautiful Belize*, introduced readers to the ancient art of chocolate through the story of Juan Cho, a Maya cacao farmer in southern Belize. His plantation offered more than a tour. It revealed a way of life rooted in culture, sustainability, and deep respect for the land.

Eighteen years later, that story continues, shaped by growth, resilience, and a deep commitment to tradition.

Juan Cho, founder of Ixcacao Chocolate, has expanded his farm and refined his craft, though not without challenges. A devastating fire once destroyed part of his plantation, a loss that could have ended the journey. Instead, it became part of his story. With determination and faith, the Cho family rebuilt, continuing to cultivate cacao and welcome visitors from around the world.



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IXCACAO LEGACY

The chocolate-making process has evolved significantly. What began with traditional stone grinding has developed into a small-scale operation producing up to 150 pounds every 36 to 48 hours. Despite this growth, the essence remains rooted in hands-on techniques and deep knowledge of cacao. Today, that knowledge is strengthened by science. Juan's son, Henry, trained in biology, refines fermentation and processing, while his daughter, studying biochemistry, contributes to flavor development and innovation.

The farm itself has grown into a thriving organic system. Beyond cacao, the Cho family cultivates ingredients such as vanilla, cinnamon, cardamom, coconut, citrus, sesame, peanuts, pumpkin, and cashew. These are used to create more than a dozen chocolate flavors, many of which are sourced entirely from the farm. Juan describes the experience of harvesting everything he needs as "heavenly."

Sustainability remains central. The family practices a no-waste approach, raising animals that help recycle organic materials and producing soaps from cacao butter and natural fats. It reflects a balance between tradition and innovation, shaped by years of experience and knowledge-sharing.

Continued on Page 8



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Ixcacao Legacy

Continued from Page 7

The visitor experience has also expanded. What was once a simple home visit is now an immersive cultural journey.



The first meeting with the Chos in 2008.



Nearly 2 decades later, their business continues to thrive.

A dedicated dining and educational space allows guests to take part in the chocolate-making process while enjoying traditional Maya cuisine prepared by Juan's wife, Abelina, the "Chocolate Queen." Meals are crafted from natural, farm-grown ingredients, offering an authentic taste of Belize.

Ixcacao remains a true family business. Juan and Abelina work alongside their children, blending generational knowledge with formal education. Despite its growth, the business remains proudly independent, Maya-owned and operated, built without outside investment. Visitors often discover it through word of mouth, drawn by its authenticity and personal connection.



Ixcacao Chocolate comes in more than a dozen flavors!

Located in the Toledo District, near the village of San Felipe and not far from Punta Gorda Town, Ixcacao Chocolate welcomes visitors year-round. Tours include a guided walk through the cacao farm, hands-on chocolate making, and a traditional meal. To learn more or book a tour, visitors can find Ixcacao Chocolate on TripAdvisor, Facebook, or Google. Advanced booking is recommended.

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MAY 16th - Chocolate Celebration Street Fete
Welcome Plaza, Punta Gorda Town | 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.

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Best Western Grand Baymen Gardens Resort, Ambergris Caye, - Offering a serene, tropical escape. This rare find boasts lush gardens, scenic views, and is an ideal location for vacation or a rental property. <https://www.grandbaymen.com>

The Galleon Building - at the Best Western Grand Baymen Gardens is the 6th building in queue featuring 5-stories, and stunning garden views of the compound. The Galleon building will feature a rooftop bar with stunning 360-degree views of the beautiful island of Ambergris Caye.



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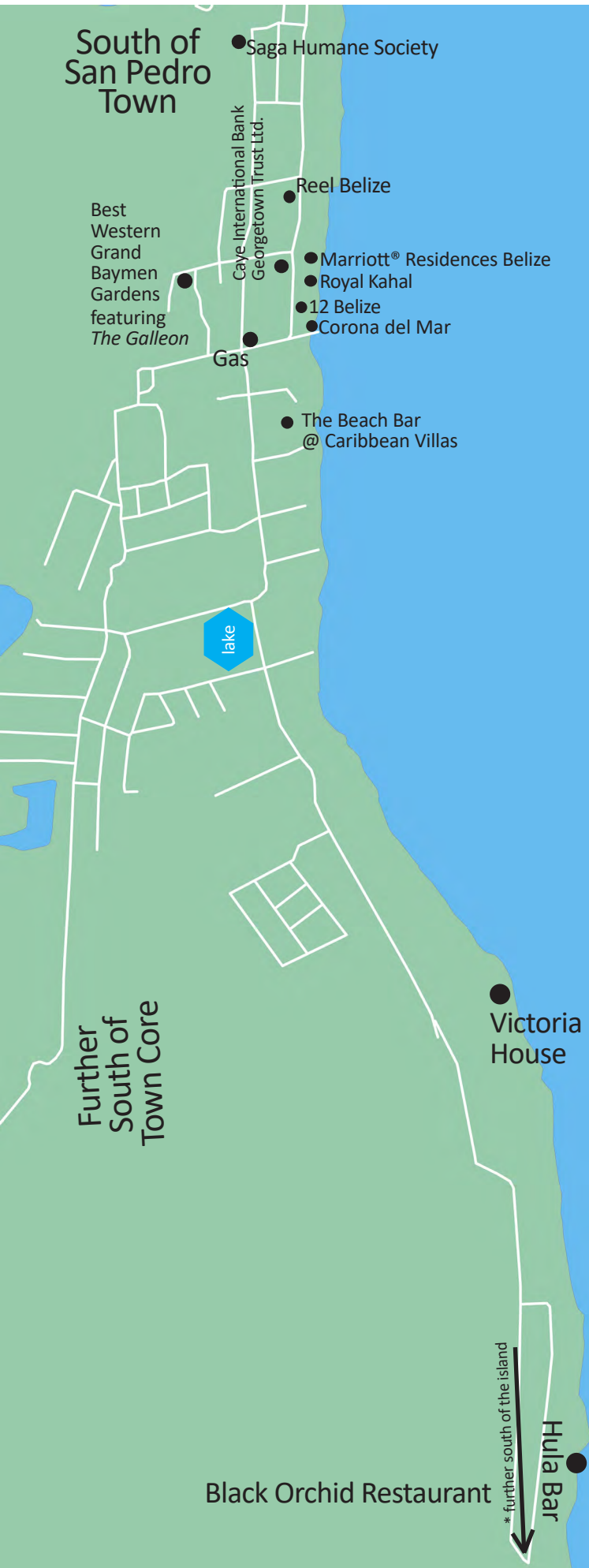
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Tiburon Rum - Tiburon rum is a hand-crafted, aged, premium rum. Our family-owned distillery is near the shores of the Caribbean Sea in Belize. Visit our tasting room in San Pedro! Web: <http://WWW.TIBURONRUM.COM/>. E-mail: basil@sharkbaitco.com



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El Fogon Restaurant - “The Firehearth,” located in the heart of downtown, specializing in authentic Belizean cuisine. Our menu consists of a diverse selection of dishes that represent our Belizean culture. Air conditioning. Follow us on Instagram and Facebook at @elfogonbelize. Tel +501-673-2121.



Paradise Cream - Paradise Cream Parlor offers its customers a variety of over 30 flavors of homemade ice cream. Open Daily, 11am - 9:30pm; TEL: 501-226-5959



SP BTIA Tourism Information Center – Hosted by the Belize Tourism Industry Association San Pedro Chapter, providing information on all things tourism on Ambergris Caye and beyond. On Almond Street, next to the Artisan Market. <https://www.facebook.com/spbtiaic/> for hours.



The Cork & Cooperage - The only Wine and Bourbon Bar in San Pedro focusing on premium, current vintage, New World Wines and Spirits. On Pescador Drive across from Caramba in the center of town. Open 10am-10pm daily. Facebook. [com/corkandcooperage](https://www.facebook.com/corkandcooperage)



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Belizean Breezes - Natural soap, bath, facial, and body care company. Located at 41 Barrier Reef Drive (Front Street).



Gypsy Restaurant & Cocktail Bartique - A cozy, laid-back beachside porch in downtown San Pedro offering locally sourced tapas-style small plates—perfect for sharing, snacking, or a light meal—alongside fun infused cocktails. Open 4–10pm, closed Sundays. For reservations, call 628-7974.



Carlo & Ernie's Runway Bar - A lively sports bar beside the runway at John Greif II Airport, featuring multiple TVs for live games, cold drinks, and hearty pub-style fare. Enjoy front-row views of planes landing and taking off. Open daily 11AM–12AM.



Lily's Treasure Chest - Popular beachfront restaurant in San Pedro serving Belizean and Caribbean favorites for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Known for its famous ceviche, fresh seafood, lobster specialties, and laid-back open-air dining. Open daily 7 AM–9 PM; closed Wednesdays.

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Table Rock Jungle Lodge - An award-winning ecolodge on a 105-acre jungle reserve along the Macal River, offering eco-friendly cabanas and farm-to-table cuisine. Located Mile 5 Cristo Rey Road, San Ignacio Town. WhatsApp at +501-672-4040.



Important Information

AA Meetings: Monday – Saturday, 6PM, #5 Boca Del Rio. 226-2020. Every Tuesday & Friday, 12 noon at the Catholic parish hall. Front street, 630-0752.

ACES Wildlife Rescue: Don't take matters into your own hands. Call 623-7920 for wildlife conflicts and rescue.

Al-Anon Meetings: Wednesdays, 5:30PM, SP Catholic Church Hall islabonitaalanon@yahoo.com

Ambergris Caye Masonic Lodge: ambergriscayemasoniclodge@gmail.com 672-2265

Belize Hotel Association: 223-0669, bha@btl.net

Belize Tourism Board: 227-2419

Belize Tourism Industry Association (BTIA): 227-5717

Dr. Otto Rodriguez San Pedro Poly-Clinic II: 226-2536

Emergency Veterinarian care: 610-3647

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Island Emergency Services: Certified medical emergency service. Call 615-2998

Narcotics Anonymous: By request at 623-0316.

National Aids Commission Island Committee (NACIC): HIV Testing/ Treatment/Stigma and Discrimination and Pre and Post Test Counseling. 650-7021.

Rotary Club of Ambergris Caye: Join Rotary at our weekly meetings Wednesdays at noon at EL FOGON, on the second floor. Find us on Facebook!

RRR Response: Emergency response team Call 627-1117

Saga Society: A non-profit "humane society" to address the stray cat and dog population in San Pedro. Phone 226-3266.

San Pedro Police Department: 206-2022

San Pedro Fire Department: 206-2372

San Pedro Tourist Guide Association: 226-2391

SP Post Office: 206-2260.

SP Town Library: 206-2028



THE WATERMARK

Skyview Rooftop Lounge - Atop The Watermark Belize Hotel offers panoramic views of the Mesoamerican reef and sunsets over mangrove lagoons. Enjoy Belizean and international cuisine, tropical cocktails, and a relaxed al fresco setting. Open daily 7AM-10PM, happy hour 4-6PM. Located north of Boca del Rio.



Portofino Restaurant - Portofino Restaurant at Portofino Beach Resort offers globally inspired cuisine, crafted with the finest ingredients. Enjoy freshly made pasta, steak au poivre, or succulent stone crab. Set in an elevated seaside setting, enjoy breathtaking Caribbean views, impeccable service and a memorable atmosphere. Open for lunch and dinner. Reservations Recommended. Tel: +501 226 5096 or Whatsapp: +501673 5096.



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Secret Beach

North of San Pedro Town
Map not to Scale

4.5 miles to Secret Beach turnoff from the bridge

Secret Beach

Secret Beach 3.75 miles

Mangata Villa / Moon Bar 1.75 miles

Portofino Restaurant 1.5 miles

Roadkill Bar & Grill

ixChel Wellness Resort Harvest Cafe

Casa Cava B&B

Blue Bayou

San Pedro Urgent Care

Rain Rooftop Restaurant

The Watermark

Island Emergency Services

Sir Barry Bowen Bridge

Secret Beach

Casa Cava Bed & Breakfast - A beachfront boutique escape focused on rest and relaxation. Its intimate setting immerses guests in tropical tranquility, offering distinctive luxury accommodations and unforgettable sunsets along a pristine beach with crystal-clear waters. Secret Beach area, north of San Pedro Town. Find us on Facebook @casacavabelize

ixChel Wellness Resort/Harvest Café - Harvest Café, located at IxChel Wellness Resort in Secret Beach, is an adults-only dining experience featuring house made dishes, specialty coffee, and a relaxed setting. Guests can purchase a Resort Access Pass with beach club access and consumable credit. Find us on Instagram and Facebook @ixchelwellness.

Blue Bayou - We are the first and only overwater restaurant & bar at Secret Beach in San Pedro. Offering fresh seafood, all-day happy hour, and in-water table service. Open six days a week, 10am-6pm; closed Tuesdays. Weekend DJs and live music. Follow @bluebayoubelize or email bluebayoubelize@gmail.com

Roadkill Bar & Grill - Your must-stop pitstop minutes from Secret Beach, San Pedro, Belize. Cold cocktails, ice-cold Belikin beer, a full grill menu, free cornhole, and pool table. Outdoor vibes, good times guaranteed. IG @roadkillbar | 501-635-8803

Where Mangoes Meet the Sea:

HOPKINS' SWEETEST CELEBRATION

Each June, the sweet scent of ripe mangoes drifts through Hopkins Village, signaling the return of one of Belize's most delicious cultural celebrations. On June 13–14, 2026, the annual Mango Festival invites travelers to experience the vibrant flavors, rhythms, and community spirit that define this coastal Garifuna village.

Set against Hopkins' relaxed beachfront, the two-day festival transforms the village into a lively gathering of food, music, and local artistry. Mango takes center stage in every imaginable form, from refreshing juices and tropical desserts to savory dishes infused with bold, Belizean flair. It is a chance to sample the country's many mango varieties while discovering the creativity of local chefs and home cooks.

Beyond the culinary delights, the festival offers an authentic cultural immersion. The steady beat of Garifuna drumming fills the air, accompanied by traditional dance and live performances celebrating the community's heritage. Visitors can browse artisan stalls, meet local makers, and take part in friendly competitions and family-friendly activities that keep the atmosphere warm and welcoming.

Intimate, flavorful, and distinctly Belizean, the Mango Festival in Hopkins is more than an event; it is a celebration of season, culture, and connection that lingers long after the last bite.



By Tamara Sniffin



restaurant & bar
serving island favorites
& cool libations!

@

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More than a Stay:

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Chaa Creek

By Tamara Sniffin

Along the banks of the Macal River in Belize's lush Cayo District, The Lodge at Chaa Creek is far more than a place to stay; it is a destination designed for discovery. While its thoughtfully crafted accommodations immerse guests in the beauty of the rainforest, the breadth of experiences truly defines a stay here.

Accommodations range from charming thatched-roof cottages and spacious suites to elevated tree-top villas and ultra-luxurious private residences like the Ix Chel Villas, each designed to blend seamlessly with the surrounding landscape. For those seeking a closer connection to nature, eco-pods offer a more rustic retreat. Complementing the stay are gourmet meals, featuring fresh, locally sourced ingredients and thoughtfully prepared Belizean and international cuisine, alongside handcrafted cocktails that add a refined touch to evenings in the jungle. Yet, no matter where you rest, the real invitation is to step outside and explore.

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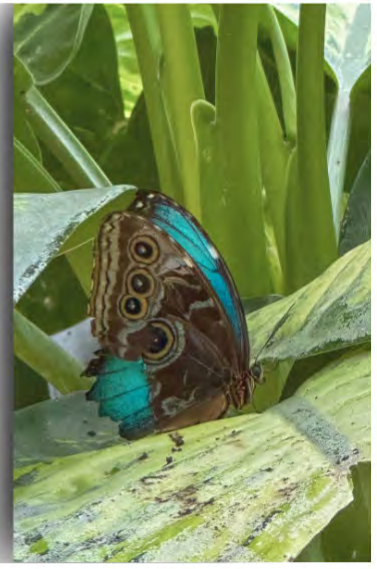
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garden visits showcasing sustainable, farm-to-table practices. Guests can take in sweeping jungle views during a sunset hilltop experience with champagne, explore the landscape on guided rainforest hikes and nature walks, or set out early for rewarding birdwatch excursions. The tranquil Macal River invites leisurely canoeing, while horseback riding offers another scenic way to experience the terrain.

Continued on Page 15



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Chaa Creek continued from Page 15

On-site, enriching experiences continue with visits to the Natural History Center, the Butterfly Farm, and the Medicinal Plant Trail, where traditional Maya knowledge is brought to life. For those seeking more adventure, RTV jungle safaris provide an exciting way to explore deeper into the reserve. Cultural connections are equally present through hands-on cooking classes featuring Belizean flavors and visits to the on-site woodworking shop, where local craftsmanship is on display.

Moments of relaxation are just as thoughtfully woven in, with spa treatments at the hilltop wellness center, poolside lounging, and quiet riverside escapes. Farm-to-table dining further enhances the experience, while guided excursions to nearby Maya sites and caves offer an opportunity to discover even more of Belize's rich heritage and natural wonders.

Whether you seek adventure, culture, or quiet reflection, Chaa Creek offers a seamless balance of it all. Mornings might begin with birdsong and a paddle on the river, afternoons with hands-on cultural learning or exploration, and evenings with a toast to the sunset before the jungle settles into its nighttime rhythm.



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At Chaa Creek, the accommodations set the scene—but it is the experiences that leave a lasting impression, offering guests a deeper connection to Belize’s landscapes, heritage, and spirit.

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Catch the Flavor: Belize's Lobster Festivals Take Over in July

By Janelle Cowo



Belize's spiny lobster season is more than just a date on the calendar; it's a full-on coastal celebration that blends food, culture, and island vibes into one unforgettable experience. Every year on July 1st, as the season officially opens, three destinations—Placencia, San Pedro, and Caye Caulker—come alive with festivals dedicated to this prized crustacean, each offering its own unique flavor of Belize.

This year, Placencia kicks things off with its **Placencia Lobsterfest**, set for July 3rd to 5th. Known for its long sandy peninsula and laid-back charm, the festival feels like a beachfront party that never stops. Think barefoot dancing in the sand, live music pumping all day and night, and creative lobster dishes with a gourmet twist. Here, chefs go all out—lobster kebabs, lobster mac and cheese, and even lobster-infused cocktails. Placencia's vibe is upbeat but unmistakably Belizean, with friendly faces, good food, and that signature “no worries” attitude.

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A few days later, the celebration shifts north to Ambergris Caye for the **San Pedro Lobster Festival**, running July 1 to the 12th. This is not just one event! It's a series of parties, beachside cook-offs, and themed nights that take over the island. From the famous lobster crawl across town to a block party-style festival, San Pedro offers variety and energy. It's where you can enjoy grilled lobster tails by the beach one night and sip cocktails at a chic resort the next. The festival captures the island's dynamic personality—vibrant, social, and always buzzing.



Then comes the grand finale in Caye Caulker with the **Caye Caulker Lobsterfest**, happening July 17 to the 19th. Here, the motto "Go Slow" meets full celebration mode. Centered around the iconic Palapa Garden, this colorful, community-driven event highlights tradition at its best. Local grills line the beach, music fills the air, and the aroma of fresh lobster—grilled, curried, stewed—draws everyone in. It feels authentic and fun, with a strong sense of community pride. Visitors don't just attend; they become part of the celebration.

At the heart of it all is the Belizean spiny lobster, sustainably harvested and deeply rooted in the country's fishing heritage. These festivals are more than indulgent seafood feasts; they're a tribute to the fishermen, the culture, and the coastal lifestyle that define Belize.

So, if you're looking for the ultimate summer escape, follow the lobster trail. From Placencia (July 3–5) to San Pedro (July 1–12) to Caye Caulker (July 17–19), it's a journey filled with flavor, rhythm, and pure Belizean charm.

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