

Latin America Travel Away from it all in Belize



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Our escape to [Las Terrazas Resort](#) in Belize began when my wife, Karen and I cruised through customs at the International airport and boarded a twin-engine commuter plane for the final leg of our journey. Our destination was Amberis Caye and it first appeared as a green sliver of land in an azure sea. Even we began our descent, we could see only lush vegetation and discrete signs of habitation. Upon landing, we soon discovered the "airport" is at one side of the town of San Pedro. It's narrow streets are navigated by a fleet of taxis, bicycles and yes, golf carts - - a primary means of transportation. Our plans took us via taxi to a private dock. There we joined four other arriving guests in an open-cockpit boat. The 'Captain' gunned the powerful outboard motor and we skipped over tiny waves at full speed, an occasional fine spray of salt water brushing across our faces.

After an exhilarating five minutes we pulled up to a long curved, two-level pier that fronted Las Terrazas. The resort radiates a contemporary upscale feel with a collection of immaculate white buildings surrounding a courtyard, fountains, restaurant and a blue tiled forty-two foot long lap pool. It includes three dozen one, two and three bedroom privately-owned villas that are available for rent. Each villa has nine-foot ceilings, leather sofas, and large flat screen televisions in the living room and master bedroom. We were escorted us to our one bedroom/two bathroom ocean-view unit. The two bathrooms was an unexpected delight and Karen immediately called dibs on the master bath, apparently the wife's prerogative!

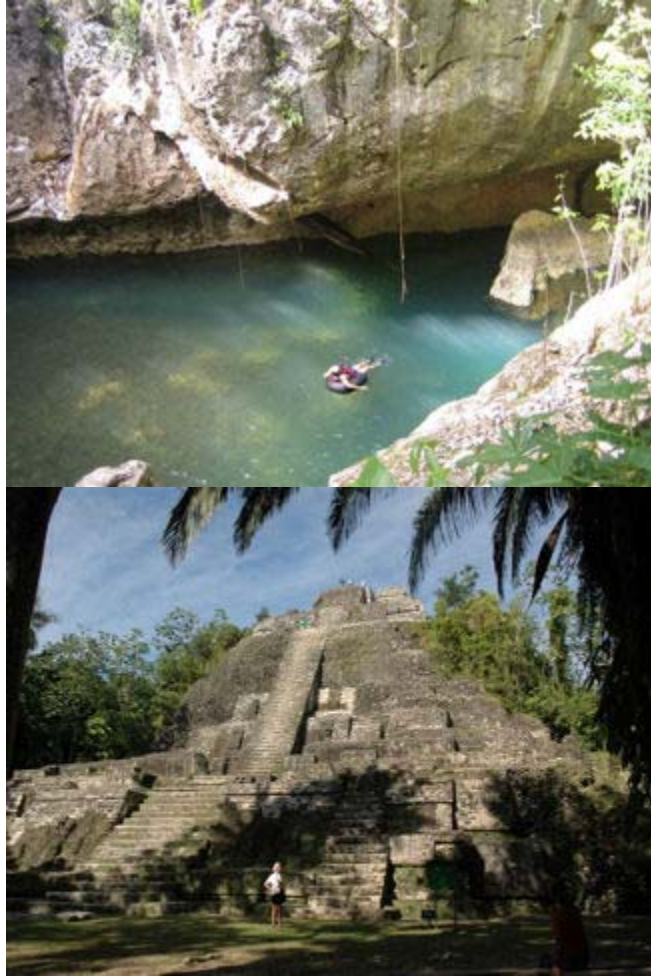
There is so much to do in Belize; it's hard to know where to begin. On the mainland there are jungle, nature and birding tours. Mayan ruin and archeological tours are very popular as are cave-tubing excursions. High-energy guests can choose from a multitude of canoeing, kayaking and whitewater rafting trips, zip-line canopy and rock climbing tours. And finally there are the more traditional fishing, golfing and horseback riding excursions. For those who want to stay on the island there is kite-boarding, windsurfing, sailing and snorkeling. The concierge at the Las Terrazas is very helpful and will book tours for guests.

We primarily came to the country to go SCUBA diving. The twenty-five mile long Ambergris Caye is bordered on the windward side by the longest barrier reef in the Western hemisphere and the second longest in the world. The 190 mile long reef extends from the caye and down along the coastline of the mainland. Belize is also famous for its Blue Hole, a 480' deep, circular hole in the ocean floor at an atoll about 60 miles off the coast of the mainland.



The next two days we went SCUBA diving on the barrier reef. Journey's End, Las Terrazas' neighbor and sister property has a dive shop with excursions departing directly from their dock. Visibility ranged from 50-60 feet, the water remained a warm 80 degrees from the surface all the way down to 90' and the reef overflowed with life. We saw sharks, rays, sea turtles, angel and parrot fish, lobsters, flounder, eels, schools of yellow fins and every manner of coral. We swam through deep canyons of coral and, on one dive, through several long dark tunnels. It was fantastic! With the reef only a five minute boat ride from the dock, we would pop back to the pier between dives for our surface interval to rest and re-group.

Karen and I decided on two trips to the mainland—one to the Mayan ruins of Lamanai and the other to an adventure park for cave tubing. Both started at a crisp 6:45am with a 45-60 minute boat ride to the coast and then up a smooth river filled with mangroves. Then it was onto a bus. Breakfast was provided at the bus transfer. The Lamanai trip also included another shuttle via speed boat up a long, windy river through the jungle. At Lamanai we climbed the Mayan pyramids, hiked through the tropical forest and listened to the howler monkeys screech in the tree-tops. The cave tubing trip was an absolute hoot. Several of our fellow guests responded to the pitch black caves with shrieks of what we could only hope was delight. When we eventually emerged it was to a world of toucans, iguanas and crocodiles... absolutely exhilarating.



We kept debating about going to the Blue Hole. It meant another early morning (6am departure) and a very long boat ride. As the diving was so good locally, we chose to stay land dive Hoi Chan, which is Mayan for 'little channel'. The channel is a shallow break in the reef and a marine sanctuary. On the dive we saw countless schools of fish and several sea turtles. Then the dive boat motored a short distance and we snorkeled with and petted stingrays, which appeared to be everywhere! Stingrays have a soft, velvety underbelly. Our guide pointed to a few nurse sharks. The sharks, like the rays, were very accustomed to people as we were able to PET THE SHARKS! The shark's skin felt like a rough grain sandpaper—a truly amazing experience and a fantastic way to finish our vacation.





We returned to Las Terrazas for lunch followed by canoeing in the lagoon behind the resort. Kayaks, canoes and small Hobi-cat style sailboats are available. Karen got a deep tissue massage at the Serenity Spa at Journey's End while I worked out at the small fitness center in Las Terrazas. On our final evening, we reflected back on our stay. Our holiday was intentionally active but there the idyllic setting would be equally appealing for those looking to simply unwind. The beach is first rate and the food excellent. Las Terrazas has a restaurant and roof-top café with a Central American/Caribbean cuisine. The restaurant at Journey's end features Caribbean cuisine and a wide selection of seafood.



As we prepared to leave the next morning, I ran into another diver. She had gone on the Blue Hole dive and rated it one of the best dives of her life! The dive boat was a large, stable and comfortable. Breakfast and lunch were included in the excursion. Suddenly I had the perfect excuse for what I was already considering -- a return trip! Las Terrazas is a destination that makes you want to keep coming back. More information: [Las Terrazas Resort, Belize](#)

