

Belize

WILDLIFE ENCOUNTERS

- Go on the trail of the elusive Jaguar and learn about Jaguar Density Research
- Visit a wild Scarlett Macaw Monitoring Project
- Explore Caribbean lagoons for Manatees
- Snorkel along the second biggest barrier reef in the world



Summary

Tucked away in a corner of the Caribbean, the small Central American country of Belize packs in fantastic wildlife viewing opportunities. Offering more than just rum cocktails and lobster delicacies, you will have the chance to join local researchers and naturalist guides as they track elusive jaguars, monitor colourful macaws and show you the secrets of such fascinating animals as the manatee and the turtle. From the pine forests and jungles of the interior to the white, sandy beaches and turquoise waters of the coast, you will be taken on a journey of exploration and conservation.

Overview



Hidden away amongst crystal-clear rivers, waterfalls and the rolling shaded pine forests of the Maya Mountains is Blancaneaux Lodge, will be home for the first part of the trip as you explore the surrounding areas.

From here, you will learn about Jaguar Density Research, look for fresh evidence of these elusive cats and visit motion camera traps. Later, you will observe macaw nesting sites and go to an observation tower where there are good raptor-sighting opportunities. Along the way, you will learn about the local flora and fauna and witness many of the region's wonders from its tiny orchids and abundant wildlife to 1000ft waterfalls; the highest in Central America.



The next stage of the tour takes place on the Caribbean coast at Turtle Inn near Placencia. Here, you will get the chance to experience a different side to Belizean wildlife as you explore the underwater treasures of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef, the second biggest in the world, looking for manatees and nesting Hawksbill Turtles. Finally, you will learn about the endangered Central American River Turtle and explore its habitat in the nearby Toledo district.

Throughout, the trip will be accompanied by local researchers, conservationists and naturalist guides as you explore some of the best wildlife that Belize has to offer.

Your experts



Roni Martinez (Conservation officer Blancaneaux Lodge):

Roni is a certified Belizean guide who has been involved in a number of research and conservation projects in Belize. In particular, he's been involved in Jaguar Density Research, Raptor Research, and, most recently, has started working on Bat Density Research. He sits on the boards of both Friends of Conservation and Development and the Belize Raptor Research Institute. Roni also organises and runs the winter and summer bird counts in the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve.

Itinerary



Day 1: Blancaneaux Lodge

Having landed at Belize International Airport, you will be met by our representative and driven to Blancaneaux Lodge, tucked away in the Maya Mountains of western Belize. This luxurious lodge, owned by Francis Ford Coppola, will be your base for the next five days as you explore the surrounding areas.



Day 2: Jaguar Density Research - Mountain Pine Ridge Habitat

There will be an optional early morning birding session before breakfast. This will be followed by a full day tour of the 300 square-mile Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve. You will visit Central America's highest waterfall - 1000ft Falls - home to the Orange Breasted Falcon and the King Vulture, before being driven high up to the Cooma Cairn Forestry Tower, a favourite observation point for raptors. During the course of the day you will observe the reserve's many orchid species, visit motion sensitive camera traps and find fresh jaguar tracks. You may also, with a bit of luck, spot the rare Stygian Owl.



Day 3: Scarlet Macaw Monitoring - Chiquibul National Park

Leaving the lodge early, you will head off on a full day trip into the southern borderlands of the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve and the Chiquibul National Park. After an hour's drive to the trail head, you will start walking into broadleaf habitat of the Chiquibul National Park. Chances of spotting wildlife are good, with regular sightings of Baird's Tapir as well as White-Tailed and Brocket Deer. Once you reach the river you will hope to see the Scarlet Macaws which nest in this remote area of the Upper Macal River.



This small region is the only Scarlet Macaw nesting site in Belize, hosting an estimated 100 pairs. These breeding pairs are seriously endangered and Blancaneaux Lodge, along with Friends for Conservation and Development (FCD), work towards the monitoring, protection and conservation of this species.

Day 4: Jaguar Density Research - Eljio Panti National Park

Today there is another opportunity for some optional early morning birding before breakfast. You will then spend the whole day exploring the unique habitat which straddles the Mountain Pine Ridge and the jungle-clad karst limestone hills of the 13,000 acre Noj Kaax Meen Eljio Panti National Park. You will visit motion capture cameras and download the data for later inspection. You will also hike up Howler hill, a good spot for raptors and Howler Monkeys.



Day 5: Blancaneaux Lodge

Today is a free day to relax or take one of the optional tours and/or activities. Options include enjoying the infinity swimming pool or the waterfall spa and hot spring; hiking into the jungle or going horseback riding; visiting the Green Hills Butterfly Farm and Botanical Gardens; exploring nearby Mayan sites or paddle into the Mayan underworld at Barton Creek Cave; taking a boat trip to another Scarlett Macaw nesting site on the Raspaculo River or mountain biking along old logging trails. There may be an additional charge, paid locally for some of the activities.



Day 6: Placencia

After an early breakfast, head out of Mountain Pine Ridge down the Hummingbird Highway. The scenic drive will take us past the capital city of Belmopan, through jungle-clad, limestone hills with meandering creeks, steep ravines and small villages. As you reach the coast, the jungle gives way to citrus plantations and the shimmering Caribbean Sea makes its first appearance.



You will arrive at Turtle Inn in time for a late lunch and then the rest of the afternoon is free to settle in and relax on the beach or at one of the two infinity pools or the Sunset Spa. This evening a member from the local NGO, SEABelize, will give a talk on their conservation efforts to co-manage off-shore marine reserves.



Day 7: Laughing Bird Caye National Park and Barrier Reef

Today you explore the underwater treasures of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef, the second biggest Barrier Reef in the World. Offshore from Placencia, the inner reef is a patchwork of coral cayes and shallow reefs. Your boat will make its way through the turquoise waters to the Laughing Bird Caye National Park, where you have the opportunity to snorkel.



Day 8: West Indian Manatees

Today there will be an introduction into how Turtle Inn partners work with SEABelize to protect and monitor the Hawksbill Turtles that nest among the cottages at night. Hawksbill nesting season in Belize ranges from May to November. It does, however, vary from year to year. Please see the 'Important Information' section for more details.



There's time to relax after lunch at Turtle Inn before taking a short boat trip north along the lagoon towards Silver Creek. The resident manatees congregate in the late afternoon at the mouth of the creek and, although the waters are opaque, the manatees surface to breathe every three or four minutes.



Day 9: Central American river Turtle Monitoring

You head south today, to Toledo District, to learn about the conservation of the Central American River Turtle. Rangers will introduce you to typical habitats and explain how they work with local communities to help re-establish thriving populations of this endangered species. Dinner tonight is left open for you to explore one of the numerous restaurants of nearby Placencia village.



Day 10: Turtle Inn

A free day to relax or take an optional tour. Cycle into Placencia village, explore the world's only jaguar preserve or go snorkeling, fly-fishing or Scuba diving. Learn how the indigenous Maya grow shade cacao, learn how to make chocolate or visit the Maya site of Lubaantun, home of the mysterious crystal skull. There may be an additional charge, paid locally for some of these activities.



Day 11: Departure / Extension

Fly from Placencia to Belize international Airport to catch your flight home or continue on your trip by adding one of our proposed extensions.



Optional Extensions:



- Take in some of the local culture and history by visiting the impressive Mayan ruins of Tikal in Guatemala.
- Spend some time relaxing or enjoying more of the reef in the Belizean Cays.



Dates

10 July to 20 July 2011
20 August to 30 August 2011

Please note: If these dates do not suite you we can arrange for a tailor made trip to the same areas. Please bear in mind, however, tailor made trips cannot have the same wildlife conservation focus.

Main tour cost

From £2495 per person in twin-share accommodation excluding international flights.

Single Supplements

We do not charge single supplements as long as you are willing to share with another person of the same sex, subject to rooming arrangements. Should you wish to have your own room guaranteed, there is a single supplement from £645.

Includes

All accommodation in Blancaneaux Lodge and Turtle Inn, all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 11 (with the exception of dinner on Day 9), all transfers and domestic flights as per the itinerary, naturalist guides and experts, all excursions as per the itinerary, donations to Friends of Conservation and Development and to SEABelize.

Excludes

International flights (which we can arrange for you), visas, vaccinations, travel insurance, dinner on Day 9, alcoholic drinks, tips and gratuities.

Travelling from outside the UK

We are happy to give you quotes in either USDollars or Euros. Please contact us for more details.

Group Size

Group Size can range from 4 to 10 passengers.

Please Note:

****Exchange rates correct at time of printing. We maintain the right to confirm the price at time of booking with the up-to-date exchange rate****

Important information

Accommodation: This trip is centred around two luxurious lodges, which are part of Francis Ford Coppola Resorts: Blancaneaux Lodge in the Mountain Pine Ridge region and Turtle Inn on the coast near Placencia. All rooms are of very high quality. Due to the nature of the lodges however, some rooms are of an even higher standard than others. For this reason rooms will therefore be allocated on a first come, first serve basis. Book early to ensure you get the best room.

Hawksbill Turtle Nesting Season: In Belize, the Hawksbill Turtle nesting season ranges from May through to November. However, seasons do vary from year to year and beach to beach. In 2009, when monitoring started on the beach at Turtle Inn, the Hawksbill Turtles started nesting on the 28th June. In 2010, however, the season has been very late in starting. We have selected our trip dates around the best times to see various wildlife, but, as with most wildlife experiences, we cannot guarantee that the animals will always be present.

International Flights: We can, if you wish, organise your international flights into and out of Belize. Due to the airline connections, if flying from the UK, you will need to spend a night in Miami on the way to Belize. The return portion of your flight can be made without overnighing in the US. To mitigate the carbon dioxide released into the high atmosphere through your air travel, we donate £10 per client to Rainforest Concern, an organisation that works hard to prevent the depletion of the world's rainforest.

Weather: We have selected our trip dates to coincide with the highest likelihood of seeing wildlife, in particular macaws (with chicks) and Hawksbill Turtles, which are seasonal. July tends to be a fairly wet month. The rains are normally warm and come in short bursts. August is normally dryer as the weather is dominated by a dry westerly wind. This can vary from year to year. Please note that this is also Hurricane season in the Caribbean and there is a risk of tropical storms and hurricanes. The last two Hurricanes to hit Belize were Hurricane Dean in 2007 and Hurricane Iris in 2001.

Visas and Health: Nationals of the UK, US, Canada, EU, Australia, New Zealand do not need a visa to enter Belize. Belize is a tropical country and you should seek advice from your GP or travel clinic at least six weeks prior to travelling regarding suggested immunisation and prophylactic treatments.

Fitness: Participants should be of reasonable fitness levels to fully enjoy this trip

Essential Items: In addition to your clothes and personal belongings, we recommend that you bring sun and rain protection: a broad-brimmed hat, sunglasses and sunscreen and a rain poncho. Bring long sleeves for the evening as well as mosquito repellent, some good hiking shoes/boots and swimwear. If you are an avid photographer, bring enough memory space and a spare battery. You will be able to charge everything in the lodges but it would be a shame to find yourself out on an excursion and out of battery power.

Our commitment



In 2007 Steppes Discovery celebrated 10 years of spectacular achievement as pioneers in the field of nature travel. As we approach our 15th birthday, our commitment to the principle of 'conservation travel to protect' remains steadfast.

We have raised significant funds in support of the world's leading wildlife and conservation agencies, researchers and experts, and increased awareness of travel and conservation through newsletters, lectures and consistent media coverage. Furthermore, we have voluntarily spearheaded collective action campaigns such as Travel Operators for Tigers in South Asia.

Friends for Conservation
and Development

Friends for Conservation and Development are a Belizean non-profit, non-governmental organisation whose primary goal is to motivate the public to protect the environment through conservation awareness, while enhancing the development of the human resource. Since its establishment in 1999, FCD has had significant achievements in public education and environmental awareness, protected areas co-management, community support programmes, monitoring, research, policy recommendation and bi-national cooperation related to the Chiquibul National Park.



An unavoidable consequence of travel is the emission of carbon dioxide into the high atmosphere and while Steppes Discovery takes measures to reduce the carbon footprint of its holidays, regrettably it is not yet possible to make them carbon neutral. In order to offset these emissions we give £10 per client to **Rainforest Concern**. Rainforests have a central role to play in the slowing of climate change and yet we are removing forests from the planet at a faster rate than they can grow back. Rainforest Concern supports projects that look to preserve the forests that we have rather than replanting new ones, working to safeguard biodiversity and local communities and in so doing mitigate climate change.



Southern Environmental Association of Belize (SEABelize) is a Belizean based, non-governmental organisation dedicated to the conservation and preservation of the country's natural treasures. SEABelize co-manages a number of marine parks, including Laughing Bird Caye National Park. Their motto is: 'Protecting our natural resources by developing our human resources'.

Our travel partners, accommodation, service providers and ground agents are all carefully chosen to ensure their commitment to the environment, most being quality, family owned businesses - reflecting the unique character of the places, the abiding hospitality of its people and the remarkable spirit of its wilderness.

Now come along and see for yourself. With us it won't cost the earth!

Want to discuss this trip?

Please call **John Faithfull** on **01285 643333** for more details or to make a booking



It was on a 1991 jaunt through Ecuador that I first fell for the allure of Latin America, bumping from A to B on chicken buses and high-Andean railways (more often than not on the roof). Over the past couple of decades I've broadened my experience throughout Central America, discovering more comfortable modes of transportation and enjoying stays at some of the region's luxury small boutique hotels and lodges while still running up volcanoes, clambering through caves strewn with Mayan relics and snorkeling whenever the opportunity arises. Neighbouring Caribbean also holds huge appeal for me and if you can detach yourself from its beaches, there's an exciting world of historic, scenic, cultural, culinary and environmental interests to be explored....not to mention a great selection of rums.