



A guide to the:

Belize Marine Education & Conservation Project



Belize Marine Education & Conservation Project

Focus: Marine life
Location: Belize

Start Date: Every Monday
Arrival & Starting Point: Placencia

The phrase "there's something for everyone" could not apply more to the stunning and remarkable country of Belize. For a small country, it has so much packed in for all manner of people and lifestyles. From rainforests to reefs and the pristine beaches in between, Belize is a diverse country that holds the key to action-packed tropical adventure, coupled with the laid-back Caribbean vibe we desperately seek when looking for a beach bum holiday. On land, you'll find dense jungles, fascinating cultures, and friendly locals. Offshore though, you'll find a whole new world under the surface, as the Belize Barrier Reef lies bustling with enchanting corals and fascinating marine life; a true diver's oasis.

The Belize Barrier Reef, spanning just under 190 miles, is the largest and one of the most impressive reefs in the Northern hemisphere. As a UNESCO World Heritage Site, it is no surprise it is home to seven protected areas, and is a hugely important habitat for many threatened and endangered marine species. These include the West Indian manatee, numerous turtle species, spotted eagle rays, the American crocodile, and plenty of sharks, including the gentle whale shark.



On a small, private island off the coast of Placencia, a team of ocean-loving biologists and diving fanatics established the Belize Marine Education and Conservation Project that has been protecting the reefs since 2006. The project has two main aims, conservation through education and conservation through action, and as a volunteer on this project, you'll be heavily involved in both. Through a series of presentations followed by biodiversity identification dives, you'll learn the ins and outs of coral reef ecosystems, from the creatures that visit and live within, to the health of the reefs themselves and how to protect all combined.

You'll also learn about invasive species from their introductions, the threats they pose, and what happens to unbalanced ecosystems, to the chain reaction they may cause. Specifically, you'll learn about the destructive and invasive lionfish that have become a significant threat to reefs throughout the Caribbean and the Eastern coasts of the United States. You will learn how to spearfish and safely extract lionfish, and record data on the removed numbers. The data collected is used by the Belize Department of Fisheries to determine the density of lionfish populations in southern Belize and at what rate the density is increasing or decreasing.

On this marine conservation project, you'll have the chance to complete a dive qualification, while making a real difference by protecting and preserving the Belize Barrier Reef. You'll also gain a lifetime of marine conservation knowledge and the chance to live true island life in paradise! So, what are you waiting for?

Activities

If you are an unqualified diver, we suggest booking a minimum of 2 weeks, as in your first week, you will be learning how to dive and achieving your PADI Open Water certification. To do this, you'll need to complete the PADI e-Learning course in advance of joining the project, so then all that's left is your open-water dives which you'll get to complete in the stunning waters of Belize! If you already have this qualification, you can jump straight into the conservation work or choose to further your diving skills by undertaking additional PADI certifications such as Advanced Open Water, Rescue Diver, Dive Master or Specialty Courses.

Conservation Education & Diving

Through a series of daily presentations before each dive, you'll learn the fundamentals of coral reef ecosystems and ocean conservation. From coral types to creature features, invasive species mitigations and the effects of plastic pollution and global warming, you'll leave the island with a wealth of knowledge that will guide you through life as an ocean ambassador - a protector of the sea! You'll put this knowledge to the test by participating in biodiversity identification dives, where you'll go in search of specific coral, fish, turtle, shark and invertebrate species. You'll also be monitoring the health of the Belize Barrier Reef by observing the diversity of the species you encounter on any given dive.



Once per week, volunteers with a PADI Advanced Open Water certification are able to participate in a night dive to experience the reef after dark! Watch the reef come alive with nocturnal creatures such as nurse sharks, octopuses, moray eels, coral polyps, and more. Due to the lack of filtered light, the colours of the reef at night are brighter and more vibrant, giving you a fresh perspective of dive sites visited earlier in the week. Please note: volunteers need to be Advanced Open Water qualified and bring their own headtorch for this activity.



Invasive Species Removal

Lionfish are a predatory species native to the Indo-Pacific Ocean. They were first detected along the Florida coastlines in the mid-1980s, and were almost certainly released by the aquarium trade. Females release egg clusters around every 3-4 days, containing between 10,000 to 30,000 eggs in each. This, coupled with a lack of native predators, has contributed to the population boom and rapid increase of the invasion.

Lionfish are not fussy eaters and will eat most of what they come into contact with, from fish to crustaceans, and even algae. Studies suggest that a single lionfish on a reef could reduce native juvenile fish populations by 79%. This, in turn, will disastrously affect marine ecosystems and local fisheries that are already heavily affected by climate change, pollution, and physical destruction.

Many mitigation plans now strive to reduce lionfish densities, as eradication is now deemed impossible due to how widespread the issue is, and population suppression has been found to help protect fish communities within coral reefs. As a volunteer on this project, you will learn how to safely extract lionfish through spearfishing and collect data on the number of lionfish removed during extraction dives. This data is passed to the Belize Department of Fisheries for ongoing density monitoring. As part of the NOAA & REEF's 'Eat Lionfish' campaign, promoting lionfish as a sustainable seafood choice, even eating your dinner will help the reefs of Belize, as lionfish will certainly be on the menu after you've helped to collect, data log, dissect and fillet them!



Beach Clean-ups

During a number of the presentations, you'll learn of the detrimental effects of plastic pollution. You will participate in weekly beach clean-ups to remove, and where possible recycle any plastic or general waste you happen across. This helps to keep the beaches clean, coral reefs healthy, and marine life safe!

Free Time & Weekends

You'll have the chance to enjoy island life during your free time, where you can relax in a hammock or maybe join in a game of volleyball with your fellow volunteers! There's also paddle boarding, kayaking and fishing from the island available for you to try your hand at! If you're staying for more than one week, you'll have a chance to explore the mainland, as you'll be staying in Placencia at the weekend in accommodation you have arranged.



Itinerary

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

6:30AM

7:00AM

7:30AM

8:00AM

8:30AM

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8:30PM

9:00PM



You will need to fly into Placencia at least a day before your project start date to ensure you make the Monday morning boat transfer at 9:30am to the island.

PRESENTATION
Welcome & orientation

LUNCH

PRESENTATION
Spear Training

DIVE
Spear Training & Dive Assessment

FREE TIME

DINNER

PRESENTATION

FREE TIME

COFFEE

EXTRACTION
DIVE

BREAKFAST

ACTIVITY
Fillet & Dissection Training

DIVE PREP

PRESENTATION

ID DIVE

LUNCH

DIVE PREP

PRESENTATION

EXTRACTION
DIVE

FREE TIME

DINNER

ACTIVITY
Documentary Movie Night

COFFEE

EXTRACTION
DIVE

BREAKFAST

ACTIVITY
Fillet & Dissection

DIVE PREP

PRESENTATION

ID DIVE

LUNCH

DIVE PREP

PRESENTATION

EXTRACTION
DIVE

FREE TIME

DIVE PREP

PRESENTATION

NIGHT DIVE

DINNER

FREE TIME

COFFEE

EXTRACTION
DIVE

BREAKFAST

PRESENTATION

DIVE
Fun dive/
ID/Extraction

ACTIVITY
Beach Clean

LUNCH

DIVE PREP

PRESENTATION

EXTRACTION
DIVE

FREE TIME

PRESENTATION
Week Highlights & Island Closing

DINNER
BBQ

FREE TIME

COFFEE

FUN DIVE

BREAKFAST



Boat back to the mainland (1.5 - 2hrs transfer time) for the weekend or your return journey home.



Presentations run on a 4 week cycle, so if you are volunteering for longer than 4 weeks the presentation topics may repeat.



You will need to book your own accommodation for your first night on the mainland and weekend accommodation (if necessary), as this is not included. There are a number of local hostels and hotels nearby, with a few suggestions on the following page...

Weekend Accommodation Suggestions

Budget Friendly

Anda Di Hows Hostel is perfect for the budget-orientated and social traveller, offering a bed in a dormitory style setting with a shared bathroom. Fans, lockers, free Wi-Fi, a full kitchen, and a bar are available and the hostel is just a 6-minute walk from the project's boating dock.

- From \$15 ppn

Julia's offers beach-front cabanas right in the heart of Placencia village. This budget friendly accommodation is basic but comfortable. All cabanas come equipped with a security safe, complementary Wi-Fi, A/C, bed linens, towels and a compact kitchenette. - From \$55 ppn



Mid-range

Cozy Corner Hotel has lots of home comforts with clean rooms, comfortable beds, free Wi-Fi, HDTV, A/C, fridge and safe in each. There's also a highly recommended onsite bar and restaurant sat right on the beachfront so you can eat and drink with a view. - From \$55 ppn



SeaSpray Hotel has a range of rooms right on the beachfront, many of which have their own veranda, beach deck and/or hammock. Every room offers at least 1 double bed, Wi-Fi and a refrigerator, and for a small increase in price of around \$10, rooms with A/C, cable TV, kitchenettes and coffmakers are available. - From \$55 ppn

Luxury

Ocean Breeze Beach Resort is available for those who want to spend a little extra and treat themselves to a luxurious room with a sea view. All rooms are equipped with ensuite bathrooms, A/C, free Amazon Alexa, smart TV, microwave, fridge/freezer, toaster, and coffee maker. Everything is in walking distance including the project's boating dock, and the hotel has a pool with swim-up Tiki bar, also overlooking the sea.

- From \$118 ppn



Accommodation

You'll be staying on the island for 4 nights and will be allocated a room in the main island building or an individual cabana located nearby. Rooms are shared between 2-4 volunteers, they are basic but clean, and the building has a shared bathroom and shower facilities. The island is small and secluded, which means every room has incredible sea views! There's no Wi-Fi on the island allowing for the best kind of digital detox. This means you can spend less time worrying about internet connection and more time connecting with nature! Snooze in a hammock, jump in a kayak or take a dip in the sea; there are plenty of ways to enjoy island life in your free time....



Food & Drink

You will receive three meals per day on the island, plus coffee, and a morning and afternoon snack. All dietary requirements can be catered for with prior notice. The project mostly provides a plant-based diet to fit its environmentally conscious ethos. In support of the 'Eat Lionfish' campaign, lionfish will appear on your plate and provide a great protein source to your diet. Drinking water is also provided, and soft and alcoholic drinks are available on the island for an additional cost.



What's Included

- 5 days/4 nights on a private island in the Caribbean off the coast of Belize
- 3 meals per day during dive week
- 12-13 dives per week
- At least one night dive a week (if AOW qualified)
- Training for conservation work and participation in conservation projects
- Boat transfers between Placencia and the island
- Accommodation while on the island

Not Included

- All flights
- Wetsuit, fins, booties, dive mask (must bring your own)
- Dive gear rental fee (BCD and regulator): 25 USD per week
- Sapodilla Caye Marine Park Fees: 25 USD per week
- Optional/additional PADI certifications

What Next?

Becoming a volunteer on the Belize Marine Education & Conservation Project is simple, and you can help make a difference to marine conservation efforts in just a few simple steps...



Visit the website to select your start date and how long you would like to volunteer for.



Secure your place online by paying a deposit of £195. You'll have up to 60 days before your start date to pay your remaining balance.



Prepare for your trip and ask your dedicated travel expert any questions before packing your bags and heading off to Belize!



Finally, have an incredible time and don't forget to send in or tag us in your photos!

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