



*Saving the Orange-breasted Falcon
from extinction*

From the Editor *Tamara Sniffin*

As 2017 comes to an end we can't help but wonder where the year went! They say time flies when you're having fun, and we have to wonder, were they talking about us??? From sky diving, to parasailing, rappelling down waterfalls, hiking through gorgeous jungles to breathtaking mountain top views, snorkeling with turtles and diving with sharks, exploring nearby islands and distant villages, to satiating our hunger and thirst with some of the best cuisine and libations Belize has to offer, to resting our weary heads at fabulous accommodations, to meeting amazing people and celebrating cultures and their festivities, to even having a team in the island's version of the Amazing Race, the My Beautiful Belize crew has been having a blast! It's been an action-packed year that leaves us only wanting to write about more, and that's the amazing thing about Belize, the options are endless, and we can't wait to wear ourselves out doing it all!



There's no doubt that each of our writers has their favorite stories from this year of fun, and you can usually guess which ones they are based on their overwhelming enthusiasm! There wasn't an experience I didn't love, and you can bet I'm all about fun, but I have to admit it's writing about the importance of protecting the precious creatures of Belize that I find the most rewarding. Be it turtles, sharks, falcons or even lobsters, the vital role these creatures play in the balance of life, along with the eco-tourism dollars they bring to our economy all depends on a healthy ecosystem and measured conservation. Heck, I even wrote about eradicating an invasive species, the Lionfish, which I felt kind of bad about promoting the killing of but, hey, eating them is sure fun!

From writing about these important issues to reporting on the joy of making corn tortillas or placing bets at the hermit-crab races, we all have our passions and they come out in the pen. Regardless of the subject, there is no question Belize and her people, landscapes and creatures are extraordinary. As you enjoy this final month of 2017 in our beloved country, we welcome you to My Beautiful Belize!

About the cover: B1, captive-bred superstar of the Orange-breasted Falcon restoration program was introduced into the Mountain Pine Ridge area of Belize in 2010 and is known to have fathered seven wild offspring. Sadly, he disappeared in 2017 and is presumed dead. *Photo credit: Robert Berry*

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

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Dr. Otto Rodriguez San Pedro Polyclinic II: 226-2536

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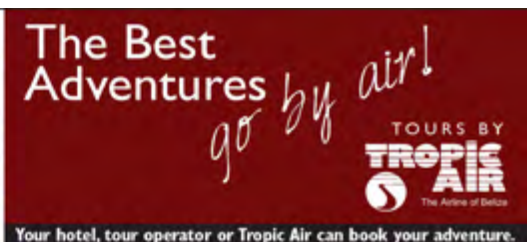
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Daytime luxury at Matachica's Mambo Restaurant:

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Give a little joy this Christmas

Through the island's Adopt A Bear initiative, residents and visitors alike can bring joy to the less fortunate children of the island and at children's shelters in Belize City! P. 13

Bring in the New Year with fun Belizean traditions:

Stock up on red underthings, get the broom ready, wash a dozen grapes, prep a suitcase and put some money away for the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve...trust us. P. 14

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Saving the Orange-breasted Falcon from extinction

By Tamara Sniffin



There was a commotion at the Customs and Immigration area at Philip S.W. Goldson's International Airport in Ladyville, Belize. Huddled around a large pet carrier, uniformed officials, along with a few baggage handlers and I peered into the crate...and blinking back were four, wide-eyed white fuzzballs with large beaks. No, this wasn't an alien invasion; the adorably kooky looking chicks were the VIP's of the esteemed Orange-breasted Falcon (OBF) team of biologists and researchers who have been surveying and color-banding OBF's in Belize since 1992. In an unprecedented effort to save this endangered species, the program has been introducing captive-bred OBF's into their wild habitat in the Maya Mountains of western Belize for the last ten years.

As a Wyoming gal, I've been a raptor lover for years. There's something synonymous with the wild west; expansive clear blue skies accented with a soaring broad-winged bird, and the classic ping of the Red-Tailed Hawk. My love for raptors followed me to Belize many years ago, and I first learned of the Orange-breasted Falcon when I spotted a Bat Falcon while exploring the Tikal Archeological Site in Guatemala in 2002. My guide explained that often the Bat Falcon is mistaken for the much larger and rarer Orange-breasted Falcon; I was intrigued...tell me more! Over the years I've studied up on these falcons, in awe of their stunning beauty and deeply concerned about their imperiled existence. You can imagine my surprise when I discov-

ered that the only Orange-breasted Falcon captive-breeding program in the world was in Wyoming, of all places! I knew then and there I was the connection for sharing the amazing story of the Peregrine Fund and their efforts to save the declining OBF population in Belize. Like a dream come true, there I was, after years of planning, staring wide-eyed and blinking back at some of the rarest bird babies in the world, and finally meeting Mr. Robert Berry, the "foster daddy" of them all.

The pieces came together when I met skilled local birder Jonathan Urbina in 2014 while birding with the Belize Audubon Society, and learned that at the time he was working with the OBF program. I begged to connect with his boss and founder of the Orange-breasted Falcon Project and captive breeding program Mr. Berry. Not only was I determined to write about their valiant efforts to restore an endangered species, but selfishly, my agenda included the fact that I'd yet to see one of these spectacular falcons, which topped my birding bucket list! The dialogue of covering the story went on for years, until June 2017 when Matt Allshouse, Lead Field Biologist for the Belize OBF project and I could coordinate our plans. Matt, who has worked with the OBF program since 2011 and lives in my hometown of Laramie, (love that Wyoming connection), invited me to join them when they were bringing captive-bred chicks to Belize for release. It all started with meeting them at the international airport where I would accompany them to the Cayo District and witness

the amazing process of introducing these juveniles to the wild.

In mid-June, when the captive-bred chicks are about 40 days old they are flown to Belize, often by a donated private charter, as the chicks are too delicate for safe passage on commercial airlines. It's a 12-hour travel day for Bob, who raises the birds, with a stop in Houston, Texas for a thorough vetting of the many permits required to transport the precious cargo. Once they arrive in Belize, armed with stacks of documents and 400 pounds of laboratory-raised frozen quail to feed the juveniles for the next few months, Matt and Bob are prepared for a less than routine customs inspection from the Belize Agricultural Health Authority. It's a painstaking but essential process with multiple biological and health test results examined and duplicated in both the US and Belize to make certain that no diseases are imported. It's an exciting but stressful day for the OBF team who have worked tirelessly in preparation for months. I'm thrilled to be a part of it and from the airport, I follow the team on a three-hour drive to a remote area in the Mountain Pine Ridge area where we stay the night and prepare for the next big day.

I might not be a bona fide biologist, but I love hanging out with wildlife rock stars. We speak the same language, our common denominator a pure passion for protecting species that have been exploited to the verge of extinction. The OBF team of biologists and researchers are no different, I just need

to learn the lingo! At first, their conversations sound like a combination of algebra, colors and alphabet soup when they refer to B1, Orange 47, Purple 29 and Caya, the equations a complex formula to permanently identify age, sex and origin. It's fascinating to learn that captive bred females carry red bands, males blue, while wild-hatched females have orange bands and males purple. The bands, fitted around what a novice like me would call an ankle, have bold white numbers that can usually be seen with a scope or binoculars. These bands help decipher reports to eBird which many birders in Belize are now doing, and the OBF team encourages people to report all sighting which is relatively common in towns and cities during the Fall and winter months, where the OBF feeds on feral pigeons and collared doves.

Continued on Page 4

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Saving the Orange-breasted Falcon



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It feels like we are on a covert operation when at the crack of dawn the following morning we are four-wheeling on rough and windy roads through dense forest and locked gates to the hack site where the chicks will begin their new life. Sadly, due to the black-market demand for these beautiful falcons in the Middle-East, there is good reason for our discretion. The hack site (falconry vernacular for surrogate nest) is located at a remote location and consists of a two-story wooden tower situated on a mountain top surrounded on three sides by steep canyons that provide ample escape routes from avian predators when the youngsters begin to fly. Adjacent to the tower is a screened hut called the Pavilion (a metaphoric exaggeration) where hack site attendants, aka research and graduate students, escape the black flies while caring

for the young falcons during daylight hours. While I ooh and aah over the chicks-in-waiting (three females and one male) the team scales a wobbly extension ladder to prepare the hack site, making sure the platform is secure, provides ample protection and perches. I'm so engaged in baby-bird-admiration that I don't notice that a nest box is situated high in a nearby pine tree, and am completely surprised when an Orange-breasted Falcon swoops down to check us out. It's one of those moments, like when I first saw Scarlet Macaws in the Chiquibul Forest, or hundreds of Pink Flamingos in Celestun, Mexico, or spotted a first-ever-recorded Swainson's Hawk on Ambergris Caye...no words, just slack-jawed astonishment.

I like to think of Orange-breasted Falcons as smartly dressed super-heroes of the neotropical rainforest.

Tailored with a black mask and hood, their back is cloaked in dusky black with feathers trimmed in blue-gray. Their pure white throat brightly contrasts with a broad band of orange-rufous across the upper breast and a coarsely patterned black vest that reminds me of mithril (aka chain-mail) from the Lord of the Rings, that adorns their lower belly, flanks, and undertail. Arguably the most beautiful of falcon species, these compact aviators prey on a wide variety of small to medium-sized birds and bats and are streamlined for high-speed dives, being the only raptor species capable of making a living hunting above the forest canopy. I love that the female Orange-breasted Falcon is the envy of all falcons when it comes to being armed! Relative to her body size, this tough mama's arsenal comes with an unusually large beak,

the largest feet of any falcon, and thick powerful legs that make her a force to be reckoned with when she's on the defense. Males have the same plumage characteristics but are half the size of their mates with normal falcon armature. Always rare and widely distributed in Central and South America, these gorgeous raptors are now absent throughout Central America with less than 20 territorial pairs remaining in Belize and Guatemala and only four pairs accounted for in Panama. Although many countries in the area contain seemingly suitable habitat, it is a mystery why they have disappeared. The declining core population in Belize is now limited to the Mountain Pine Ridge and nearby areas, with a few pairs in the southern Maya Mountains. A low reproductive rate (compared to other raptors) along with human conflicts such as loss

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Mama Orange 47 keeps a vigilant eye on her newly expanded family.

of habitat (clear-cutting), fragmentation, shooting, collisions with high-tension wires, and electrocution from power poles as well as natural predation and parasites are thought to be responsible. In 2012 the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) up-listed the Orange-breasted Falcon to Near Threatened based on The Peregrine Fund's research. The Fund's core study population of 12 breeding pairs in the Mountain Pine Ridge area declined to five wild pairs in 2016. If trends continue extinction is not far off, something the OBF team is committed to preventing. To see an OBF in the wild is a rare and breathtaking sight, to have the opportunity to witness the efforts to sustain this imperiled beauty... extraordinary.

Once the team situates the chicks in their new home with a stunning view, they will roost there for the next four months while learning how to be a responsible adult and fend for themselves. Sure, they now have a spectacular home, but I keep wondering, how will they learn to be wild? I am surprised when Matt straps on a helmet and prepares to ascend the nearby tree that houses the nest box! Obviously, the OBF we spotted is the very protective mama of whatever is in that nest box (remember what I said about the females being well equipped for battle) and she attacks viciously, dipping and diving in protest. Bob, a very spry octogenarian, scampers up the tree behind Matt as he retrieves a single chick from the nest (three is their maximum). The mama, known

as Orange 47 and originally banded in 2015 by the team in Tikal, aggressively nails Matt on the shoulder, her razor-sharp talons ripping his shirt. She then snatches Bob's ball cap right off his head, taking a small portion of his scalp with it! Up she flies, dropping, then retrieving the cap in an attempt to kill it as it falls into the deep canyon, her aerial assault lightning fast. I'm impressed when the experienced team reacts with amazing calm! The chick-nabbers retreat from the tree, where inside the Pavilion the baby is weighed, given a health assessment, banded and blood-feathers collected for genetic testing. Team member Audrey Martin, who is conducting next-generation genetic sequencing for her master's degree at the University of Wyoming, (yet another Wyoming connection), will use this important data in her research. The wild chick (a male) is then carefully placed with the four captive-bred babies on the hack platform. I can't help but wonder how the introductions went, the clutch of captive-bred chicks huddled in one corner, clearly checking out the new chick on the block.

I was familiar with the practice of placing captive-bred birds into wild nests when assisting threatened species, but doing it the other way around seemed unprecedented. According to Bob, falconers in the middle-ages developed the hacking process, fledging their falcons from artificial enclosures, similar to the hack tower, an innovative technique now used to repopulate endangered raptors such as Peregrine Falcons, and now for the first time

Orange-breasted Falcons! Combining the wild chick from the nest box with the captive-raised chicks enables all the chicks to be raised by wild parents to avoid imprinting on the human attendants. Amazingly, the parent(s) of the wild chick will respond to the hunger-begs of their transplanted baby and soon will not only start feeding their off-spring but the captive-bred chicks as well! Regrettably, Orange 47 became a single parent the day before we arrived, her mate B1, a captive-bred falcon hacked in 2010 and known to father seven wild offspring, including the one just added to the hack site, disappeared and is presumed dead. The single chick would likely have starved as the male does most of the hunting, transferring the food to the protective female to feed the chicks. Of course, suddenly having to feed a family of five is too much to ask of any parent, and for the next few months, the hack site attendants will supplement their meals with tasty frozen quail, taking care to avoid habituating the chicks to humans. It doesn't take long for these surrogate parents to identify and bond with each falcon through its unique vocalizations, wing beat, appearance, and personality, which they seem to have plenty of!

Continued on Page 6



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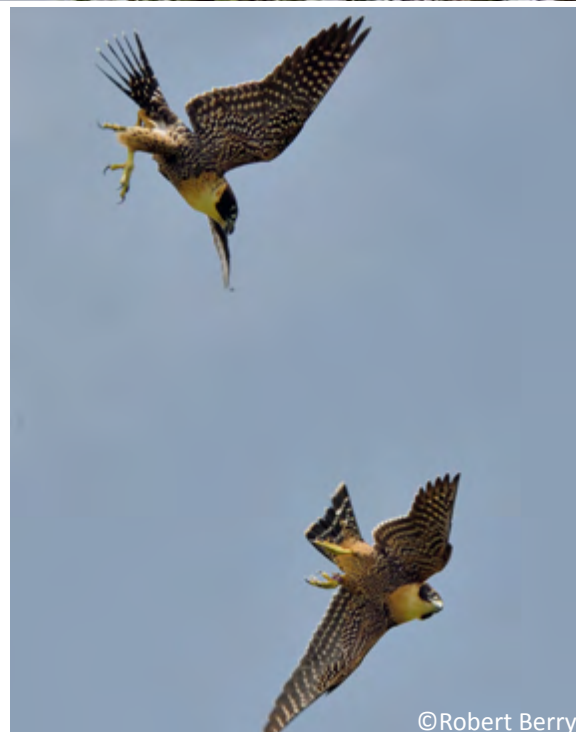
Saving the Orange-breasted Falcon

As much as I want to swap jobs with one of the hack attendants I am forced to return to the reality of work, although I promised to return in August when the juveniles are all but finished with hack site life. There only a day to witness this amazing adoption process, it is all I can do not to text message Matt three times a day once I reach home on Ambergris Caye. "I know Orange 47 was perched protectively near to the hack site when I left, did she come to the chicks yet," I message. "Not yet, she's in the box next to the tree," he responds. "We haven't fed the chicks today in hopes their food-begs will attract her!" Everyone is super bummed about the disappearance of B1, and Matt adds, "B1 has not come back, but today had a wild bird I banded last year at 1,000 Foot Falls showed up for the first time (Purple 21)." A week later Matt sends me a photo from the hack site and I am surprised at the change in the chick's appearance. These 'ugly ducklings' are morphing into beautiful colors and distinct markings. Matt is also happy to report that Orange 47 is

feeding all five of the babies, and now another male, Purple 29, who happens to be B1's two-year-old son has now pair-bonded with Orange 47 and is sharing the hunting responsibilities. The team is ecstatic that one of B1's progeny is now the resident male at the hack site, a bittersweet outcome that points out how few available bachelors are out there, especially in the remaining epicenter of the local OBF population. It won't be long before these juveniles will attempt their first flights in their journey into adulthood and the dangerous world.

In early August I get to spend an afternoon with Matt back at the hack site. The area is beautiful, and even though things are pretty quiet, it's still a great place to hang out. Matt reports that one of the captive-bred females has not returned to the site for several days. Although it's hard not to worry about these young birds, the team stays optimistic that she is busy staking out new territory somewhere else. The others occasionally return for a free lunch but show evidence that they've adapted well to life in the wild, especially hunting and feeding themselves.

According to Bob, who directs the project, the 2017 hack was successful with three unrelated juveniles reaching independence and probably a fourth that dispersed earlier. They estimate that the nine surveyed breeding pairs in Belize, including the hack site pair, may have fledged as many as 15 young this year, eleven in the wild and four captive-bred. Mortality is very great and based on experience at the hack site, even with care from both wild parents and attendants,



©Robert Berry

they have found that a third of these fledglings perish prior to independence in the Fall. Over the last ten years, the OBF program has released 52 captive-bred chicks into the Mountain Pine Ridge area. Bob believes that by working with a small, viable wild population, their modest successes has been crucial for the species with a total of 10 young falcons produced in the wild with a captive bred adult, adding unrelated genes from Panama to an inbred population that should increase fitness and productivity. He reiterates that education and conservation efforts by local groups, eco-lodges, government agencies, and individuals all help to create an awareness and give meaning to the vital role raptors play in the web of life, along with their practical benefits in pest control and eco-tourist dollars that depend upon a healthy ecosystem.

As we four-wheel out of the hack site area on my last day there, Matt spots something he has never seen before. Perched on a tree limb above the road sit all four falcons. He's amazed that they really do hang out together after leaving the hack site, and I am blessed with a beautiful parting photo. It's the perfect farewell from my gorgeous falcons and an image I'll never forget.

If you would like to learn more about this project and how you can help, please visit <http://www.bit.ly/OBFalcon>. For identification assistance (OBF versus Bat Falcon) you can visit www.birds.cornell.edu/obf

For more photos and to learn where you can see these Falcons in Belize, please visit our website at www.mybeautifulbelize.com

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Answers on Page 15

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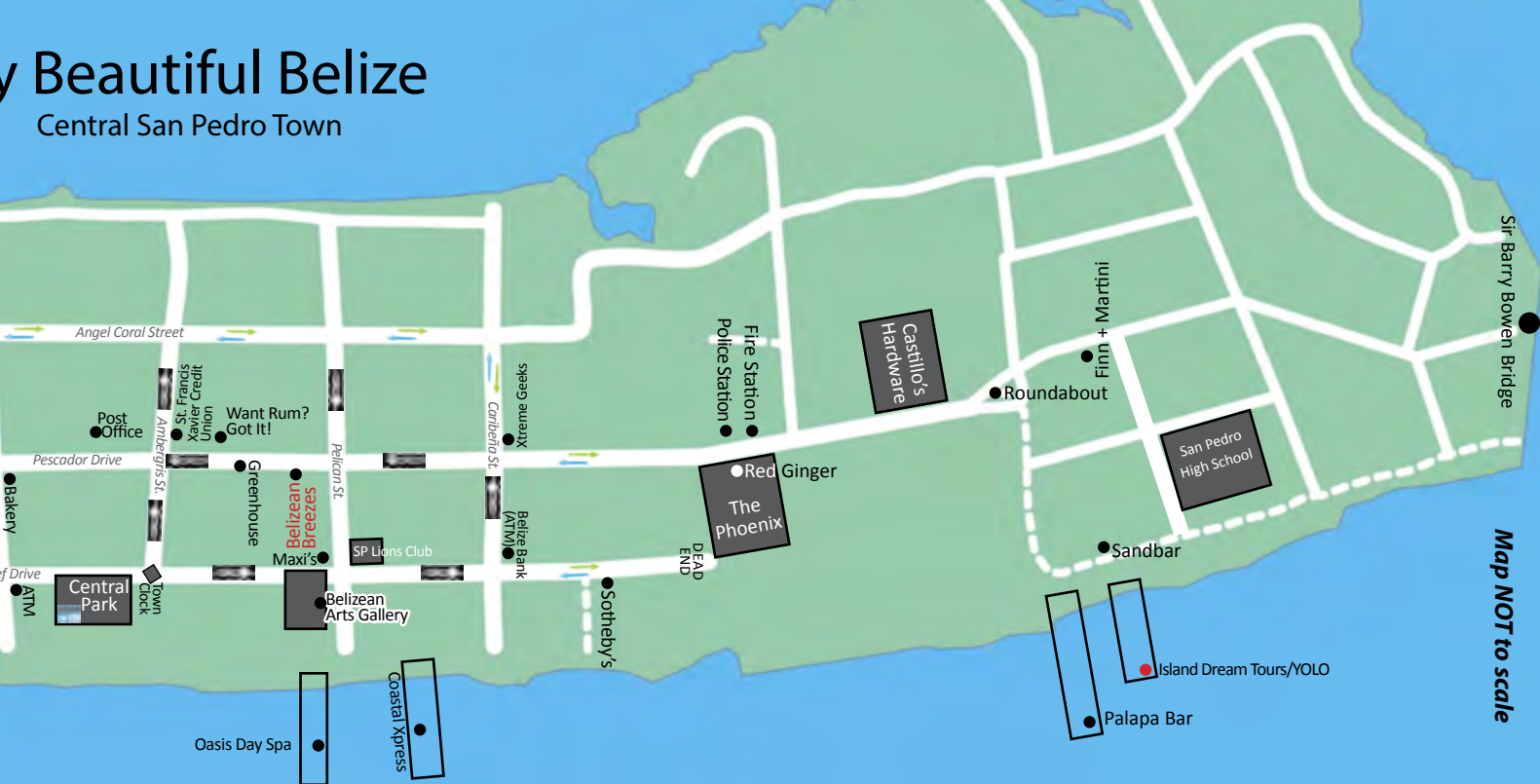
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"12" is the only shop in Belize that features only Belizean made luxury products & gifts suitable for both locals and tourists. Featuring exclusive items from around the country from soaps & scrubs to handbags & sauces, we ship same day throughout Belize. www.12belize.com 670-5272.



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SAN PEDRO ARTISANS MARKET: Over 20 booths featuring local arts and crafts. Wood carvings, jewelry, paintings, sculptures, souvenirs and much more. Open daily from 8AM until 9PM. Located on Angel Coral Street across from the Hon. Louis Sylvestre Stadium.

PARTY PARTY



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WANT RUM? GOT IT! 100% Belizean Rums. Travellers Liquors FACTORY OUTLET and showroom! Home of world class and award winning rums. Wholesale and retail. Daily complementary rum tastings of over 25 products! #15 Pescador Drive 226-4690. www.facebook.com/wantrum



PALAPA BAR AND GRILL – On the Wet Willy's Dock. Daily 11am – 11pm. Relax on the inner-tubes and have your bucket of ice cold beers lowered to you. Outdoor seating, awesome smoked food, cheeseburgers, seafood and tropical drinks and an astonishing view!



EATS & TREATS



THE COCONUT CAFÉ: Life's better when it's made from scratch! The Coconut Cafe offers breakfast all day, as well as pizzas, paninis and burritos/wraps. We make all of our own breads, pies and cinnamon rolls from scratch. Open daily from 7-3, closed Wednesdays. Located just south of town, on Coconut Drive, across from Road Kill Bar. 226-4311.



TROPICANA BAR & GRILL: Fine dining in a casual setting. Dine outdoors under our palapa, or upscale your experience and enjoy our New York steakhouse-themed dining room. Daily dinner and drink specials. Dinner 5PM - 10PM. Reservations recommended: 226.2992.

CASA PICASSO RESTAURANT: Tapas dining in an artful setting. Global flavors from local ingredients...martinis, wines, cocktails. Vegetarian & gluten-free options. Open Tuesday-Saturday at 5:30pm. Last reservations 9:00pm. 226-4443 or reservations@casapicassobelize.com. Located south of town past Caribeña Gas Station & Belikin Distributor. Check out our specials & weekly "Tasting Thursday" menu at facebook.com/CasaPicassoBelize & casapicassobelize.com.



EI DIVINO CARIBBEAN STEAKHOUSE & MARTINI BAR: Nominated for Restaurant of the Year 2016 by BTB! Banana Beach's signature restaurant, featuring indoor and outdoor dining and sports lounge. Serving USDA meats, wood fired pizza, fresh seafood, pastas... locals LOVE our ceviche! Daily dinner and drink specials, Happy Hour from 3-7pm. 226-2444.

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BLACK ORCHID RESTAURANT & LOUNGE: Come visit us; just a quick Golf Cart Ride 2 1/2 miles South of Town after the Croc Pond Lagoon and well before the Marco Gonzalez Maya Site. Open Tuesday through Saturday; Happy Hour: 3PM-5PM, Dinner: 5:30-9PM. Reservations Recommended (501) 206-2441. www.blackorchidrestaurant.com.

PARTY PARTY!

CRAZY CANUCKS BEACH BAR: Beach bar located at Exotic Caye Beach Resort. Open daily 11am-midnight. Bar food and daily drink specials. Mondays: Live reggae @8pm Tuesdays: Live Music & Hermit Crab Racing @6:30pm Thursdays: Paint n Splash @2pm Fridays: Trivia @7pm Karaoke @8:30pm Sundays: Live music/ horseshoes @3pm Follow us on Facebook. Phone: 670-8001

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BELIZE SOTHEBY'S INTERNATIONAL REALTY is a full-service firm offering sales, vacation rentals, and property management in Belize (Ambergris Caye & Placencia Peninsula). We are service oriented and will ensure that our clients' needs are met and exceeded. www.belize-sothebysrealty.com

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at The Great House, Mahogany Bay Village



Mambo Restaurant makes for a delicious daytime treat

By Mary Gonzalez

I take the last sips of my Mambo Honeymoon cocktail, a refreshing sea breeze blowing in my face as I curl up on the beachside lounger. It's been a while since I've been this relaxed - Matachica Resort and Spa was clearly the perfect getaway for a holiday lunch.

The luxury resort was recently named in the Top 10 resorts for Central America in the 2017 Conde Nast Traveler's Choice Awards. They annually land on travel lists, clearly due to their fabulous service and enchanting location. If you were to choose a romantic dinner location, Mambo Restaurant would absolutely fit the bill. Being quite the contrary Mary that I am, I opted for lunch instead, and dragged the boss lady along with me (she hardly put up a fight). I wanted to see the restaurant in the light of day...I wanted to indulge in a delicious lunch, and possibly segue into cocktails for an afternoon of fun. I wanted to live it up a little - do the things we say we'll do but never get around to. With a more-than-willing partner in crime, we make our way five miles north, winding along until we hit their parking lot and walk over to the beachside restaurant.

Of course, cocktails lead the way, and it's a Mambo Honeymoon for me and a Coconut Mojito for T. One clearly needs some liquid inspiration to decide which of the delicious items on the menu will land on our table. I immediately notice the Lobster BLT, my curiosity piqued as to how much more delicious a sandwich could be. Of course Mambo would add lobster to that classic - and of course I wanted to try it! Tamara goes for the jerk chicken salad, earning some side-eye from me. (A salad? Really?)

With a potent mixture of tequila and coconut amongst other liqueurs, my blue-and-red-layered Mambo Honeymoon arrives, ready for consumption. As the layers blend, the drink turns into a gorgeous purple hue. Tamara's coconut mojito steals the show shortly after, with its creamy white consistency and slices of coconut garnishing the top. Let it be known, even the cocktails are beautiful, and as to their taste - divine! I'm not a fan of fussy or overly sweet drinks, and both of these earn a 10/10 rating from me: refreshing, light,



excellent liquor to mixer ratio, and tasting like a second (or third...or...)

We have a grand time sipping and people watching, then getting distracted by an adorable yellow-throated bird that flits around the open air courtyard where we're seated. It's an adult-only resort, so the ambience is one of tranquility, several couples just doing their utmost to soak up the sun's rays, enjoying Matachica's excellent personalized service. Even just as lunch guests, we get the same attention, our waiter beaming as he sets down our lunch. I'm immediately drawn to the lobster BLT, which the

chef has artfully designed, complete with lobster tail garnish. Tamara's plate is loaded - now **that** is a salad, and I take back the side-eye.

Each bite of my sandwich reinforces the idea that I made the right choice. As much as I love the tasty crustacean, I hardly ever have it, and certainly would have never thought to add it to a sandwich. But then again, I'm not a chef, and clearly, there's a reason why. The chunks of sweet succulent seafood blend perfectly with the crisp, salty bacon and creamy dressing - each bite decadent. Washed down with the last sips of a Mambo Honeymoon, followed

by a coconut mojito, and even a slice of key lime pie, I'm soon sated and happy with the beach chairs calling my name.

We move to the front of the bar, and seeing as it's the Terrible Two-some on an afternoon adventure, our drink orders switch to margaritas. There is something about a beachside bar, lounges, sunshine, friends and margaritas. With our ever-attentive bartenders topping us up, our afternoon ends up being one of the best getaways, and all just a five miles north of the bridge from town. For dinner reservations (and free boat pickup), call 226-5010.



Deck the halls with the Spirit of Christmas Giving

By Janelle Cowo



For many of us, the holidays are a joyous time to be spent with loved ones. Besides the delectable Belizean treats we get to indulge in, finding creative ways to liven up old cultural traditions make us embrace our Caribbean Jewel's holiday season fully. As a child, Christmas generally spells gifts, carols under the Christmas tree and much fun with family and friends. Of course, as we grow up, we begin to embrace the true essence of the holiday – the spirit of giving rather than receiving.

For those of us who call Belize home, or simply have a love for its people, there are many ways to contribute positively to people in need during the holidays.

Giving a child a present always seems to bring the most Christmas joy. In Belize, there are several ways to ensure our Belizean children have a memorable holiday. One such way is the Adopt-A-Bear initiative by San Pedro's Non-profit Organization, Raise Me Up.

For the past couple of years, Adopt-A-Bear has taken on the task of ensuring that the island's less fortunate children receive a gift from Santa. They have expanded their reach to the children of Liberty Children's Shelter and Kings Home, the homes of Belize's abandoned and orphaned youth. The best part of this initiative is that it's the community that makes it possible. Residents and visitors alike have

the opportunity to make a child's Christmas wishes come true!

How does it work? All you have to do is "adopt" a bear off a Christmas Tree from the following participating establishments: Hidden Treasure Restaurant, Sandbar San Pedro, Wayos Beach Bar, Palapa Bar and Grill, Marbuck's Coffee House, Crazy Canuck's Beach Bar, or The Truck Stop. Written behind each bear is the first name, gender, and age of a child, as well as their dream gift. Once you adopt a bear, you are responsible for purchasing something they need, an educational item, and their wish gift item, then delivering it to the same location you picked the bear from. Each gift will be delivered to the respective child,



making their Christmas morning extra special.

Sharing a warm plate of food with the homeless or those in need is also an excellent way to spread the holiday spirit. Organizations such as the Colleen's Kitchen at San Pedro Food Bank (info@raisemeupbelize.org) and Together We Can Solve Hunger (togetherwecansolvehunger@hotmail.com) host Christmas soup kitchens to ensure no one goes hungry during that special holiday. The San Pedro Lions Club also holds an annual Christmas Dinner for Senior Citizens and volunteers are welcome to help! You can also contribute to feeding Belize's less privileged by volunteering your time or giving a donation of any size.

These are just a few great ways to give back this Christmas. So as we prepare to cross presents off your holiday shopping list or book that perfect holiday getaway, it's always nice to remember that there are those who are in need of your time and generosity; and while giving back during the holidays bring that warm feeling into your heart. Take the time to make others' Christmas Day a bit happier and you'll find you've given yourself the best gift yet, happiness. Happy holiday from the My Beautiful Belize family!



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Get Wet, Get Satisfy!



Enjoy some New Year's traditions the Belizean Way!

By Janelle Cowo



Each country – each culture – has its tradition that honor special occasions. When ushering in a new year, don't be surprised in Belize when you see someone frantically counting out 12 grapes, or suddenly grabbing the broom. With our many ethnicities, Belize will keep you entertained with the unique ways we welcome 2018!

For the Mestizo of Northern Belize, wearing red underwear is a must if you desire a year filled with love. I guess if you are ending 2017 without a significant other, you might need to consider this tradition to increase your chances of romance in the New Year. If you feel especially unlucky in love, you can also (literally) sweep out the bad vibes at midnight. This New Year's tradition involves sweeping your home just minutes before midnight on December 31st, the action ensuring that all negative vibes from the previous year do not bleed into the new one.

Opening the back door of a home at the stroke of midnight to let the old year "out" is a tradition practiced by the Creole culture of Central Belize. Many believe this New Year ritual was passed down by the Baymen settlers of old British Honduras, as this tradition is also practiced in England.

Another tradition among ALL Belizeans is to make sure that you have money in your pockets at the stroke of midnight on the New Year. This act is believed to ensure a financially stable year. (It also helps to have the cash to pay the cab fare too if you have had too many Belikins.)

There is also the ritual of consuming 12 grapes at midnight - a tasty tradition if you ask me! Each grape signifies a wish for each month of the New Year, and the simple act of consumption will bring good luck and joy. A Spanish tradition, we believe it infiltrated our culture thanks to the Spaniards' presence in our region.



If you're spending time with friends at home, don't be surprised if you catch them packing a suitcase. No, they're not running away from you – it's just another fun belief that 'packing' equals 'travel' in the New Year.

The most common tradition however, and observed all around the world, is the midnight toast. No New Year celebration would be complete without a glass of champagne to toast to your wishes, goals, and aspirations in 2018.

Whichever of the traditions you opt to test drive, go forth in optimism for a fantastic 2018. Be sure to 'pack', because we would love to see you back in Belize!

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Located on Fido's Pier

Enjoy the San Pedro Holiday Lighted Boat Parade!



Each year the coast of San Pedro Town on Ambergris Caye is brightly lit with elaborately decorated boats during the annual Holiday Lighted Boat parade. The traditional event, first started in 2006, officially brings in the Christmas holiday season, delighting residents and visitors who gather at the beach, docks and seaside bars along the parade route. This year the parade will take place on Saturday, December 16th, starting at 6PM. The route begins at Wayo's Beach Bar, heads south and turns around at Crazy Canucks Beach Bar. All proceeds from the event go towards charitable organizations on the island, including Raise Me Up, who is part of the boat parade committee. If you're visiting the island during this festive event you are in for the ultimate Caribbean Christmas treat!

Wolfe's Woofers

Let Me Help You

"I thought you were going to see Bruce and Becky this morning," Sherry said.

"I'm going right now," I told her. "I'm almost finished putting new strings my guitar."

"You'll be too late," she warned. "They've probably already gone to lunch."

Bruce and Becky from Texas arrived on the island the evening before and I was anxious to visit.

"Which room is Bruce Anderson in?" I asked the girl behind the desk at their hotel.

"I don't think I can tell you," she said, with a confused look on her face. "I'm not really a desk clerk. I just started here yesterday and I'm in office training."

"Please get me someone who can help me."

"They're all gone to lunch but they should be back in about ten minutes. They left me to answer the phone and do some chores."

"I'll wait."

I took a seat and watched her trying to put some papers into the paper shredder. After five minutes of watching her I approached the desk.

"Would you like some help with that?" I asked.

"Oh, would you?! Please. I've never done this before."

I walked around the counter to the shredder.

"Let me see the papers," I said, and she handed them to me.

"Turn on this switch and the green light comes on. That means it's ready."

"O.K."

"Now, the secret is that you have to feed the papers in one at a time. Watch." I fed each of the papers into the shredder until they were all gone.

"Now," I told her, "You flip the switch the other way and you're done. You got it?"

"Yes. Thank you, but where do the copies come out?"



Plan your December Belize travels

December 3rd – The Nativity Christmas Show at San Pedro Lions Den, San Pedro Town starting at 7:30PM

December 8th – Belizean Christmas Concert at George Price Center, Belmopan City starting at 7PM

December 9th – Vital by Iconic Fashion show at Hour Bar, Belize City starting at 6PM



– Holiday Craft Fair & Tree Lighting Ceremony at The Truck Stop, San Pedro Town starting at 4PM

– Cayo Art Festival at Cayo Welcome Center, San Ignacio town starting at 9AM

– Penn Cayetano Art Exhibition at Diamond Lodge Boutique Hotel and Spa pre-opening night, Coconut Drive. Cash bar - proceeds will be donated to Wellbeing and Education Foundation

December 10th – Love FM Christmas Parade

starting from Boca del Rio Park, San Pedro Town at 7PM

– The Story of Frozen Dance Show at Bliss Institute for Performing Arts, Belize City starting at 5PM

– End of the World Marathon at the Placencia Peninsula starting at 5:30PM (more info at runbelize.org)

December 14th – The Story of Frozen Dance Show at the Belmopan Civic Center, Belmopan City starting at 5PM

December 14th to the 16th – Mista Peetaz Brokdong Bram at Court House Wharf, Belize City starting at 5PM each day

December 15th – Fabulous exhibition of new paintings by Papo at Belizean Arts inside Fido's Courtyard in San Pedro Town, from 4PM to 10PM

December 16th – San Pedro Holiday Boat Parade, starting at Wayo's Beach Bar, San Pedro Town from 6PM

– Metal Mayhem 2017 at Scotty's Bar and Grill, Corozal Town starting at 8PM

December 17th – Pop-Up Christmas Shop by Kaj Expressions at Belizean Arts inside Fido's Courtyard, San Pedro Town from 2PM until 10PM



Sudoku Answers Puzzle on Page 7

5	7	8	3	6	4	2	1	9
4	3	2	9	8	1	7	5	6
1	6	9	7	5	2	3	4	8
6	1	3	5	7	8	9	2	4
8	2	7	6	4	9	5	3	1
9	5	4	2	1	3	8	6	7
7	4	5	8	3	6	1	9	2
2	8	1	4	9	5	6	7	3
3	9	6	1	2	7	4	8	5



December 21st – Dirty Santa Bash at Crazy Canuck's Beach Bar, San Pedro Town starting at 7PM

December 31st – New Year's Eve Block Party at San Pedro Central Park, San Pedro Town starting at 9PM

December 31st – Lions New Year's Bash at San Pedro Lions Den, San Pedro Town starting at 7PM



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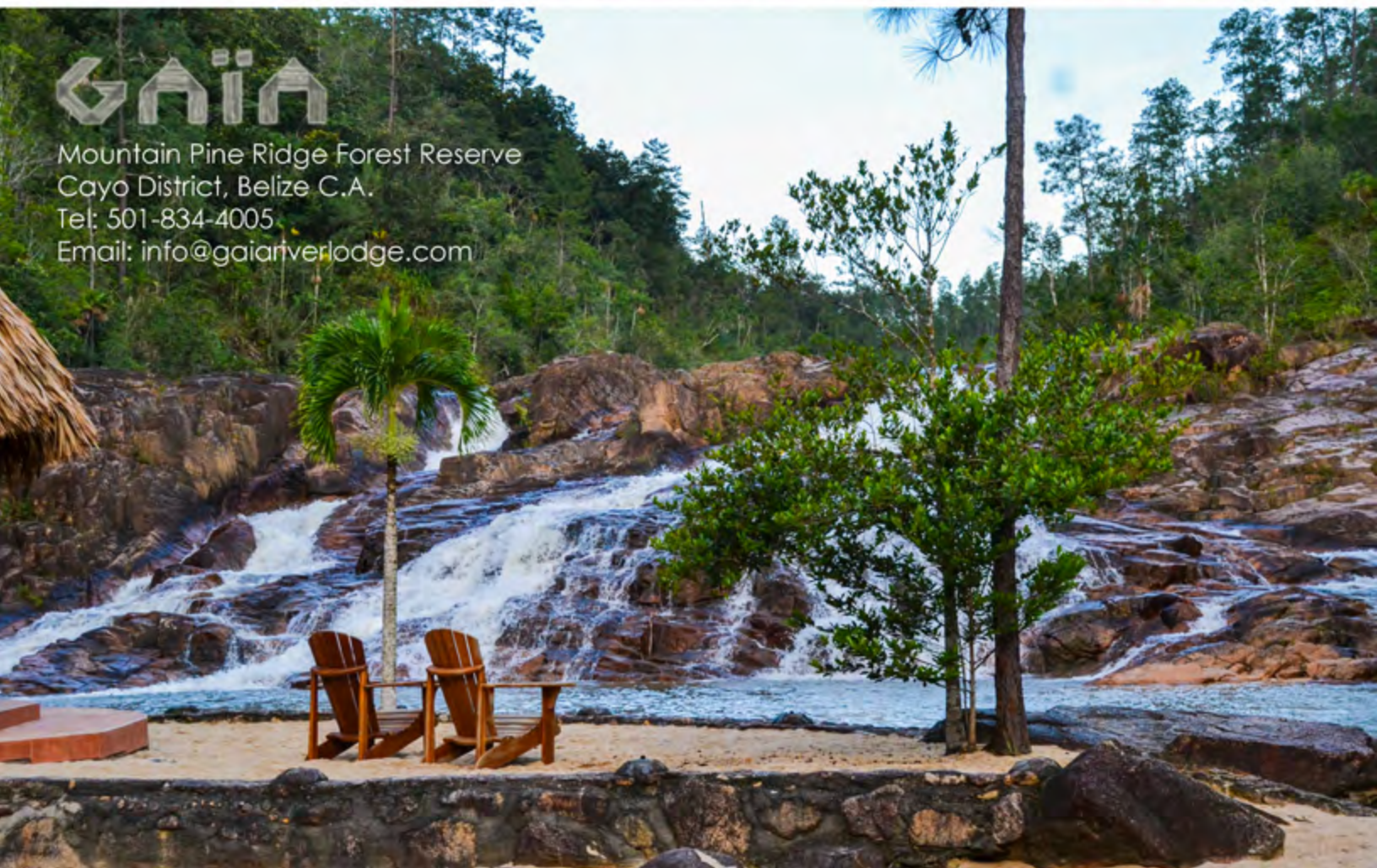
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