

# Protecting and Preserving the Belize Barrier Reef



# From the Editor *Tamara Sniffin*

The Belize Barrier Reef is the crown jewel of our country. She is our pride and joy, and the source of sustenance in one way or another for more than half our population. Be it harvesting from her bounty of fish and tasty crustaceans, to the jobs and millions of dollars she attracts in tourism-based activities, a vast number of Belizeans depend on her generosity. Although our fearless reef, who also protects our beaches from erosion and subdues the mighty waves that roll in from the great blue, tries her best to take care of us, we have managed to tire her out. With overfishing, development, pollution and the rise in water temperatures due to climate change, this living fortress of coral doesn't need any more challenges. With many conservation organizations pushing the agenda, the fear of offshore oil drilling was put to rest when the Government of Belize (GOB) unanimously passed the Petroleum Operations (Offshore Zone Moratorium) bill last year. This step towards safeguarding our precious reef on a national level is unprecedented, and for like-minded non-profit organizations that do their own part in preserving the reef, it is a huge relief. How heart-breaking would it be if you worked hard - like Lisa Carne in our Fragments of Hope story this month - and after years of restoring a portion of the reef with transplanted coral, it was destroyed by oil? Of course, the repercussions would be devastating in ways we can not imagine, and the only thing we can be certain of is how ill-equipped our country is to tackle such a disaster. Although the concern is still there, with the number of oil tankers that traverse our waters daily, we can at least take some of the problem off our worry list.

We applaud the government and all those who worked tirelessly to make this moratorium happen! Here's to protecting our beautiful reef, here's to protecting My Beautiful Belize!

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## Important Information

Belize Tourism Board - 227-2419.

Belize Tourism Industry Association (BTIA) - 227-5717.

Belize Hotel Association - 223-0669, [bha@btl.net](mailto:bha@btl.net)

San Pedro Tourist Guide Association 226-2391.

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

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.

Al-Anon Meetings: Wednesdays, 5:30PM, SP Catholic Church Hall. 608-3924 / [islabon-itaalanon@yahoo.com](mailto:islabon-itaalanon@yahoo.com)

Narcotics Anonymous: *By request* at 623-0316.

Emergency veterinarian care: 610-3647

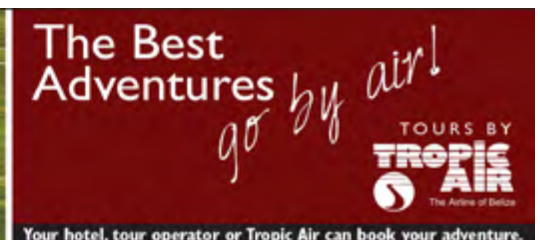
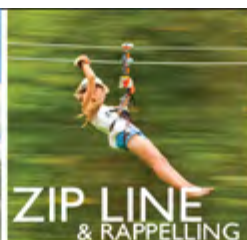
American Crocodile Education Sanctuary/ACES – Don't take matters into your own hands. Call 623-7920 for crocodile problems.

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

SP Town Library - 206-2028.

SP Post Office - 206-2260.

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



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A plant that could be toxic, but is tasty once prepared? Feed us! P. 13

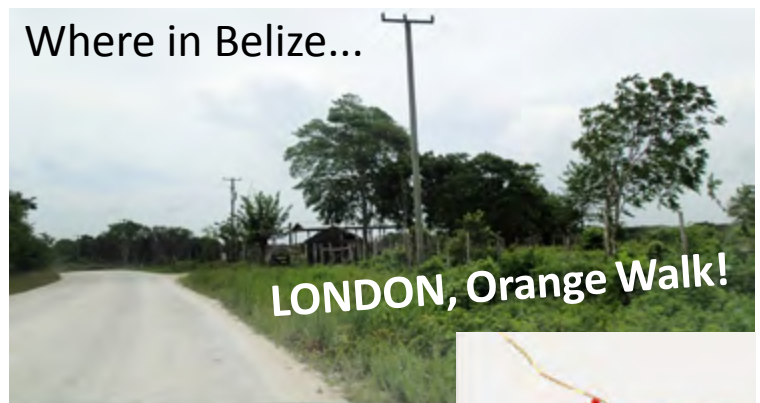
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Shelley Griffith is an avid diver, and considers Belize to be one of the best diving spots in the world. We're so proud! P. 14

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Take a wild guess at this location...let us know on social media! P. 15

## Where in Belize...



The February issue of My Beautiful Belize contained a photo of a location we dubbed the "classic 'blink-and-you'll-miss-it' spot". We had been driving for what felt like hours, with no other cars in sight, our final destination seemingly unreachable. Finally, we came across a stand containing mangoes for sale, and being the mango fiends we are, stopped to buy and also ask for directions.

Imagine our surprise when the helpful lady indicated we were in LONDON! "So when England voted yes to BREXIT, they literally broke away...and came to Belize?!" Tamara and I laughed and joked...but our interest was piqued. We abandoned all hopes of making it to Bomba, our final destination, and turned around and left London in the dust after bagging the last of the season's mangoes.

A few searches online indicated that indeed, there is such a place as London, Orange Walk. Google maps show its location as a blip in the radar...so there you have it. February's mystery location is London, Orange Walk. Take a guess at this month's photo...and if you aren't already, do follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter @mybeautifulbelize, using the hashtag #whereinbelize.



# Protecting and Preserving the Belize Barrier Reef

By Mary Gonzalez

Sometimes the saying “opposites attract” needs to be turned upside its head and proven wrong. Opposites like oil and water need never attract. Imagine splashing about crystal clear waters, chasing after a pretty fish playing hide and seek, then breaking to the surface and getting covered in sludge and oily film. Not the best scenario, right? That is the possibility that faces many populations around the world as the quest for oil, specifically offshore oil, rampages on. Thankfully, Belize’s Barrier Reef and its gorgeous waters has eluded this frightening scenario, after its government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Dean Barrow, and with pressure from its people and numerous organizations, signed the official law that declares our waters off limits to offshore oil drilling. A government and its people – now that is a combination that works!



The unanimously passed Petroleum Operations (Offshore Zone Moratorium) Bill, 2017, places an indefinite moratorium on offshore oil in Belize’s marine territory. One of the organizations that worked tirelessly to fight for this law was Oceana Belize. “This is truly ‘The People’s Law’. Belizeans have remained steadfast in their opposition to offshore oil since they became aware that marine assets were at risk of irreversible damage from the offshore oil industry,” said its Vice President in Belize, Janelle Chanona.

Beyond the physical, there was also economic threat to the country and its people. Belize depends on tourism for a major portion of its economy, and the possibility of offshore oil drilling along its biggest asset, the Belize Barrier Reef, could have crippled the nation. The Belize Barrier Reef is home to 1,400 species, including endangered hawksbill turtles, manatees, rays and six threatened species of shark. A World Heritage Site since 1996, the fragile reef is so much more than the possibility of oil. It is the bread and butter of generations of Belizeans. Even if a Belizean never steps foot in the waters, the reef still affects his life. Much like farmers and mainland suppliers provide us with sustenance, our tourism dollars trickle to all corners of the country via our tax dollars, via salaries sent back home, and more. In fact, it is estimated that 190,000 out of a total population of 332,000 would be negatively affected by oil exploration.

That is because we have a new breed of traveler – we ARE a new kind of traveler. The desire to travel across Mother Earth also comes with a desire for her survival, wanting to preserve her for future generations. The sense of responsibility carried the world over has arrived on our shores. With a law in place to protect and preserve the Belize Barrier Reef, all that is left now is to enjoy her bounty in the various ways we’ve come to discover.

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## Diving

Diving aficionados are enchanted by the diverse scuba diving opportunities within the Belize Barrier Reef. Walls, reef flats, the Great Blue Hole and so much more await exploration...as one repeat traveler to Belize shares with us on Page 14!

## Snorkeling

190 miles of a series of coral reefs straddles our coast, offering a wealth of underwater worlds to explore. Snorkelers delight in the clear, warm waters that provide around 70 hard coral species, 36 soft coral species and around 500 species of fish. They may not see them all at once, but the fun is in the search and discovery!

## SAILING

Nothing beats being on a sailboat, carried along by the sea breeze while safely ensconced inside the barrier provided by our reef. Gorgeous hues of blues and greens flash underneath, and if you're lucky, playful dolphins and eagle rays accompany you along your journey. With the sun above, the waters below, wind in your hair and a drink in hand, it's easy to see how enchanting being alongside the Belize Barrier Reef can be!

## Fishing

Whether it's deep sea or reef fishing, the excitement of loading the boat and heading out to sea never gets old. Avid fishermen know their favorite spots; they follow the tides and currents, ready to hit the waters and reel in the big ones. Huge snapper, grouper, tuna and more wait in the waters.

For those who pay for the privilege of catching their own dinner, there is no bigger excitement than fighting the reel and landing a nice big one. Well, perhaps there is... the knowledge that the fish came from one of the World Heritage Sites, and that by law, it will remain untouched by oil explorers, protected by its government and a proud people.

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# Marine biologist Lisa Carne cultivates coral for a healthier reef

By Tamara Sniffin

*Across the globe, there are non-profit organizations that are dedicated to conservation. Powered by selfless individuals who are dedicated to the cause nearest and dearest to their hearts, there are shining stars within the constellation of people who work hard to make a difference in this troubled world. Be it the preservation of endangered flora and fauna, to keeping native languages, cultures, music and the arts alive, each person is an essential cog in the wheel of conservation. Belize is blessed with many such organizations, and although it takes a collective group to accomplish the many challenges before them, often there are those who inspire others to share the same commitment. In this monthly series, we spotlight one of these outstanding individuals.*

As a young girl growing up in California, USA, Lisa Carne knew at a tender age that she was in love with the creatures of the sea. "I must have been 11 years old when I touched a dolphin in captivity. The dolphin was in a small, shallow holding tank racing in tight circles with crowds of people and no 'supervisor'—it was horrific, and when I touched it, I knew the whole set up was wrong and that the animal should have been in the ocean where it belongs. Flash forward to 1994: on my first trip to southern Belize I swam with wild dolphins for over 90 minutes, and that was just one of many reasons I knew Placencia would be my home forever." Lisa moved to Belize in 1995 and her first 'job' was 'volunteer research assistant' at Carrie Bow Caye, the Smithsonian field station. There Lisa met and assisted researchers working on sponges, corals, mangroves and funny enough, it was the Littlers (a husband and wife team studying marine plants and algae) that taught her to drive a skiff and warned her the corals were in peril-and to focus efforts on saving them before it was too late. That year, 1995, was the first year Belize experienced a coral bleaching event. Lisa has a Bachelor's Degree in biology from the University of California at Santa Cruz and in 2014 she completed the University of Belize's first MSc program in Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Development, in collaboration with the University of the West Indies, graduating with 'distinction' for her research paper on the Acroporid family of coral.

In 1995 Lisa worked as a PADI Open Water Instructor and later as a manager for Glovers Reef Marine Reserve for the Belize Fisheries Department and a biologist for the Southern Environmental Association (SEA-back then called Friends of Nature). When she witnessed the devastating impact of Hurricane Iris in 2001 in Southern Belize, she was deeply troubled by the vulnerability of Belize's marine environment to climate change through rising sea temperatures and stronger storm surges. After conducting reef research on Ambergris Caye in 2002, Lisa began to wonder about the possibility of coral transplanting after



(l-r) Lisa Carne, Dale Godfrey (Chair of the Local Boats) and Mariko Wallen (snorkel guide and reef restorer)

noticing living pieces of Elkhorn coral that had broken from the reef but were still alive. Was it possible to re-forest the reefs by planting coral?

In 2006, Lisa received a research grant from PACT here in Belize for a transplanting experiment; moving Elkhorn corals to Laughing Bird Caye National Park, and those corals are still thriving today! After extensive research, Lisa consulted with Dr. Austin Bowden-Kerby who had pioneered and published on coral nursery methods and in 2009, with funding from the World Wildlife Fund, the Caribbean Community Climate Change Center and the World Bank, Lisa launched her bold new coral nursery project in Southern Belize at Laughing Bird Caye National Park. That same year the Caribbean Acroporids (Elkhorn and Staghorn coral) were the first corals to be Red listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN); their status considered Critically Endangered, one step away from extinct in the wild. These corals were once the most common in the Caribbean but have been reduced by over 99% Caribbean wide within the past 30 years.

When interviewed in 2011 by our sister publication The San Pedro Sun, Lisa commented on her Fragments

of Hope (FoH) program, "In a nutshell the project is basically coral nurseries – growing corals in situ – meaning out in the field, not in a laboratory – and we're focusing on the Acroporids family that's the (Elkhorn, Staghorn, and hybrid) the most important reef-building corals and the fastest growing corals and branching corals. Climate change, the increased intensity and frequency of hurricanes, bleaching events, disease, pollution, over-fishing, sedimentation, and other human impacts are contributing to massive mortality." According to Lisa, not only is coral essential for protecting shorelines and providing habitats for creatures we like to eat and see while in the water, it ultimately contributes to the tourism dollar. Laughing Bird Caye National Park alone was recently valued at US\$4.5million a year.

In 2013 Fragments of Hope, Ltd. was registered in Belize as a not-for-profit organization, with Lisa as the Executive Director alongside her Community Board members. In 2015 Fragments of Hope added a US counterpart (501c3) with a different Board of Directors that includes women scientists. They are funded by several small and medium grants and contracts, with one private investor. Partnering with other conservation organizations such as SEA,

Healthy Reefs Initiative, Oceana and World Wildlife Fund, they also foster a relationship with the Belize Fisheries Department and international researchers.

Now considered the Caribbean's most successful reef restoration projects, Fragments of Hope has planted over 100,000 coral fragments in three different marine protected areas. They use a variety of methods, including rope nurseries which are based on a design adapted from Dr. Bowden-Kerby. Long strands of rope are strung between steel frames which are buried firmly in the seafloor. Coral is attached by twisting apart the rope and inserting the coral between the strands. One benefit of this technique is that once the corals are large enough, the entire coral encrusted rope, or smaller cut sections of the rope can be removed from the nursery and attached directly to the reef. Other corals growing in the nurseries are fragmented and individual branches of coral are attached to the reef using a cement mixture. Fragments of Hope is also growing corals on small cement disks or frag plugs, and these corals are transplanted to the reef

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# Fragments of Hope

Continued from Page 5

once they have grown to a healthy size. The corals usually grow in the nursery for about one year, depending on the species and nursery location, before they are transplanted to the reef. Most recently, the organization invited Dr. David Vaughan from Mote Marine Research Institution to Belize, where they learned his micro-fragmenting technique, which they have adopted and adapted for use directly in the sea bypassing land-based nurseries. Upon his visit, Dr. Vaughan exclaimed, "this is the best example of coral restoration around the world."

It's a labor of love for Lisa, and she comments, "It's super gratifying to see the corals take off and thrive and all the life they bring with them, such as fish, crabs, etc. As a community-based organization that includes fishers and tour guides, it's also super gratifying to see locals feel the same pride when they see the corals THEY planted thriving years later." When asked if there's one accomplishment she's especially proud of Lisa thoughtfully responds, "Besides the corals, it is seeing how the people involved respond to our success and providing local education, along with a few jobs! I'm MOST happy about taking Belizeans to other parts of Belize, and now, through Belize Marine Conservation and Climate Adaptation Project (MCCAP), we've expanded our work, so we get to bring folks from Placencia to areas such as Turneffe Atoll, so they get to know more areas of their own reef. We also bring regional partners here to Belize such as scientists, tour guides and fishers and taking Belizeans to other regional places is great. Next month we have three Jamaicans coming to learn about what we are doing, and later four of us will go to Jamaica. In September we have a group of Mexican, Guatemalan and Honduran scientists coming to Belize to inspect and tour our work, and then the same group will go to Mexico. It's all about the exchanges!"

Lisa's efforts have not gone unnoticed, and in 2014 she was named "Ocean Hero" by Oceana Belize. And, in 2017, Fragments of Hope attended the 23rd Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to receive their Lighthouse Activity award from the UN Secretariat for Climate Change under their Momentum for Change Program. As if Lisa isn't busy enough, over the years she has also published two books: *Mangoes and More: A Rough Guide to Local Fruit Trees and Flowers in Belize* (2002) and *Way Bak Den: Preserving and Celebrating Creole and Garifuna Culture on the Placencia Peninsula, Belize* (2010).



The future looks bright for Fragments of Hope, with a grant from GEF Small Grants Programme this year for educational tools such as coloring books, puzzles, and posters using local artist Anton Leslie. The first coloring book Anton Leslie created, "more corals=more fish" can be downloaded for free from their website [fragmentsofhope.org](http://fragmentsofhope.org), teacher's corner page. They were also awarded two grants from MAR Fund for more exchange trips -and have ongoing work in South Water Caye Marine Reserve and Turneffe through MCCAP (World Bank) until 2020.

To learn more about Fragments of Hope please visit their website at <http://fragmentsofhope.org>.



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## SHOP



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**WHITE SANDS DIVE SHOP:** A PADI 5 star Dive shop in San Pedro Town on Ambergris Caye teaching scuba diving and certifying divers, as well as providing daily Diving and Snorkeling adventures to the beautiful Belize Barrier Reef. Scheduled (local) departures are at 9:00AM, and they pick you up at the hotel dock. 226-2405.



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## Sudoku Time!

Answers on Page 13

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



## EATS & TREATS

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**COASTAL XPRESS WATER TAXI** – Scheduled ferry service & water taxi for Ambergris Caye. Phone 226-3007.

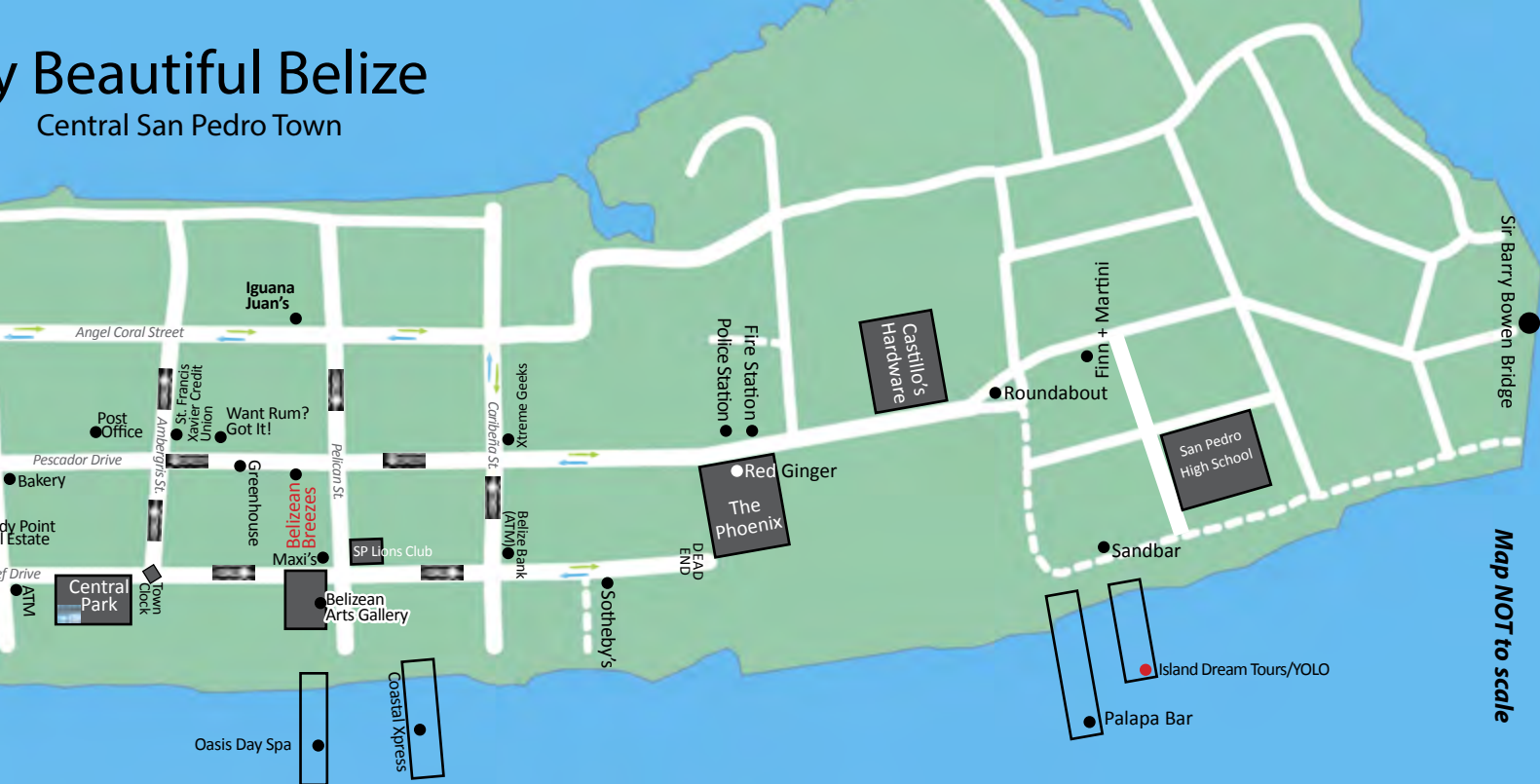
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**EI DIVINO CARIBBEAN STEAKHOUSE & MARTINI BAR:** *Nominated for Restaurant of the Year 2016 by BTB!* Banana Beach's signature restaurant, featuring indoor and outdoor dining and sports lounge.

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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## Irresistibly healthy and delicious treats at Juice Dive

With most of Belize's agriculture industry providing fresh and organic produce and the rich bounty of the sea, making the healthy choice when it comes to meals is easier and tastier than ever. As we become increasingly aware of how we nourish our bodies, finding like-minded businesses that cater to our nutritional needs becomes important. One island eatery leading the delicious green way is Juice Dive.

As the first commercial cold press juicer in Belize, Juice Dive is so much more than shots of wheatgrass! Using a combination of vegetables and fruits, pressed to extract all its nutrients and fiber, the juices are refreshing and tasty. You may taste the health, but you'll enjoy every last drop. Since they held their soft opening on December 30, 2017, Juice Dive has had customers rushing back for their delicious juices, avocado toasts, wraps, and salads.



Proprietor Renato Solis (*above, middle*) is a Belizean who returned to his home country after living in New York, USA for the majority of his life. His wife Brooke (*left inset*) is also a major inspiration – the reason the family is healthy, according to their son Justin (*above, right*). "She has been making the Green Goddess dressing since I was in elementary school, and I think of her every time I have it in a meal." With Brooke's original recipes, Renato, Justin and his brother Alex (*above, left*), Juice Dive is a true family business. Alongside Sergio (the chef), Hector (the juicer) and Miguel (the all-around helper), the business is providing islanders and visitors a variety of refreshing juices as well as delicious breakfast and lunch options that include wraps, salads and for the first time in Belize, Acai bowls!



A beautiful and delicious Acai bowl

Curious to try out the healthy treats, Janelle and I decided to drop in for a taste-test. At the entrance, you're immediately greeted by a fridge stocked with a rainbow of fresh juices...hmmm, which one to taste first?! Should we go for the Sweet or Super Green? Are we here to Feel the Beet? *Should we just drink and lay off the terrible puns...?* Eight flavors later, we're convinced that two pounds of fresh fruit and veggies in one container is the easiest way to get all the nutrients. However, I remain hesitant when it comes to the Juice Cleanse packages – despite the phenomenal health benefits!



As it is, we're torn between our favorite juice flavors. Janelle's was the creamy Crescent Moon – a mix of filtered water, cashews, vanilla, dates and a touch of agave nectar. Mine was the Carrot Karma, a delightful orange juice with carrots, red and green apples, ginger and lemon. The Spicy Melon could easily be naughtied up with a shot of vodka (like I said, I'm only marginally healthier than before), and with ingredients like pineapple, cucumber, green apple, and mint, it's clear why Sweet Green is a clear favorite of many.

As for their food selection, everything on the menu sounds delicious, but my eye is caught by the Thai Chicken Wrap. I love the complex and savory flavors in Asian cuisine, and can never get enough, so Justin and Sergio get to whipping up two separate wraps for us to try. The Thai chicken wrap has crunchy kale and romaine layered over a vegan tortilla, topped with roast chicken breast, scallions, pickled red onions, cucumber, shredded carrots and an amazingly delicious chili peanut sauce that Justin whipped up while we were chatting away. Fresh, crunchy, sweet and salty flavors made this a winner in my book. Loaded with roast chicken, crunch lettuce, black beans, corn, tomatoes and a spicy chipotle dressing, the Southwestern wrap is bundled in its vegan tortilla. Janelle even claims she forgot she was eating something healthy, and if that isn't a testament to the Juice Dive's success, I'm not sure what is!

"Eat Clean and Live Green" is their motto, and Juice Dive is paving the way to deliciously healthy eating in Belize. Serving organic, vegetarian and vegan options, they are open seven days a week, from 8AM to 6PM. They are located on Pescador Drive, directly across the street from Atlantic Bank's San Pedro Branch main office. Check them out and be sure to follow them on social media platforms @juicedive. Locals receive a 20% discount on all food purchases.

By Mary Gonzalez



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# Honoring La Semana Santa: The Holy Easter traditions of Belize

By Janelle Cowo

Around the world, Easter is a time for families to come together, often taking a vacation and reveling in the sun – even if it's just for a weekend. This year, Easter weekend begins on Friday, March 30th with Belize's top tourism destinations already gearing up for fabulous beach parties, sporting events, and entertainment for all ages. Beyond the revelry, however, Easter is also a commemoration of La Semana Santa (Holy Week) for the religious communities in Belize.



From Sunday, March 25th to Saturday, March 31st, Christians across the country observe the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through a weeklong series of Easter activities. The week begins with the Domingo Ramos (Palm Sunday Procession). Roman Catholic Churches in several municipalities re-enact Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Holy Monday's Procesion del Silencio and Holy Tuesday's Procesion de Encuentro reflects Christ's teachings.

These events culminate on Good Friday morning, featuring the Live Passion Play as streets are transformed into the Via Dolorosa, with local actors dramatizing Christ's trials, tribulations, and crucifixion. Residents also create intricately designed sawdust tapestries on the streets in a show of

gratitude for blessings received throughout the year. The late evening Procesion del Santo Entierro – Christ's symbolic funeral procession – passes over these tapestries. While this event is held cross country, the largest show is held in Benque Viejo del Carmen Town in the Cayo District.



La Semana Santa concludes with Holy Saturday's late-night Mass recalling Christ's resurrection. During this time, one can relish in the typical dishes such as palmito, cox'an, bollitos de Chaya, empanadas de papas and other meat-free foods. Everyone is welcomed to participate in the Semana Santa celebrations in the local municipalities across Belize.

If you find yourself in Belize this Easter and are curious to participate in the country's local traditions, know you are always welcome. Note that Good Friday is a Dry Day, and as such, no alcoholic beverages are to be served/sold from Thursday at midnight to Friday at midnight.

## Guanacaste National Park – jungle exploring done easy!

By Tamara Sniffin



Belize is blessed with an abundance of national parks, natural reserves and wildlife sanctuaries. Most of them are off the beaten path, but there are a few that are easy to access from the road, which is great when you don't have a lot of time to explore or just need a quick nature fix! Guanacaste National Park has to be the easiest one to reach, and it's amazing how immersed you feel within this jungle paradise when you are so close to civilization! The dense habitat is known as a secondary broadleaf forest, which benefits many birds and wildlife, including the shy and secretive "tiger cat" or jaguarundi and black howler monkeys. This popular getaway is located just two miles from the capital city of Belmopan in the Cayo District at the intersection of the Hummingbird and Western Highways. You don't even need wheels to get there as buses stop right outside the park!

Named after a very large and unusually old Guanacaste tree, spared by woodcutters because of its split trunk, there are several large Guanacaste trees within the park. Known for being one of the largest tree species in Central America, Guanacaste trees have wide-reaching branches that support a variety of orchids, bromeliads, ferns, cacti, lianas, and vines. The Guanacaste tree is highly prized for its resistance to insects and decay, and is a choice timber for making dugout canoes or dories.

The park's small size of 50 acres allows visitors to enjoy wildlife and tropical vegetation and is the perfect getaway for an afternoon commune with nature. Laced with two miles of maintained trails that won't challenge your level of fitness too much, you can either perch yourself at the bird watching deck overlooking the Roaring Creek, enjoy the scenic swimming area where the Belize River and Roaring Creek meet or meander along the Living Cycle trail and learn about plants and their traditional uses through informative signage along the way. Besides Guanacaste trees, the park is also home to majestic Rain trees teaming with life, Mamey, Sapote, Brazilian Fire tree, and Mahogany, which is Belize's national tree.

Continued on Page 13

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There is also a wide range of animals that you may be lucky enough to spot when exploring the park. Keep an eye out for white-tailed deer, jaguarundi, kinkajou, nine-banded armadillo, among countless others. This park is also a favorite for birdwatching, and over one hundred different bird species have been recorded here, including the Lesson's motmot and black-faced ant thrush. Other birds seen at Guanacaste Park include the smoky-brown woodpecker, black-headed trogon, red-fored amazon, the magnolia warbler, belted kingfisher, and the bright-rumped attila.

Managed by the Belize Audubon Society, the area was established as a Crown Reserve in 1973 and was declared a national park in 1990! On-site there is a Visitor Center that provides educational information about fungus-farming leaf-cutter ants and the mini-ecosystem inside a

## Sudoku Answers

### Puzzle on Page 7

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

bromeliad among other topics, and there's a groomed lawn area that hosts a nice thatched picnic area as well. Guanacaste National Park is also a popular area for spectators to enjoy the annual La Ruta Maya Belize River Challenge, where they cheer on the competing participants along the river banks as they race by in canoes and traditional dories.

The park is open from 8am until 4:30pm with an admission fee of \$1 BZD for citizens and \$5 BZD for tourists. It is recommended that visitors wear long-sleeved shirts, sturdy shoes, and pants to avoid contact with poisonous plants and insects. For more information about Guanacaste National Park please visit [www.belizeaudubon.org](http://www.belizeaudubon.org).

# Chaya- Maya Spinach

By Mary Gonzalez

Commonly referred to as Maya Spinach, Chaya is a big part of Belizean cuisine. For as long as I can remember, a chaya tree or two would always be a part of the home garden while growing up. Belizeans, especially those who grew up in villages, learned to eat from the land and some ingredients are probably only common to certain areas. Thankfully, chaya is easy to grow pretty much anywhere, not invasive and growing up to six feet in height, so it is a common staple in household kitchens.

Preparing the chaya leaves for eating is very important. They should be cooked before eating, as the raw leaves contain a high content of toxic hydrocyanic acid. To safely ingest these greens, the required cooking time is 20 minutes. Once cooked, it can be added to soups, sauces, salsas and even salads.

One common way that chaya is prepared is in tamales. Known as tamalitos de Chaya, these are a Mestizo delicacy often topped with a meat (usually pigtail) and tomato sauce and shredded Dutch cheese. However, an even easier way to prepare it is in scrambled eggs (recipe follows)



With the Scientific name: *Cnidoscolus aconitifolius*, chaya is believed to provide quite a few health benefits. In Mexico, the list of bold claims include improving blood circulation, lowering cholesterol, reducing weight, preventing cough, increase calcium in bones, replacing iron in the blood, improving memory and brain function, combatting arthritis and diabetes, helping with digestion, improving vision, reducing appearance of inflamed veins and hemorrhoids and even decongesting lungs! Nutritionally, chaya is exceptionally high in protein, calcium, iron, and vitamin A, with its levels of nutrients two to three times greater than any other land-based leafy green vegetable. Whichever way you look at chaya, either as another fun vegetable to add to your diet, or if it is the first time you're consuming it, know that you're enjoying a staple Belizean ingredient! Bon Appetit!

## Maya Eggs

### Ingredients:

Chaya leaves (10-12), boiled, drained and chopped finely  
Coconut Oil  
Diced onions  
Diced peppers  
Diced tomatoes (2 medium)  
6-8 eggs  
Salt and pepper to taste

### Directions:

Sautee onions and peppers in coconut oil till fragrant, then add tomatoes to blister.  
Add chaya leaves and continue sauteing till properly combined.  
Add eggs, season and stir till cooked to your taste.  
Serve with fresh hot corn or flour tortillas, or to be even more decadent, a few fry jacks. Enjoy!



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# Belize - My Happy Place

By Mary Gonzalez

The beauty that surrounds us Belizeans is immense and varied. Yet, caught in the throes of simply living and surviving, we might miss moments here and there. However, we get a gentle reminder when we meet people who have plotted and planned for months to visit our country. We meet them and see them trying to enjoy every second of their precious vacation time exploring Belize's wonders. Suddenly, our curiosity is piqued. Why here? What is it that draws you here, out of all the places in the world? Why Belize?



Shelley, 2<sup>nd</sup> from right

Shelley Griffith is from Canada, and sadly, a Seahawks fan. However, she makes up for her choice in NFL teams by being a pretty awesome and a hilarious friend to a bunch of us. Her primary reason for traveling to Ambergris Caye is diving, and I was fascinated to learn why. **How did you find out about Belize?**

*I travel quite a bit and when I wanted to see Maya history, Belize and*

*Guatemala were first to come up on a Google search. After more research, I decided to do Belize over Guatemala because it has such a diverse eco-system with the jungle and the Caribbean Sea only a few hours away. Coming from a large country like Canada, that's a very small amount of travel time to see such contrast!*

**Where all have you dived?**

*Belize and Hawaii.*

**How often do you get to go diving?**

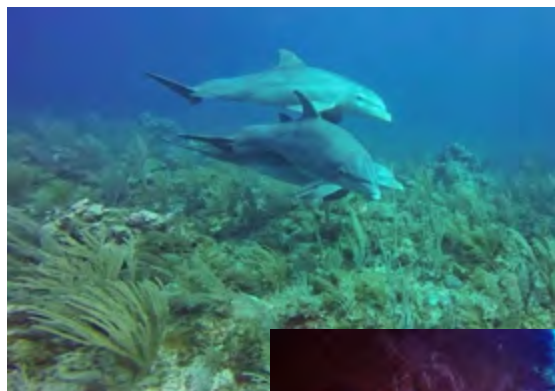
*Maybe once or twice a year.*

**What is it about the diving here that makes it so special for you?**

*I got certified by Robbie from Chuck and Robbie's a year and a half ago, during a relatively difficult period of my life as my father had just unexpectedly passed away. Robbie and his whole crew were amazing, and I found being underwater extremely therapeutic. They took such good care of me, I keep coming back. I guess I've attached a special meaning to diving and coming to visit and dive with the guys at Chuck and Robbie's is a highlight of my year.*

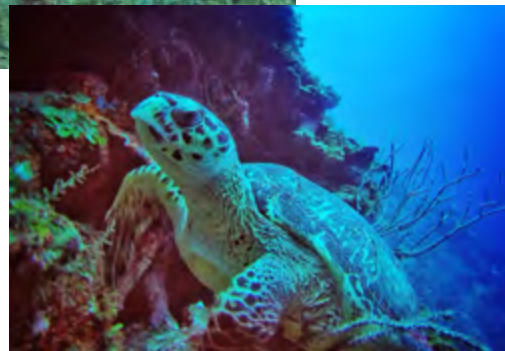
**What's been your favorite experience?**

*Seeing the dolphins so up close and personal and just seeing all the marine life. The turtles are my favorite, so I really love when I see a lot of turtles.*



**Do you have a particular dive bucket list?**

*Not really. I've heard Belize is some of the best diving in the world, so it's a pretty high standard to start off with. However, I want to check out the cenotes in Tulum and some of the underwater caves there, and I do want to go dive in South East Asia... (Uhhh...we'll be right back...gotta work on opening our SEA branch of My Beautiful...S.E.A!)*



12

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# March in Belize!

**March 3<sup>rd</sup>** "Unchained" Fashion Show at the Ramada Belize Princess Hotel and Casino, Belize City starting at 7PM

**March 9<sup>th</sup>** – Cribbage Challenge at Feliz Bar and Grill, north San Pedro Town starting at 4PM

**March 9<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup>** Island Invasion DJ Bash – Fido's Restaurant & Bar – San Pedro Town starting at 9PM

**March 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>** La Ruta Maya River Challenge starting at Hawkesworth Bridge, San Ignacio Town (more info at [larutamaya.bz](http://larutamaya.bz))

**March 10<sup>th</sup>** Ride to the Reef starting at National Assembly Building of Belize, Belmopan City at 7AM

**March 10<sup>th</sup>** Button Wood Bay Regatta at BTL Park, Belize City starting at 9AM

**March 11<sup>th</sup>** Baron Bliss Harbour Regatta at BTL Park, Belize City starting at 9AM

**March 12<sup>th</sup>** 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Raft Race Regatta at Barrier Reef Sports Bar, Caye Caulker Village starting at 11AM

**March 17<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup>** Fiesta de San Jose at San Jose Nuevo Palmar Village, Orange Walk District starting at 5PM each day

**March 17<sup>th</sup>** 6<sup>th</sup> Annual St. Patrick's Day Bash at Crazy Canucks Beach Bar, San Pedro Town starting at 1PM

**March 18<sup>th</sup>** Marco Gonzalez Solstice Festival at Marco Gonzalez Maya Site, south San Pedro Town starting at 10AM

**March 24<sup>th</sup>** 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Lion Fish Derby at Barrier Reef Sports Bar and Grill, Caye Caulker Village starting at 10AM

**March 24<sup>th</sup>** Invasion Latina at San Pedro Lions Den, San Pedro Town starting at 7PM

**March 29<sup>th</sup>** Hopkins International Paranda Music Fest at Palmeto Grove Cultural and Fishing Lodge, Hopkins Village starting at 1PM

**April 7<sup>th</sup>** Belize Truck Show at Spanish Lookout Village, Cayor District starting at 8AM



## Where in Belize...

Despite its relatively small square mileage, a lot of Belize remains a mystery. There are so many hidden nooks that may never be discovered by all. We can't tell you how often it is we take the wrong turn down a dirt road, only to find ourselves feeling like we're in a whole new world. It's the beauty of exploring a place that remains relatively undeveloped, and if you're up for the adventure, who knows where you'll end up!



With the Lenten season in full effect, Christians across Belize flock to the many places of worship to show devotion to their faith. In Belize, one of the most predominant religions remains the Roman Catholic Faith, with churches in every city, town and even villages. Many of these churches date back to the beginning of Belize's history, displaying its colonial roots via architecture. This church is one of those colonial relics that continues to welcome worshippers. Do you know where it is?

And that is all the hint we'll give you!

Join our guessing game on Instagram and Facebook, let us know if you can identify this little spot!

To find out where exactly it is, and how to get there, follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter @mybeautifulbelize, using the hashtag #whereinbelize. We can't wait to see your guesses!

## Wolfe's Woofers

### Retirement Gift

"After twenty-five years of service as a church pastor, I retired last week," the tourist told me. "The church board gave me a two-week vacation here in Belize as part of the retirement package."

"That's a good retirement gift," I said.

Reverend Hugh McCready was seated at a table near mine on the deck of the Holiday Hotel, where we enjoyed conversation over our coffee.

"I'm really close to the guys on the board," he said. "One of them—Bishop Hanlon, is a terrible practical joker and he promised to provide me with a little something extra. I shudder to think what he meant by that."

A young woman in a bikini walked up from the beach onto the deck and stopped at the minister's table.

"Are you Reverend Hugh?"

"Yes, miss."

"My name is Rita," she said. "A Mister Hanlon paid my way down here to be the something extra he promised for your vacation."

"What?!"

The minister turned beet red and I was afraid he would choke on his coffee.

"Hold on," he said to the girl as he pulled his phone from his pocket.

He frantically dialed a number.

"Hey, Ron. This is Hugh McCready. What? No, I don't think it's funny. What were you thinking? Don't you think that after twenty-five years of service for the Lord that I should be shown some respect? I am the moral leader of the community. This isn't over. When I get back we're going to get a few things straight."

He closed the phone and put it back in his pocket.

While he was on the phone the girl in the bikini got to her feet and began to steal away.

The reverend said, "Hold on there pretty lady. I'm not angry with you."



By Dennis Wolfe

## White Sands Dive Shop

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