

My
Beautiful **Belize**

TRAVEL PUBLICATION

| November 2018 | Vol. 06 #09 |

Victoria Peak
an icon soaring among the clouds

From the Editor *Tamara Sniffin*



One thing that keeps visitors coming back to Belize is our amazing people. Quick to smile and as warm as the sunshine, our colorful persona is at the center of our boomerang effect. Feeling welcome is one of the first things that makes a vacation feel right, and don't be surprised when on a return trip familiar faces come with a hug and a "good to see you" greeting!

While attending the first annual Belize Birding Festival in Belmopan over the weekend of October 27th this sense of friendship was in full force.

Belizean birding and tour guides from around the country along with birding enthusiasts of all levels of expertise flocked together to share a genuine passion that goes deeper than avian love, it's a love for nature, conservation and education. It felt like a grand reunion of old friends along with the fun of making new ones, and together we had a blast.

Of course, nothing is more fun than sharing one's passion, and for those of you who are lucky enough to meet one of our talented birding guides you are in for a real 'tweet'. Not only do they come with the requisite Belizean charm, they are super smart, fun and full of enthusiasm.

No matter who you have the pleasure of meeting while visiting our humble country, the message is clear, we WELCOME you to My Beautiful Belize.

About the front page:

Victoria Peak is located within the Maya Mountains inside the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary. Standing at 3,670 feet high, the natural monument was named in honor of Queen Victoria. It is the second highest peak in the country after Doyle's Delight.

Aerial images were made possible thanks to Tropic Air Limited.

www.mybeautifulbelize.com

Wolfe's Woofers Shipwrecked



By Dennis Wolfe

"Mr. Dennis, why don't you go with me on a boat ride this weekend?" Mario asked. "I'm going down to Barranco to visit my grandma on my mama's side."

"Where is Barranco?"

"It's on the coast near Sarstoon National Park, way south of Dangriga and just north of Guatemala. If I go by bus it takes two days, but I can make it in my skiff in a day. I could use some company."

"It should be an interesting trip," I said. "I'll go."

We made it to within sight of the Barranco pier when a sudden storm started blowing us back out to sea. During the night we ran out of gas and the next morning the wind and tide brought us ashore.

"Mr. Dennis, we're in big trouble," Mario said. "We're probably in Guatemala or Honduras."

"We're going to have to find some people," I told him.

He said, "We got to watch out, though. Some of these local people will just as soon kill an outsider as look at him. I hear some of these tribes are savages."

We pushed through the bush until just before dark, when we smelled smoke and heard voices.

"Let's be careful," Mario whispered. "We got to make sure they ain't no head-hunters or nothing."

On our hands and knees, we crawled slowly toward the sounds.

Suddenly a voice rang out.

"You damned idiot! You just spilled rum over the whole deck of cards!"

Mario stood up and said, "We're saved, Mr. Dennis! They're Christians!"

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Where in Belize...

Double Head Cabbage!



Idyllic, dusty roads and wide-open expanse, this place is one of several that form a special cluster of settlements in Belize. Double Head Cabbage is a village in the Belize River Valley, and its name inspired one of the most fun road trips for our My Beautiful Belize Team - complete with a Howler Monkey Sanctuary visit!

To join our guessing game, follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter @mybeautifulbelize, using the hashtag #whereinbelize.

You can also send us your images of mystery locations to add to our guessing game! Send them to hello@mybeautifulbelize.com and join the fun!

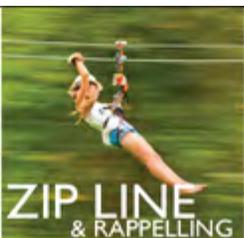
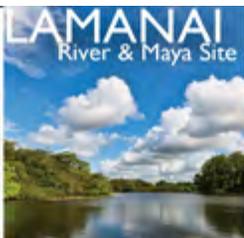
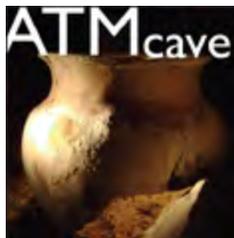
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Cave Tubing and Zip Lining – it’s a VITAL tour!

By Mary Gonzalez

Exploring Belize as a Belizean never gets old. The country may be small, but so much of it is undeveloped and untouched, simply waiting for curious travelers to discover her wonders. The Belize Tourism Board is the main body responsible for building tourism in the country, and part of their itinerary for the year is inviting the local media to explore a different part of Belize to live the tourist life and enjoy what millions of visitors do each year.

One such location that calls the adventurous and enthusiastic is the Western region, primarily the Cayo district. The largest of Belize’s six districts, Cayo provides rolling hills, mountains, caves, rivers, rainforest,

wildlife, untamed beauty and rustic luxury alongside the warm, welcoming smiles of its people, who are a mix of Creole, Mestizo, and Maya.

Our eager group of writers, photographers and videographers were thrilled to discover that Mr. Vitalino Reyes, of Vital Nature Maya Tours, had planned a double whammy of adventures for us: Zip Lining AND Cave Tubing. I was beyond excited for the zip lining, but looked askance at the cave tubing portion, having had less than a stellar experience before. Vowing to enjoy every moment, I joined our group in strapping up for the first part of the day’s fun. Heavy duty harnesses wound around us, metal buckles clinking as we

tromped uphill for about 10 minutes to the first platform.

After our guides gave a thorough explanation and safety drill, we formed a line to begin the fun. The sight of the cables strung through thick jungle had my blood pumping, and when it was my turn, there was

nothing but the rush of air and a whoop of excitement as I landed on the second platform, ready to jump on and ride down to the next and the next and the next! The final zip was beyond unique, with our shrieks ringing across a river that rushed

Continued on Page 4

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Vital Tours

Continued from Page 3



below us as we flew overhead. It was all smiles and high fives for our motley crew, as we made our way to the next stop: Nohoch Che'en.

Awaiting us at the gear station were inflatable tubes, emblazoned with the cavetubing.bz logo, hard hats with built-in-lights, and of course, life-jackets. Oh yes, cave tubing means getting in the water, sitting on an inner tube and floating down a river through a cave. My previous experiences meant hooking my ankle/feet under someone's arm, holding on to someone else's and forming a wiggly worm that would have to maneuver through the cave's twists and turns. It turns out that Vital Nature's guides have another plan and a great one at that!

Our tubing adventure began with a nice hike past an interesting cave entrance, then across a rushing river. The currents were strong, and my guide Julio explained that the waters are fed from rivers that converge from waterways of southern Belize. When it rains in that area, a few days later, we get rising waters and sometimes, tours have to be cancelled! We noted the marker set to determine the safety and were relieved to see it was all clear.

As always, I lagged a little behind, wanting to look at every leaf, nook, and creature along the pathway, and Julio was only too willing to keep me company, showing me where tarantulas hide and sharing fun tidbits about life in the jungle. By the

time we rolled up to the entrance of the cave where our adventure would start, it was simply to listen to the guide's rules, getting into our tubes and prepping for our ride along the winding river inside the cave. Julio tied up four tubes, and my companions Ashley, Mike, and Jamie clambered on to their tubes as well. There was no need to create a human wriggle worm; Julio would direct us all, dragging us if necessary, and letting the currents do the work. Our tubes were fully protected, and so we were dry and comfortable the entire way through.

Through the ever-darkening cave, we went, the swift but gentle current leading the way and our lights shining tiny spotlights on stalag-

mites and stalactites, the walls of the cave twinkling back in some spots where mineral deposits were bigger. Overhead, we could see some bats sleeping and all around us was the whooshing sound of water pouring somewhere further inside. With our hands and legs free, the entire experience was a pleasure. We took in as much of the sights as we could, and when it became too dark, we enjoyed the eerie calm before another spot of light would come from around the bend. It's easy to see how our ancestors, the Maya, revered these dark spaces and believed them to be the entrance to the underworld.

By the time we finally made our way outside, the exit of the cave



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Xibalba – Are our caves a passageway to the underworld?

Belize’s cultural heritage boasts of three Maya groups: Ke’kchi, Yucatec and Mopan, and their contributions to our landscape are everywhere, particularly in the jungles. Archaeologists and modern-day explorers are fascinated with their pottery, temples, traditions, and rituals. Some of the most intriguing finds have been inside caves, and it’s easy to see why those darkened hollows of earth are significant to the Maya!

Pronounced She-Bal-Bah, Xibalba can be roughly translated to “place of fear”; it is also referred to as the entrance to hell (which, frankly, strikes fear in my heart!). Those are traditionally cave entrances and having traipsed around a couple; I can say that if my lights went out and the utter darkness of a cave surrounded me, I’d probably believe I was about to enter the underworld indeed!

One of the most significant caves in this country is the ATM – Actun Tunichil Muknal. This archaeological site includes skeletons, ceramics, and stoneware. There are several areas with skeletal remains in the main chamber, including the famous “Crystal Maiden,” believed to be the skeleton of an adolescent (possibly 18-year-old female) who may have been sacrificed. Her bones have been calcified to a sparkling, crystallized appearance.

There is still so much to learn about our ancestors, but the clues they left behind sure make for incredible stories and adventures! As we often tell our friends who visit and want to explore, ‘follow the rules and listen to your guide.’ We certainly do not want a modern-day remake of Xibalba adventures!

What in Belize? Under the sea...



Photo by Gordon Kirkwood

Renowned for its epic diving and snorkeling along the Belize Barrier Reef, our underwater world is full of wonderfully unique creatures. No matter where you look, chances are something is looking back! When exploring our vast seascape have you ever ventured across a face like this? This little guy is probably as perplexed as we are when exchanging the glance, wondering, what IS THAT in Belize!?

beaming beautifully at us, my perception of cave tubing was changed. When you’re not completely focused on trying to stay as dry as possible while navigating the dark with a bunch of other people, the experience can be quite serene! Vital Nature Tours certainly has it figured out with the right ratio of guides to guests, and their knowledge makes the entire experience a pleasure.

Once outside, we made our way back to the river that we’d crossed earlier, but instead of walking back, we let the tubes do the work, opting for a scenic downriver ride on the tubes. Above us was blue skies, around us tall green trees and unexplored dry caves, and under us, a swiftly running river took us to our final stop. We had been ‘to hell and back’ – and it was a journey worth experiencing!

Vital Nature Tours is a Belizean-owned family-run tour company. You can learn more about booking tours by visiting their website at www.cavetubing.bz or email vitalinoreyes@gmail.com. You can also call 602-8975 (011-501-602-8975 if dialing from the US). They provide pickups/drop-offs!

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Congratulations to the 2018 Ocean Hero Award Winners!

Being an ocean hero can mean many things but mostly, it means deciding that you are ready to take action to help to protect our marine environment for people and creatures of today and for future generations. Over the past nine years, Oceana in Belize has been proud to recognize several Belizeans for their contributions to the sustainable management and protection of our marine environment.

On October 27, 2018, two more Belizeans were honored for their invaluable contributions to ocean conservation. The 2018 Oceana Ocean Heroes are Captain Earl David Jr. and Michael J. Heusner.

David Jr. has lived and worked in what is now the South Water Caye Marine Reserve all his life. As a seaman, captain and fisherman, he has advocated for the sustainable use and development of Belize's marine resources. David Jr. has also supported scientific research of coral reefs, mangroves and sea grasses through his technical and logistical assistance to the Smithsonian Institution's field operations at Carrie Bow Caye.

"Well I never really thought about it as, as a hero. I mean, I just do what I had to do and get on with it but I guess it's a good thing you know and I just hope that when it comes to conservation and taking care of the ocean other people who just feel would be as passionate as I am and let's try and keep this thing for the

grandchildren, you know. At least they can experience some of this. Because I believe I have seen the changes on the sea. And it's not pretty."

Michael "Mike" Heusner has been active in conservation in Belize for more than four decades. In 2009, he was a leading advocate for the protection of three sports fishing species to secure the lucrative economic benefits of the fly fishing sector. Heusner's tireless efforts in this regard continues up to today given that indiscriminate fishing gear such as gillnets undermine the protected status of a host of charismatic species such as managers and turtles as well as

bonefish, tarpon and permit.

"Whatever I've done has been achieved through active participation in various organizations and committees. I challenge the younger generations to get informed and involved in development issues. Work as an advocate rather than an activist. We need activists and we need advocates, who are after the same end result."

Recognition of ocean heroes by Oceana began in 2009. In presenting the awards to both honorees, Oceana's Vice President for Belize Janelle Chanona shared, "Collectively our awardees represent the reality that as Belizeans we are innately aware of the existential

connection between our lives and our natural resources. All around us are men and women who are going above and beyond that call of duty to safeguard Belize, our home. Their actions come straight from the heart; they do what they do not to get praise but because it's the right thing to do—and not necessarily because it's the easy thing to do. And all of us benefit. Very rarely do we even know who these unsung heroes are—much less do we get the opportunity to acknowledge their selfless efforts. At its essence, that is what this award is all about: To express gratitude and to share their stories so that others can be inspired."



2018 Oceana Ocean Heroes Captain Earl David Jr. (left) and Michael J. Heusner (right) alongside Oceana in Belize VP Janelle Chanona. The limestone carvings were designed by Gilvano Swasey and made by artist Anthony Vaccario of Maskall Village.

North Ambergris Caye

©2018, Map not to scale



EAT



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SuDoku Time! Answers on Page 15

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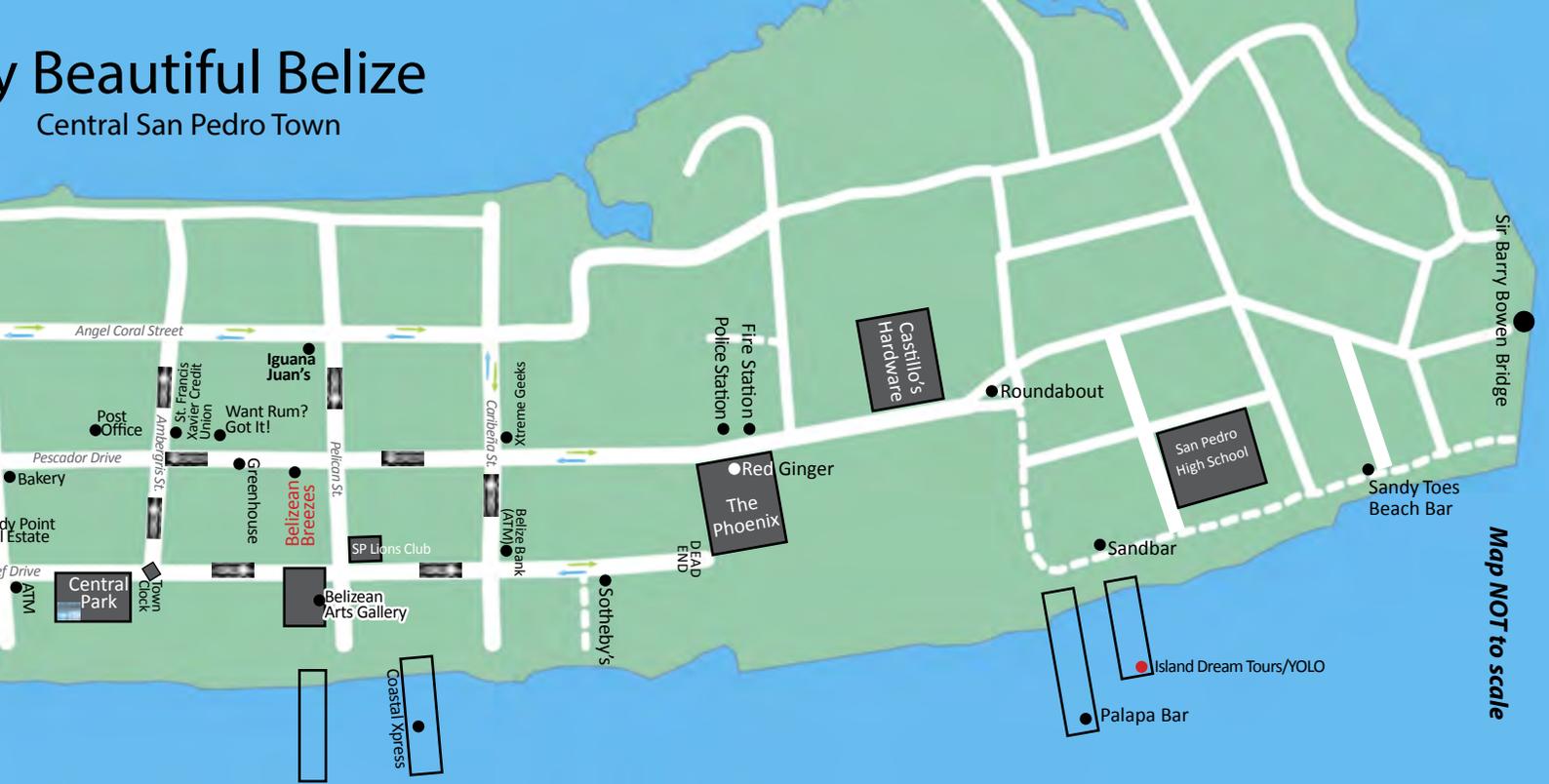
Important Information

Belize Tourism Board - 227-2419.
Belize Tourism Industry Association (BTIA) - 227-5717.
Belize Hotel Association - 223-0669, bha@btl.net
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.
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Narcotics Anonymous: *By request* at 623-0316.
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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.
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South of San Pedro Town



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ISLAND BUZZ CAFÉ: A cozy friendly café serving Breakfast and Lunch all day, at least until 1:00ish Monday-Friday. Sometimes Saturday. Hardly ever on Sunday. Coffee, Bacon & Eggs, Biscuits & Gravy, Breakfast Burritos, Subs, Paninis, Smoothies. Call ahead or delivery 668-1322.

PEPPERONI'S PIZZA: The island's most delectable combination of traditional Italian crafted pizzas with Belizean influences. Handmade, local, and fresh ingredients made daily along with good vibes, music, and service. Dine-in, carry-out, & delivery offered. Open 7 days a week at 4:30pm-10:00pm and Friday-Sunday from 10:30am-2:30pm. 501-226-4515



CASA PICASSO RESTAURANT: Tapas dining in an artful setting. Global flavors from local ingredients...martinis, wines, cocktails. Vegetarian & gluten-free options. Open Tuesday-Sunday at 5:30pm. Last reservations 9:00pm. 226-4443 or reservations@casapicassobelize.com. Located south of town past Caribeña Gas Station & Belikin Distributor. Find us on Facebook or casapicassobelize.com.

EI DIVINO CARIBBEAN STEAKHOUSE & MARTINI BAR: 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.



HIDDEN TREASURE RESTAURANT: Serving Latin American & Caribbean cuisine in an enchanting atmosphere. Serving dinner Wednesday-Monday from 5pm - 90pm, closed on Tuesdays. Located in the Escalante neighborhood. Live music on Thursdays! Free shuttle service to customers in town. Contact us 226-4111/4236 and www.hiddentreasurebelize.com

THE PALMILLA RESTAURANT AT VICTORIA HOUSE: A casual experience with a unique mix of island seafood and continental cuisine. Relaxed and informal yet romantic. Admiral Nelson Bar is the place to be casual and relax in your swimsuit, enjoying breakfast, lunch and dinner with magnificent views. Reservations recommended: 226-2067.



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. Reservations Recommended (501) 206-2441. www.blackorchidrestaurant.com. ON VACATION...will re-open October 17th!

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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Dine Artfully

A taste of home at Island Buzz Café & Grill

By Janelle Cowo



We are often told that breakfast is the most important meal of the day, but I believe in the power of lunch and dinner too! Every now and again, it's worth it to skip the mess of pots and pans by dining out. San Pedro Town has plenty of breakfast and lunch delis, but sometimes we want a little extra comfort with our food. That's exactly what you get at Island Buzz Café and Grill. Located at Fairdale Plaza on Coconut Drive, the café offers a cozy, friendly ambiance with a side of classic breakfast plates and lunch sandwiches, and of course, freshly brewed cup of Java.



Island Buzz serves up good old 'as close to home as possible' cooking! Sausage, eggs and cheese biscuits, yum! Let's not forget the gravy. Or a classic pancake breakfast with crispy bacon on the side. Their home-cooked beans were a home run for me – slow cooked to perfection. Breakfast at Island Buzz is a delight! Lunch options range from meatball subs to grilled Paninis and even a chef's salad if you're seeking healthier options. Pair any of these plates with fresh, natural juices or some locally roasted Caye Coffee.



Promoting healthy eating for island children

School lunches are often a challenge. For children that don't get to go home during lunch hour, their options might

not be all that great or healthy. With this in mind, Island Buzz Café and Grill has stepped up to give parents a helping hand during lunch time by preparing and delivering healthy and delicious lunch options to school children at The Island Academy (just across the street from their location). There is nothing better than a hot well-rounded meal to fuel them up for an active school day! Even better, lunches are served in reusable, eco-friendly containers that are picked up after lunchtime. Talk about keeping the welfare of our future in mind: the children and the environment. Kudos!

Island Buzz Café and Grill also offers a 'to go' option - call in your order and pick up when ready. They are open Monday to Friday from 7AM to 1PM-ish. For orders call or text 501-668-1322 or email islandbuzzcafe@yahoo.com. Don't forget to like them on Facebook at Island Buzz Café and Grill.



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Holiday Boat Parade: Decking the Caribbean Coastline

As December rolls around, a festive breeze starts blowing across Belize. Yes, it's Christmas time again and with the merry season comes the festive family gatherings, kids' parties and of course, the San Pedro Holiday Boat Parade! Now in its 13th inception, this is an island tradition you won't want to miss. There is nothing more festive than artfully decorated boats cruising along the Caribbean coastline.

Scheduled for Saturday, December 8th, the 2018 Holiday Boat Parade will start its merry journey from Wayo's Beach. The illuminated boats will make their way to Crazy Canucks Beach Bar, delighting residents and visitors alike along the way. The parade then returns to the SandBar Beach Hostel and Restaurant for the announcement of the winners and the final hurrah.

To enjoy the parade in the best way possible, head on over to one of the many docks and seaside bars along the route for a great view. All proceeds from the lighted boat parade go to charitable organizations, after all, giving back is the true meaning of Christmas.

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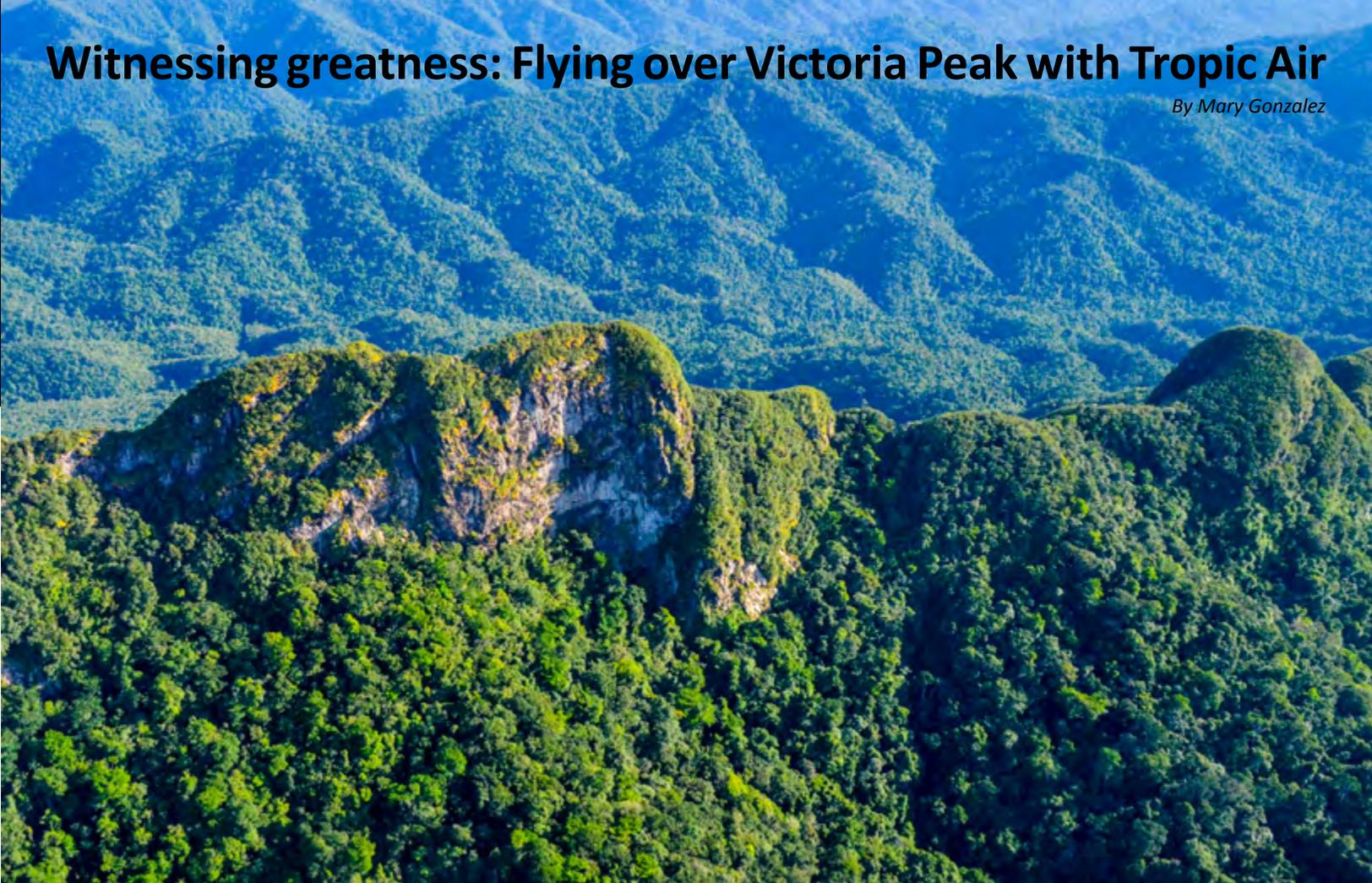
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Witnessing greatness: Flying over Victoria Peak with Tropic Air

By Mary Gonzalez



It's not often I'm rendered speechless, but when it does happen, it's in the face of magnificence. I was awed into just such silence recently when I had the privilege of flying over Victoria Peak with Tropic Air.

The second highest peak in the country, Victoria Peak is located within the Maya Mountains inside the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary. Standing at 3,670 feet high, the natural monument was named in honor of Queen Victoria. A cluster of mountains, the tallest of which

falls just 18 feet below Doyle's Delight, Victoria Peak is a rugged terrain that can be hiked and is home to a variety of plants and animals unique to Belize. Several other social studies/geography tidbits flooded my mind as we flew south to Stann Creek from San Pedro Town bright and early in the morning. Nothing, however, prepared me for the vistas I saw outside my window seat.

The actual reason for flying over was not because I'm a special superstar, but rather because it was a chance to catch a master in action. Tony Rath, one of Belize's brilliant and talented photographers, was strapped down in another plane with an open side, loaded down with camera equipment to capture the best of Victoria Peak for Tropic Air. Two planes hit the airway, and as passengers inside the "model" plane, we simply got to enjoy the stunning beauty that lay below and around us.

My heart was in my throat for the first few minutes as Tony shifted around comfortably in his seat, switching lens and zooming, the plane floating up just a tad, or lower, or closer, or sideways...AHH-HH!! Even from far, I could see his signature smile as he snapped and every so often, he'd gesture to our pilot, and our plane would switch to the pose he required. Frankly, we were just orbiting Tony's world at that moment.

Soon after we flew past the Belize District, over winding rivers and into clusters of mountains blanketed in a thick mist. From small spots of white, we soon saw the fluffy shroud extending deep into valleys across the mountainous region. For a few

Continued on Page 14

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Witnessing greatness Continued from Page 13

moments, it was all green and white, stunning in its simplicity. Onwards we flew, and soon those lucky guests to my left began to get excited, and I just knew we were drawing closer. Soon, I could see the famed peak jutting out proudly, making the previous mountains look like tiny hills. The sun was rising and shining brightly, casting fantastic shadows in some spots while highlighting other nooks and crannies.

Never in my wildest dreams did I think I'd see Victoria Peak from this vantage point. As a Belizean and a travel writer, I'm often called upon to explain WHY Belize. I love the languages we speak, including my own Yucatec Maya. I love our incredible people, and our ability to warmly welcome absolute strangers as though they're home. I love our food – tortillas, rice and beans, salbutes. I love the warm waters off the Belize Barrier Reef, and cruising down Hummingbird Highway. And ever since I was six and took my first domestic flight, I have loved flying all over my country.

There is nothing quite like observing the true, awe-inspiring and expansive beauty of this tiny place we call home. The flights are low enough that you can see a cluster of houses sitting in the shadows of Baldy Beacon, miles and miles away from civilization.

That morning, as the sun rose in the east - its heat burning off the last vestiges of mist and sleep – I witnessed what I know very few people will be privileged to see. I may hike it some day, I may wander around under its looming shadow, but my first real view of it rugged vastness from the air will forever burn in my memory.

About Tropic Air Belize:

The photo shoot was one of many held with famed photographer Tony Rath. His eye for Belize's rugged beauty has provided Tropic Air with many stunning backdrops with which to model its fleet. Tropic updates its imagery every other year, using the photos for marketing and media purposes. The iconic Blue Hole has been used often, the striking sinkhole emblematic of Belize and travel. The Victoria Peak images will reflect the vast, rugged terrain that makes Belize so unique, showcasing its verdant, unscathed beauty. However, for those wanting to catch these vistas for themselves, there's always the option to charter a flight over the peak! You can find out more by visiting tropicair.com!



Getting to Victoria Peak by land:

For those who may not have the chance to fly over Victoria Peak, but seek some way to connect with this magnificent natural monument, we recommend hiking it! This can be done during the dry season from February to June, and takes approximately 3-4 days to cover the 15 mile (one way) trail. Licensed tour guides are a MUST and groups are limited to 8 people maximum. It is a strenuous hike, including 20-60 degree descent/ascents, with some requiring scrambling and a rope. The trail also contains two campsites, one halfway on the trail and the other at the 12th mile. For more information on this hike, check with the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary.

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