

FREE

My Beautiful Belize

TRAVEL PUBLICATION

December 2019 | Vol. 07 #10



'tis the season...

...in Belize!

From the Editor Tamara Sniffin

What's on my mind this holiday season? Christmas Tree Worms of course! No, you won't find these worms in your stocking or holiday basket but rather on corals when snorkeling or diving along our glorious Belize Barrier Reef. I absolutely love these ocean-dwelling worms that resemble tiny Christmas trees because of their shape and brilliantly hued tentacles. These tubular, segmented worms aren't very big, averaging about 1.5 inches in length, and they dwell in coral reefs in tropical waters all over the world. A day snorkeling is not complete until I spot one or several of them together.

These amazing little creatures come in many colors, including orange, yellow, blue, red and white, and all though they are small in size, they are easily spotted due to their shape, beauty, and color. Their colorful plumes, or tentacles, are used for passive feeding on suspended food particles and plankton in the water. The plumes are also used for respiration. Though the plumes are visible, most of these worms are anchored in their burrows that they bore into the live coral. Christmas Tree Worms are very sensitive to disturbances and will rapidly retract into their burrows at the slightest touch or passing shadow. They typically re-emerge a minute later, very slowly, to test the water before fully extending their feather-like plumes.

Should you find yourself snorkeling or diving our gorgeous Caribbean waters while discovering our beloved country, I hope that these Christmas Tree Worms are there to greet you. I am sure if you listen close enough, they will say, "Welcome to My Beautiful Belize!"



Wolfe's Woofers Who Said?

"Here's the coffee," Mario said, handing me a cup. "And I got us some johnny cakes. They were sold out of meat pies."

Mario and I were having a late breakfast from Celi's Deli on the deck of the Holiday Hotel. As we tucked in to our food an elderly gentleman in wet bathing shorts and tee-shirt took a seat at the table next to ours to drink his coffee. When I nodded to him, he said, "Good morning. It's a beautiful day."

"It sure is," I said. "It's a great day for swimming."

"It certainly is for me," he said. "I just celebrated my eighty-first birthday with a one-mile swim."

Mario was astonished.

"You're eighty-one!" he said, in wonder. "How do you keep so healthy?"

"I swim five times a week. It's great exercise."

"There has to be more to it than that," I said. "You must have inherited good genes. How old was your father when he died?"

"Died? Who said he died? He went swimming with me this morning."

"Good God!" I exclaimed. "How old is he?"

"He's ninety-nine years old."

"What about your dad's father?" I asked. "When did he die?"

"Who said Grandpa died?" the old man asked. "He's one hundred and nineteen years old."

I said, "Let me guess. He went swimming with you this morning."

"No. He's back home getting ready for his wedding next week."

Mario said, "His wedding? Why would a man who's a hundred and nineteen years old want to get married?"

"Who said he wanted to?"



By Dennis Wolfe

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Tasty Sushi: Dining out is fun when options include international cuisine. It's even better when prepared by talented Belizean chefs! P. 8

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Fine...bring on the adventure: Hamerlin just wasn't sure how he felt about going into the Maya underworld. Bugs, heat, mosquitoes... creepy crawlies! Well, he survived AND enjoyed his Waterfall Cave Adventure with Ian Anderson's Caves Brach! Whoohoo! P. 14

December = Food + Drinks: Between Rom Popo - a delicious eggnog perfect for Christmas, and tasty traditional foods like mechado, December is a time to indulge! P. 16 & 17

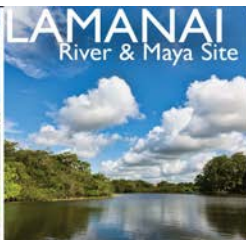
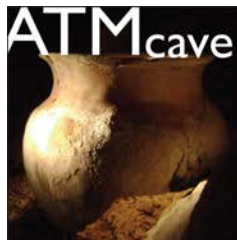
Happy Holidays! Be sure to catch at least one of our events! P. 18 - 19

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How much fun can you have on the YOLO? Let me count the ways!

By Tamara Sniffin



White Sands Dive Shop
San Pedro Ambergris Caye Belize



Free pick up from your dock.
www.whitesandsdiveshop.com
elbertgreer@fastmail.fm 226-2405

Island Dream Tours on Ambergris Caye offers a variety of excursions on their customized catamaran, the YOLO. From sunset cruises to snorkel day trips that include time at our sister island Caye Caulker, there's something for everyone. But my 'go-to' trip that I insist on taking friends and family on when they visit my island home is their full day Chill n' Cruise Day!

The day kicks off at 9AM on the super comfortable YOLO, with lots of great seating in and away from the sun, ample room to socialize, a full bar, and even a bathroom! After a brief safety introduction, the boat sets sail to our first snorkel stop at Hol Chan Marine Reserve. Along the way we enjoy a buffet of yummy ham and cheese-stuffed French Toast, fresh fruit, and juices. Caribbean music sets the chill vibe, and guests can choose from their impressive menu of custom-made libations or anything else from their well-stocked bar, including sodas and fresh juices. It's just minutes after 10AM when we reach Hol Chan and the very attentive crew is sure to properly outfit the guests with snorkel gear and divide us into groups with designated guides.

Continued on Page 4

All the fun on the YOLO!



The water is clear and warm, with colorful fish eager to greet us. Our guide knows how to find the good stuff and leads us to where a Green turtle is grazing on turtle grass, imagine that! The busy turtle doesn't mind our dives to get a closer look (and photos) and the day is off to a brilliant start. For the next hour, we explore the gorgeous corals of the Belize Barrier Reef and spot gray angelfish, trumpet fish, barracuda with big teeth, nurse sharks, parrotfish, permits, and brightly striped Sergeant Majors to name a few!

Once back on the boat we head to Shark and Ray Alley to swim with guess what...sharks! Have no fear, these bottom-dwelling denizens of the deep are just there for the chum and are not interested in eating tourists! There's nothing quite as exhilarating as swimming



with sharks and rays, and while some of us are eager to jump right in and check it out, others are happy to have another drink and watch the huge school of begging nurse sharks from the comforts of the boat.

All this excitement and swimming has everyone hungry, and as we depart from Shark and Ray Alley, heading to the ultimate chill destination, lunch is served. Delicious chicken and ribs, along with rice and all the fixings are served buffet style and for once the chatty passengers are quiet as they devour the tasty meal. The crew keeps the drinks coming, and we are all very happy campers! Next stop, the best swimming hole you'll ever soak in!

Seaside Dining on the Beach under the Stars
The Best in Fine Dining - Ambergris Caye
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All the fun on the YOLO!



We set anchor in shallow, crystal clear water that's not more than four feet deep. Everyone into the pool! Next comes the inflated pink flamingoes and unicorns to lazy away in or maybe you want to take up a game of volleyball at the net the crew has erected. At this point no one is a stranger, cocktails have a way of doing that, and it's just one grand pool party with twenty of your new best friends! After a couple hours of fun in the sun its time to load back up and head home. Out comes fresh seafood ceviche and chips with of course, more cocktails. The music now playing is solid get up and dance tunes and everyone is on their feet bustin' a move, posing for selfies and group photos while having a blast!



Once we reach the dock where we launched from, my visiting nephew and his wife, along with their four friends proclaim, "this was the BEST TIME EVER!!!" I do know how to show my guests a good time, and it's easy when you take them on the YOLO! Trips on the YOLO are all-inclusive, offering chef prepared meals, limitless open bar, local beer, signature fresh fruit cocktails made to order, sodas, water, juices and more. Is it possible to have too much fun? Never! After all, You Only Live Once!

For more information please visit their website at www.islanddreamtours.com or find them on Facebook at Island Dream Tours – YOLO.

December 2019



Ambergris Caye's only
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with unobstructed views of
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For reservations: 226-4000



1 Mile North,
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Reservations at 226-4001



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WEDNESDAY,
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Celebrating the colorful palette of Belizean Artists: Rony Jovel

By Tamara Sniffin



Sometimes it feels like I am exaggerating when I say Belize has it all, but when I take inventory of the many blessings our small but mighty country has, I quickly realize I'm not exaggerating at all; in fact, it's an understatement! From our spectacular Belize Barrier Reef complete with stunning marine life, to our misty Maya Mountains chock-full of exotic flora and fauna, to exhilarating adventures and scrumptious cuisine, to fabulous accommodations large, small and completely unique, I will argue that by far our national treasure is the amazing people who call Belize home. Warm, friendly, and



Photo by Rony Israel Jovel

downright genuine, not only are they some of the nicest people you will ever meet, but they are talented as well! Musicians, writers, performers, crafters, and artists, these people are an essential part of our Belizean culture.

One artist extraordinaire who humbly shares his talent is Rony Israel Jovel. Rony's passion for the natural world often shares the canvas with the sharp yet voluptuous features of his abstract portraits, celebrating the brilliant colors of Belize's most flamboyant birds, butterflies, and flora. Magically, they intertwine as one entity, a Purple Gallinule bird frames the face of a full-lipped maiden, flowers, and vines lace the profile of a floral goddess, a female face emerges from the core of a Scarlet Macaw and butterfly wings fan from the back of a woman's neck. As crazy as it all sounds, Rony's talent for mingling the mundane with the fantastic transforms naturally as if the combination of these unlikely subjects were destined to collide into perfect harmony.

At the young age of twelve, Rony first explored his affinity for art. "I started to practice by trial and error. Later, my interest in birds started when I was working for The Peregrine Fund. It was then that I realized how beautiful and important these creatures really are. My background is in business administration, so for me to be out in the field working with birds, it really helped me develop as an artist. I was compelled to incorporate faces and birds to show the connection humans have with nature. Birds, as well as humans, have their own personalities," he commented.

Often adding texture and even recycled items to his paintings, the materials produce dimension and exaggerated life to his acrylic creations. "I love to work with acrylic because it's easier to work with. I also love to incorporate recycling into my art pieces because it is a way how I can help with the environment. Many are the time people call me crazy because I am not ashamed to collect garbage and make art. I see potential in any and everything that I can use. We, as artists, never stop seeing the world in an entirely different spectrum," explains the young artist. "Sometimes I visit schools in my community of San Ignacio and teach the kids how to recycle trash and turn it into something cool. I think if we all put a little grain in the basket, we can all make the world a better place. Currently, I am at the Belize Bird Rescue and just got inspired to paint one of their birds that can never go back into the wild because she is missing the lower part of her beak." Naturally, Rony is moved to honor her flawed beauty in a painting while the parrot dutifully poses and interacts with the process!



Photo by Rony Israel Jovel

When asked if it's hard to part with his paintings, Rony reflects, "I don't like to reproduce my work. I want people to have something unique that comes from within. Yes, it is hard to part with my artwork because it feels like a piece of me is going somewhere unknown. With each piece I can still remember where I was and what was my creative process to complete it. I still have my first painting when I was 12 years old! I decided to keep it so that I can remind myself of where I started."

Originally from Orange Walk, Rony has lived in San Ignacio for the last seven years. He's sold paintings in Norway, Panama, Houston Texas USA, Australia, Chetumal Mexico, and Belize City and hosted four exhibitions. Rony has also participated in two art competitions, winning second place in one of them. Although his paintings are not available in any galleries at the time, you can peruse (and purchase) his artwork on Facebook at Painting by Rony Jovel and on Instagram at Rony Jovel.



The Palmilla Restaurant & Admiral Nelson's Bar
Dinner Reservations 226-2067



Southern San Pedro is a fast developing area on Ambergris Caye and full of life - Salt Life Belize is situated on the west side of the island right on the edge of the majestic fly fishing flats of Ambergris Caye and is home to some of the most beautiful sunsets in the world. The development will feature the perfect balance of rugged adventure, world-class fishing, diving and snorkeling, a pristine beach club and authentic, modern accommodation.

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Balconies on the water

IMPERIAL | 1050 SQ.FT

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Boat access and parking
Balconies on the water



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THERE IS SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE.

Aqua Sushi Restaurant – an example of the ever-evolving culinary arts of Belize

By Mary Gonzalez

It's incredible how much cuisine has expanded on our 26-mile island, going beyond our cultural staples to embrace a variety of cultures and their specialty foods. My favorite part of this growth is watching local cooks and chefs taking on the challenge and excelling at providing us with tasty, beautifully presented dishes. The talent has always abounded; it was just the freedom of expression and access to ingredients that possibly held us back. Well, no more!

Aqua Sushi and Steakhouse at Grand Caribe is a prime example of just how much our local chefs have grown. Executive Chef Samuel Gonzalez Jr. (Samii) is a fantastic success story of a young man who moved his way through the kitchen to become an executive chef, with intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the cooking sanctum. His mind is always working, and as he tastes food wherever he goes, he has lots of ideas on how to re-create, improve, re-design or replicate. It's no surprise that when he was trained to take on sushi that he would pass the test with flying colors!

During a girls' night out, we had the delight of watching him and Chef Gian Cortez craft a variety of rolls that brought inspired flavors. The Serpent Roll was a fun, familiar sight that we enjoyed from tip to tail. Chef Gian's Salmon Okaki was also quite the fun bite: I thought it looked like mini salbutes or tostadas, with its crunchy base of crispy fried sushi rice. While we ate and chit-chatted, we sipped on refreshing cocktails – inspired and innovative like the food we had before us. The White Walker, with its bamboo straw, dehydrated citrus garnish and cilantro smash was incredible. The sweet Passionfruit Mai Tai was a perfect tropical accompaniment to our meal.



Exec. Chef Samii and Gian (right)
Aqua Belize



More and more dishes arrived, each one unique in flavor and presentation. The Hamachi, a Strawberry-Arugula sauce was refreshing, as was the Ichigo Hamachi in a vibrant hibiscus citrus sauce. The Barbecued Eel was a tasty follow-up to all the lighter sauces, but then came the surprise treat. It was two (nice-sized) bites on the platter, yet the Surf Clam in its garlic chili oil packed a singularly unique flavor punch that I could not get enough. Both chefs shared with us the origin of the ingredients they use, and we learned that Aqua goes above and beyond to ensure its chefs have the necessary tools to indulge in their creativity. Dare I say, I may have found my favorite sushi spot on the island?!

There will always be tasty, local, traditional Belizean food. But we also celebrate our chefs who test themselves, learning and evolving to bring forth unique dishes honoring other cultures with the same passion as we hold for our own. For more information, please visit their website at www.aquabelize.com or find them on Facebook as Aqua Belize.

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North Ambergris Caye

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EAT



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CROCS SUNSET SPORTS BAR: The newest bar north of the bridge, with refreshing cocktails, bar food, killer sunset views and all the games on large-screen TVs. Book upstairs bar for private events. Open from 11am everyday.



THE TRUCK STOP: Belize's first shipping container food park. Come try the different exciting options from our food trucks, play backyard games, or cool off with a sundae from our ice cream shop.



AQUA: Open Tuesday to Sunday from 5:30PM to 10PM, Aqua Belize offers an elevate seafood and steakhouse dining experience. Located 1 mile north of San Pedro Town inside Caribeville. Sushi nights on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. Reservation highly recommended: 226-4001



AJI TAPA BAR RESTAURANT: Beachfront dining in a romantic setting. One of a kind 5-Star Tapa Bar and Restaurant situated on the enchanting island of Ambergris Caye. Breakfast: 8AM-10:30AM, Dinner: 5PM-10PM, every day except Tuesdays. Open Friday, Saturday & Sunday for lunch. Call +501-226-4047 for reservations.



PORTOFINO RESTAURANT - Enjoy our Euro-Caribbean inspired menu and spectacular Caribbean views. Also offering a full VEGETARIAN Menu. For Reservations & Free Transportation, please call 226-5096 or 678-5096.



PIRATE'S NOT SO SECRET BEACH BAR & GRILL: The island's trending destination; adventure to SECRET BEACH! Soak up the sun or take a dip in crystal clear shallow waters accompanied with island music, refreshing cocktails, gourmet lunch menu by AWARD WINNING CHEF. Credit Cards Accepted. Open daily 10am to SUNSET! **MAMBO RESTAURANT** - Enjoy a unique dining experience at this award-winning restaurant at Matachica Resort. Romantic atmosphere with island ambience, offering locally inspired flavors and meals that will excite even the most seasoned palate. Complimentary transportation with reservations - call 226-5010/226-5011.



RAIN: Located 1 mile north of San Pedro Town inside Caribeville, Rain Restaurant and Rooftop Terrace offers unobstructed views of the Caribbean Sea and Lagoon for the perfect atmosphere to dine. Open daily from 7AM to 10PM serving breakfast, lunch and dinner.

PLAY



MARBUCKS COFFEE HOUSE - Specialty Coffee Drinks - both hot & cold; fresh fruit smoothies and baked goods. Join us for Thursday Wine Fun, 4PM-7PM and our delicious Sunday brunch (with mimosas!). Located just off the main road in Tres Cocos, before the Truck Stop. Like us on Facebook and keep up with the fun!



THE GREEN PARROT - Eats and treats. Relax on the patio, sip your favorite island drink gaze out at the azure Caribbean Sea, take a dip in the pool and enjoy our great beach bar. Friendly staff always on hand 6 miles north of town. Open daily from 9AM-9PM. For complimentary boat transportation please call 226-5096/ 678-5096.

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.

MARUBA BEACH KLUB @ Secret Beach - The ultimate beach club offering butler beach and water service, daybeds, lounge chairs, gastronomic wonders, cocktails and great chill vibe. Sister company of the world famous Maruba Resort Jungle Spa known for its Signature Spa treatments, service and style. Open 8am - 6pm, Phone 610-3779. Find us on Facebook

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SHOP



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SuDoku Time! Answers on Page 11

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



EATS & TREATS

EL FOGON: Authentic Belizean Cuisine prepared on a fire hearth. Featuring dishes that represent the diversity of our Belizean culture. Lunch menu and daily dinner specials. Open Mon. – Sat. 11AM – 9PM 206-2121/280-2626 See map for our location!



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THE SAN PEDRO LIONS CLUB Join us on Fridays for fun bingo (7PM) and delicious chicken BBQ (from noon). All proceeds go back to assisting the community in times of need.

TRANSPORTATION

CRYSTAL AUTO RENTALS - 2 BZ locations: Philip S.W. Goldson International Airport and 5 Miles Northern Highway. Free shuttle service to and from our Belize City office to anywhere in Belize City. Tel: 011-501-223-1600 Fax: 011-501-223-1900 (direct dialing from U.S.A.) Toll Free in Belize: 0-800-777-7777 Email: reservations@crystal-belize.com or visit our website at <http://crystal-belize.com>

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PARTY PARTY



WAHOO'S LOUNGE: We are home to the WORLD FAMOUS CHICKEN DROP! Thursday nights starting at 6PM. Drink specials, games and an amazing view of the reef. Located on the beach at the Spindrift Hotel. 226-2002.



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My Beautiful Belize

Central San Pedro Town



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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. **Closed through October 8th** for vacation!

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LaSIRENE

LA SIRENE is located at the southern tip of the island. Currently in the development phase, La Sirene's model home located on Coconut Drive is open to the public. Open from Monday to Saturday from 9AM to 5PM. For more information visit www.lasirene.bz

Sudoku Answers Puzzle on Page 9

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



EATS & TREATS



CASA PICASSO RESTAURANT: Artfully creating Belizean inspired cuisine with local products for a farm to table experience. Open Tuesday - Saturday, Happy Hour 2pm-5pm, appetizers, dinner service 5pm- 9pm. Full bar with global wine list. 226-4443 for reservations. Located just south of town on Coconut Drive.



EL 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.

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.



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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.

San Pedro Police Department: 206-2022

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. islabonitaalanon@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.

Hope Haven: 226-2333

Rotary Club of Ambergris Caye:

Join Rotary at our weekly meetings, Wednesdays at 11:45am, Banyan Bay Villas. Find us on Facebook!

The Seasons of Belize

By Tamara Sniffin



Photo Credit Karen Brodie Photography



In early October, our friend (and scientist extraordinaire) Valentine Rosado lamented that in the last month of our rainy season, we were already getting our first “Norte” in Belize. Rosado explained that many people don’t know that our region has three seasons. Unlike our friends to the north who have a winter and spring, people can be confused about how our rainy and dry season fits into the whole picture.

Seasons are based on the annual climatic trends of a region, mainly air temperature and rainfall (precipitation to be technically accurate). Different regions across the globe have their own set of seasons based on their annual cycles.

The seasons in Belize are dry - March through May, rainy - June through October, and Norte - November through February. Nortes are strong cold northern winds that blow in from Mexico along the Gulf of California. Sure, it might rain during the dry season, be dry in the rainy season or blow Nortes during the other seasons, but the seasons are defined by long-term trends. It allows us to expect a certain kind of weather during each season.

According to Rosado, the bad news is that the damage we are inflicting to our planet is going to make seasonal trends vary a lot more than we are used to. People are asking, “Where is the rain?” and Nortes are unseasonably common and more frequent. Based on the changing climate, we may have to redetermine Belize’s three seasons and which months they are, but at least you don’t have to worry about snow, for now!



Photo Credit Karen Brodie Photography



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Discovering a hidden sense of adventure

By Hamerlin Flores

For as long as I can remember, I have always been a sea/caye person. Give me the sea, the sun and little spot to relax, and I'm the happiest person in this world. As such, a Waterfall Cave Expedition via Ian Anderson's Cave Branch Jungle Lodge was definitely something out of my comfort zone. However, I don't regret it one bit!


As part of our annual media familiarization tours hosted by the Belize Tourism Board, adventure was to be had! The tour began around 10am, departing from Ian Anderson's Cave Branch Jungle Lodge with all of us transported in a rustic, open-air bus to an area close to the cave. After that, it was a vigorous 30-minute hike three kilometers through the jungle. I was

mostly worried about the mosquitoes and bug bites, not about a jaguar encounter or snakes or other jungle animals. A bath in insect repellent solved my issues, and all I concentrated on after was the birds chirping here and there, and the excitement when one of my colleagues accidentally startled a small boa constrictor. One of our tour guides, Carlos Hernandez noted it had just eaten, as its stomach was swollen, and such there was no aggression. That was a relief! When we arrived at the entrance of the Waterfall Cave, Hernandez gave us a quick briefing on what to expect inside.

I was immediately impressed with the cave's impressive ceiling heights, and the bats flying all over at the top, which meant no mosquitoes! Our trek continued deeper into the cave, where we encountered amazing sculptures believed to have been done by the Maya, who used the caves to perform their rituals and sacrifices centuries ago. During this tour, we learned about the history of the cave and more about the Maya world as our guides point out ancient ceremonial centers, altars, artifacts, among other amazing things throughout our hike.

After almost 45 minutes of trekking, it was time to get wet! Our hike took us up, up, and all the way to the top of various waterfalls where the true fun began. Our hike included plunging into refreshing pools, and the higher we went, the more breathtaking the stalactites and stalagmites were. Their sparkle motivated me even more to continue, as I wanted to see what was next.

At the top of the last waterfall, I felt like a Belizean Dr. Henry Walton ("Indiana Jones") after all. I had just conquered one of the ultimate cave expeditions in Belize!



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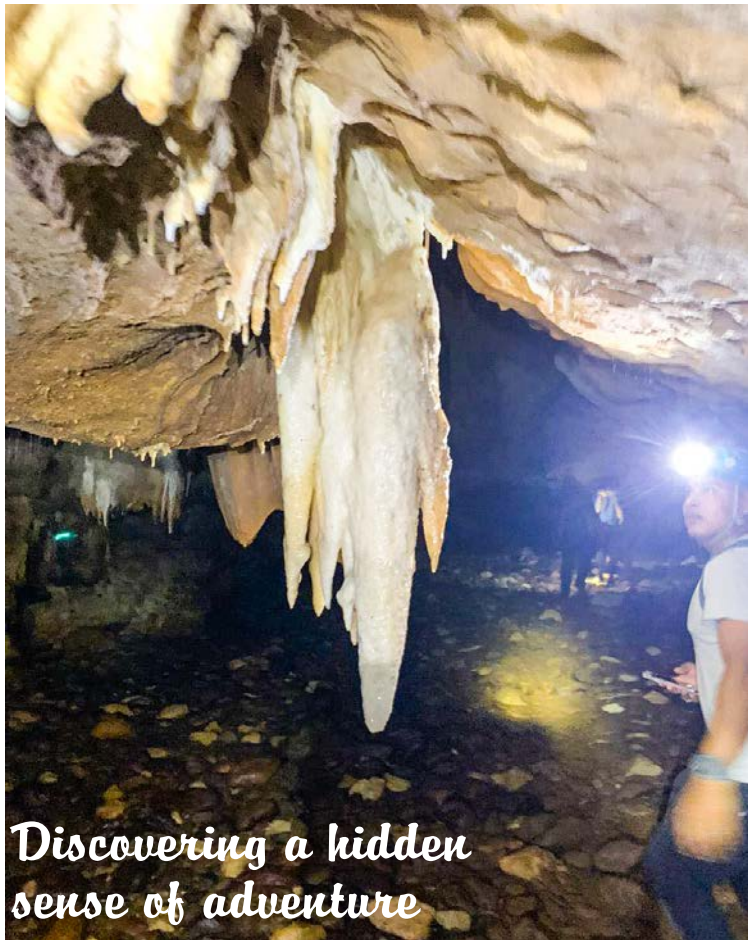
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Continued on Page 13



Discovering a hidden sense of adventure

On the way back through the waterfalls some brave souls opted to jump off each waterfall and into the pools below! I opted to be lowered by ropes (*you know, to ensure this story would be written!*). When we made it back to the base area of the cave, Cave Branch tour guides had already set up one of the cutest lunch areas ever! A white picnic blanket and candles were laid out on over a rock, with tortillas, cold cuts, fresh vegetables, and fruits ready for consumption. Eating a burrito deep inside a cave was one of the most memorable experiences ever. After all that trekking, swimming, and hiking over a few hours, believe me when I tell you it was, they were the BEST burritos I've had for this entire year. (*Editor's note: he's still talking about those burritos!*)

After our short lunch break, we continued trekking until we made it out of the cave around 3pm. We then hiked back through the jungle, where our driver was waiting with our fancy ride. He took us back to the lodge where we took much-needed warm showers and rest.



More than four hours were spent viewing spectacular formations and ancient Maya ceremonial centers inside a mist-shrouded kingdom. I can say it was of one of my best adventurous experiences ever. It may have been my first cave expedition, but it will not be my last!

This amazing Waterfall Cave Expedition tour offered only by Ian Anderson's Cave Branch Adventure Company and Jungle Lodge on Hummingbird Highway in the Cayo District. They further offer a wide variety of caving experiences, from moderate to extreme. Tours can be booked directly through their website at <https://www.cavesbranch.com/belize-cave-tours>. Some caving rules include lightweight walking long pants (no short pants allowed) that can get wet, well-treaded sneakers or enclosed hiking sandals or boots, bug repellent, and a water bottle. Guided tours usually provide any gear necessary, such as headlamps, flashlights, life jackets, etc.



Let's get jolly with Christmas Rompope!

By Janelle Cowo

The topic of the hour seems to be Christmas – Christmas parties, Christmas food and, of course, Christmas cocktails. No matter how or with who you celebrate, chances are you might find yourself sipping on some traditional Christmas drinks. One libation that stands out as a Christmas concoction is egg-nog, or as we Belizean know it, Rompope. The egg-based drink is seasoned with local spices and is a true taste of home.

Rompope has always been present at family festivities during the holiday but never had I tried it. It wasn't until recently that I got to sample the boozy Christmas drink made by the top distillery in Belize. Travellers Liquors has always kept the Belizean traditions alive, and Mrs. Perla Pedromo's family Rompope recipe is the best example. Perfected over the years, this cream liqueur is the perfect addition to any holiday gathering. Travellers Liquor recommends you enjoy it straight on the rocks or served in your coffee and even as a topper for desserts.

Hints of vanilla and nutmeg blend perfectly with the richness this creamy drink. Pour over ice and voila, Christmas has started! While this was my first time trying Rompope, it won't be the last, and it will definitely be at the center of this year's family Christmas party.

You too can enjoy Travellers Rompope this Christmas! Purchase at your local store or order at www.onebarrelrum.com





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Where do you read My Beautiful Belize?



Yvonne Temsik from **Red Feather Lakes, Colorado USA** enjoys reading her copy of *My Beautiful Belize* while visiting friends in Stuttgart, Germany. Behind her stands **The New Palace (Neues Schloss)**, which is an 18th-century Baroque palace and one of the last large city palaces built in Southern Germany. The palace is located in the center of Stuttgart at the Schlossplatz, which is the largest square in the city. The New Palace derives its name from its commissioning by Duke Carl Eugen of Württemberg to replace the Old Castle in the early years of his reign and was built between 1746 and 1807.

Send us your pictures at hello@mybeautifulbelize.com!

Tasting the unique Mechado

By Mary Gonzalez

For a country so underpopulated, it's surprising how varied its cuisine is. It's also fun to discover a dish you've never heard of! That is the great thing about Belize though: she's small enough that you could find yourself in a familiar kitchen being served a bowl of deliciousness like Mechado. That's what happened to me!

Cooked by my friend Dulce



Gonzalez, an entire pot of gorgeous Mechado awaited consumption as requested by her grandson, the birthday boy, and I was honored to be invited to this special occasion. This rich, complex soup made with chicken, green olives, onions and Dutch cheese is served with hot corn tortillas and/or white rice. It is

quite a complicated dish, requiring some patience, so I happily ingested my first bowl of goodness with a major foodie appreciation.

A cross between escabeche (just because of the onions and 'white' soup) and chicken soup, topped with the unique Dutch cheese (hardback or red back cheese) and olives, this dish has me stumped. Complex flavors combine for a truly rich finish. It is genuinely nothing like I've ever had. When I polled friends online about this dish, several had never heard of it, and many had eaten but never cooked it. And then there were some claiming to make the best.

A little bit of research has shown that it has Yucatec roots, and since Ambergris Caye was a haven for refugees fleeing the caste war in the Yucatan Peninsula, I can only assume that is how it became a dish known and loved here. And now I do too.



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Bon Appetit!

A Merry Holiday and a Party, or two, in Belize!

By Janelle Cowo



The last month of the year is finally here and to me “it’s the most wonderful time of the year”. Family gatherings during Christmas and parties till the sun rises on New Year; this is the season for all forms of enjoyment.

While spending the holidays close to family and friends is still the top option for many, holiday vacations are more enticing than ever – especially for our friends up north who’d much rather be on a sunny beach rather than chilled on a frosty evening. We are all looking for that “best trip possible,” and Belize has much to offer during the Christmas/New Year’s holiday; we are a country brimming with old and new holiday traditions. As the streets come alight with twinkling lights and jolly decorations, the merry season offers a variety of cultural and social events to ensure everyone (visitors included) have a memorable Christmas and end of year celebration.

The traditional events held leading up to Christmas are among my favorites. Each district has its own special flair to celebrating the holiday; down south in the Stann Creek District, the Garifuna celebrate by holding Jankunu dance festivals, at the heart of the country in Belize City music festivals to the tune of punta and brukdown called Brams resonate from local parks, and in the northern town of Corozal and Orange Walk the religious traditions are kept alive with the re-enactments of the birth of Jesus, complete with a nine-day Posadas (a commemoration of the journey that Joseph and Mary made from Nazareth to Bethlehem in search of a safe refuge). While the events differ at each location, one thing remains constant – food galore, colorful culture, and joyful spirits!

It doesn’t matter where you find yourself during New Year’s; it’s always a party! However, Ambergris Caye (in my humble opinion) is the place to be! Restaurants and bars across town throw social affairs fit to welcome the New Year. One of my favorite parties lets me celebrate while contributing to a worthy cause. Not only is the



San Pedro Lions Club, one of the leading charitable groups on the island, but they also know how to throw one heck of a dance party that goes till the next morning. And, if you indulge a little too much, we have special events the next day to help cure that headache too!

If you are one of the lucky ones to find yourself in Belize, this December check out our calendar of events for some fun activities to do during holiday vacation. Don’t forget to check out our online calendar at www.mybeautifulbelize.com for more events and additional information on Belize.

From our *My Beautiful Belize* family, we wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year 2020!

Enjoy a December filled with festivities



December 7th – Holiday Boat Parade starting at Wayo's Beach Bar, San Pedro Town from 6PM

– Caribe Man Triathlon at Hopkins Village, Stann Creek District starting at 2:30PM



– San Pedro Dance Academy Christmas Show at the San Pedro Lions Den, San Pedro Town starting at 7PM

– Cayo Art Festival at the San Ignacio & Santa Elena House of Culture, Cayo District starting at 8AM



December 8th – Tree Lighting Ceremony at The Truck Stop, north of San Pedro Town starting at 5:30PM

December 11th – A Christmas Medley at the George Price Center, Belmopan City starting at 6PM

– Salon Party at CG Esthetic, San Pedro Town starting at 2PM

December 13th – San Pedro Polyclinic Christmas Concert Benefit at Fido's Beach Bar, San Pedro Town starting at 7PM



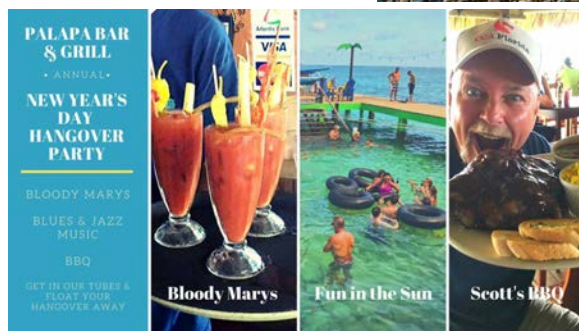
December 14th – Holiday Craft Fair & Cookie Bake Off at The Truck Stop, north of San Pedro starting at 2PM



December 21st – Krismus Brukdong Bram Festival at Battlefield Park, Belize City starting at 3PM

– December Bingo Night at Crazy Canucks Beach Bar, San Pedro Town starting at 5PM

December 22nd – Hummingbird 5k and 10k Race starting at Armenia Village, Cayo District at 6:30AM

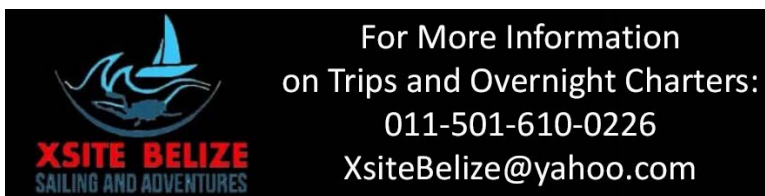


January 1st – New Year's Day Hangover Party at Palapa Bar and Grill, San Pedro Town starting at 10AM

December 31st – Palapa New Year's Eve Party at Palapa Bar and Grill, San Pedro Town starting at 9PM

– New Year's Eve Crab Race at Crazy Canucks Beach Bar, San Pedro Town starting at 6:30PM

– Lions New Year's Eve Party at the San Pedro Lions Den, San Pedro Town starting at 10PM



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