

#### From the Editor: Tamara Sniffin

Many people who travel try to go to new places instead of returning to the same place time and again. I understand that. There's so much to see and do in this vast world; if you're like me, the FOMO (fear of missing out) is real! With limited time and often limited funds, we want to discover new places and do new things, ticking off the travel to-do list as we go.

But what do you do when you love a place so much that you keep coming back, discovering more reasons why you love it each time? When we moved to Belize over twenty years ago, my husband ex-



Editor Tamara (I) treats her visiting friend Courtney to a day stay at Caves Branch Jungle Lodge.

claimed, "Now we can go somewhere else when we take a vacation!" And he was right—I no longer needed to get my Belize "fix" now that we lived here!

Now the conundrum of favorite places lies within the country, and amazingly, after all these years of exploring Belize, there's so much we have yet to see or do. But sometimes, we are guilty of gravitating to places we cannot resist. Sometimes, the comfort of going to a place you are familiar with relieves you of anticipating the unknown. Here, you know what to expect, what you love about it, and there's no learning curve; just settle into your home away from home and enjoy the surroundings.

We are especially guilty of this when we have friends and family visiting who want to explore the country. Depending on their interests, we already have an itinerary at the ready. Ian Anderson's Cave Branch Jungle Lodge is one of our go-to places in the Cayo District. We've taken countless friends and family there for a real-deal Belizean experience, complete with warm hospitality, gorgeous rooms, lush landscape, delicious food, and all-around comfort. We have countless favorites in Belize, but if you haven't stayed at one of our jungle lodges, do yourself a favor and check it out — they're just one of the many highlights in My Beautiful Belize!



Welcome to La Isla Bonita!

As we move through the months of April to June, San Pedro enters a season filled with warmth, tradition, and celebration. The calm of spring gives way to the vibrant energy that defines our island culture. From Easter gatherings to community cleanups and school events, this time of year reflects the pride we take in both our people and our home.

June brings one of our most vibrant traditions—Día de San Pedro—a celebration of faith, unity, and the island's deep-rooted heritage. It is a time when locals and visitors alike join in honoring what makes our community our home. Around the same time, preparations for Lobster Fest begin, building excitement for a season full of flavor, music, and unforgettable island experiences.

Throughout the celebrations, the San Pedro Town Council remains committed to investing in public spaces, shoreline improvements, and environmental initiatives that protect and enhance our community. You'll notice efforts across town aimed at sustainability and resilience, from beach restoration to educational outreach. These are not just projects; they reflect our commitment to building community partnerships and safeguarding our island, our home.

We hope our waters, our wildlife, and the generous spirit of those who call San Pedro their home inspire you to stay a little longer!

Enjoy your stay and may your time here be full of discovery and unforgettable moments.

# Louvre, Paris, France

#### Where do you Read

Don and Kathy Sniffin, from Longmont, Colorado, USA, took their copy of My Beautiful Belize to the Louvre Museum in Paris, France. The Louvre is home to the Mona Lisa, an oil painting by Leonardo da Vinci, probably the world's most famous. Painted sometime between 1503 and 1519, when Leonardo lived in Florence, the sitter's mysterious smile and unproven identity have made the painting a source of ongoing investigation and fascination.

Belizean Elena Gabb, who now resides in Houston, Texas, USA, travels with My Beautiful Belize while visiting the iconic Trevi Fountain in Rome, Italy. Standing 86 feet high and 161.3 feet wide, it is the largest Baroque fountain in the city and one of the most famous fountains in the world.



#### Rome, Italy



Have a great picture reading this publication? Send it to us at hello@mybeautifulbelize.com to be featured!



#### Belize Banana Fibers: a new art-form sustaining Belizean families

What began as a local project where fibers processed from banana and plantain trees were handcrafted into artisan products has become a budding Belize Banana Fiber business. It has evolved into a new, all-Belizean art form that creates income for Belizean families.



Banana Fibers originally started in 2019 by missionaries in the Cayo district. They were first challenged with extracting fiber from the banana plant's pseudostems, or trunk, which is a tightly packed bundle of overlapping leaf sheaths. Finding the right machinery to do so proved challenging, especially if they acquired something costly and complicated to repair, should it break down. Thanks to the ingenuity of Humberto Chulin, a resident of San Jose Succotz, he crafted a machine with parts available in the country. The Eco-Gater proved to be the perfect machinery for the job. By the time the COVID-19 pandemic hit Belize in March 2020, they had two machines, and it was time to get serious with the business. Banana Fiber started on June 1, 2021, to provide jobs for artisans working from their homes. As a new medium, workshops were offered, and many people responded and wanted to learn. Training programs on how to craft products from the fibers were held, and those who completed the sessions received a certification. Over time, artisans started to work and weave, later creating baskets, mirrors, lamps, rugs, etc.

In September 2024, Leisa Carr-Caceres from Banana Bank Lodge acquired the business. A savvy entrepreneur and artist, she felt investing in a banana fiber business was destiny. "We've worked with about thirty artisans altogether. It's really been a great journey meeting all of





them, learning from them as well...and now my creative genes also get to exercise, like OK, what else can we do? My hope is to combine this with my stained glass, especially for the lamps," she exclaimed.





#### Banana Fibers Continued from Page 4

The entire process, from banana plant to fiber, is arduous. Carr-Caceres explains, "After the fruit is harvested, the banana pseudostems are brought to our workshop where we split the stems and peel them into slices. The slices are fed through the Eco-Gator, which crushes out the liquid and leaves only the fiber strings. Then we sundry the fiber, boil it to eliminate bacteria, and sundry it again. When the fiber is dry, we distribute it to our artisans who twist fibers into strands of various girths for weaving."

The artisans are mainly in the villages of Buena Vista, Hill View, Benque, Arenal, Spanish Lookout,

Unitedville, Belmopan, and throughout the Cayo District. A collective of about thirty artisans are certified to work with banana fibers.

"We offer workshops and a certification program so artisans can achieve the qualifications and knowledge necessary to manipulate the fiber correctly. It is not just knowing how to weave but also being able to dye the fiber and sort different fiber qualities for various purposes to achieve quality assurance. Banana fiber is the mahogany of fibers, meaning it can be used in many ways. It is softer than other fibers yet as strong when properly worked. Our workshops highlight specific skills. Those who complete the workshop get a certificate. We have beginner and advanced workshops, and our artisans are primarily women supporting their families. Each artist has their own level of expertise. We intend to continue to foster artisans and bring them to an artistic level for banana fibers," Carr-Caceres tells us.

Belize Banana Fibers' future looks bright, with a growing demand for its artisan products. To see their products, please visit their showroom at Banana Bank Lodge. Other vendor locations include Chillpoint and Sirenian Bay in Placencia, GariMaya in Hopkins, and Spanish Lookout Gallery and Gifts. You can also order online at http://www.belizebananafibers.com and find them on Facebook. For more information, contact belizebananafibers2024@gmail.com, phone, or WhatsApp at 664-6551.









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www.corkandcooperage.com/shop facebook.com/corkandcooperage What's new at the Zoo?

#### A Graceful Beginning

Article Submitted by The Belize Zoo

In early March, a concerned citizen found a struggling tapir calf near La Gracia Village in the Cayo District. A wildfire had swept through the area, and amid the chaos, this tiny calf was found alone; her mother was nowhere in sight.

Her rescuer acted quickly to remove her from harm. He then reached out to the Belize Wildlife & Referral Clinic so the calf could get the urgent care she needed. Once she was stable, she made her way to The Belize Zoo, where she will grow up in a safe and loving environment.

In late April, "Grace" is estimated to be about two months old, and is still developing; her little teeth just arrived recently! She enjoys bottle feeding four times daily, enthusiastically chugging down a milk replacement formula provided by her zookeepers.

This is very similar to their early days in the wild, where tapir calves would be nursed by their mother several times a day during their infancy, and spend over a year at her side learning how to forage for food, avoid predators, and navigate the wild in general.

The Central American tapir, Belize's beloved National Animal, is an endangered species largely due to habitat loss and fatal collisions with vehicles.



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Grace represents an iconic but vulnerable species and will play a critical role at the Belize Zoo in raising awareness about her species' survival challenges.

Grace made her big public debut on Sunday April 27th for World Tapir Day. And, if a baby tapir wasn't adorable enough, the Zoo also received a baby tamandua (anteater) and jaguarundi around the same time Grace arrived! Thankfully, both these animals are also thriving and getting stronger every day. Both species are often good candidates for rehabilitation and release, so

the Zoo aims to release them independently into the Maya Forest Corridor

when the time is right.

Their habitat needs are, of course, vastly different. Tamanduas require a healthy and spacious forest canopy with lots of termite nests to feast on, while jaguarundis enjoy prowling lowland savannas and mixed forest habitats (did you know jaguarundis are Belize's most diurnal wildcat?!). Thankfully, the Maya Forest Corridor provides these habitats and more, making it the perfect landscape for their release!

You can follow the Belize Zoo on its Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/BelizeZoo or at https://www.belizezoo.org. The zoo is open Monday through Saturday from 8:30AM to 5PM (last admission at 4PM) and Sunday from 8:30AM to 4:30PM (last admission at 3:30PM).



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The Cayo District is the largest in Belize, spanning 2,000 square miles and bursting with diverse terrain. The verdant landscape is enchanted with misty Maya Mountains, thick with subtropical jungle, sweeping farmland abundant with citrus orchards and cattle, lush river valleys, and rolling hills. The District's most important industry is eco-tourism, boosting exotic archaeological sites, comfortable accommodations, and acclaimed jungle lodges. Cayo is a great place to unwind and get in tune with Mother Nature, offering memorable experiences for the whole family.

One landmark establishment in Cayo, just a twenty-minute drive from Belmopan along the picturesque Hummingbird Highway, is Ian Anderson's Caves Branch Jungle Lodge. This renowned lodge is a Belizean adventure you'll never forget, and it's a must-stay if you want the ultimate Caves Branch experience. However, for those who are exploring the area, just passing through, or quartering at one of the lodges in the vicinity, Caves Branch offers day reservation options where you can enjoy their unique amenities without the extended stay. There are many options you can mix and match with your interests.

#### **Caves Branch Botanical Gardens** - Guided Garden Tour

Curated in 2008 by Ella Baron and the Caves Branch Jungle Lodge to educate the public about the beauty and importance of Belizean flora and fauna, nature lovers stroll along stone pathways lined with lush foliage. Many pop with vibrant blooms, new to the novice eye, and each plant amazes the mind with shapes and colors never imagined. The sense of wonder grows with every turn. Within the orchid gazebo, the tickling sound of water and a small pond with floating greenery is embraced by orchids that burst





into an array of blooms, showing a kaleidoscope of colors and sizes.

Knowledgeable tour guides led the magical journey, identifying nature's masterpieces and explaining their medicinal or cultural significance. Visitors can smell the

lemongrass and all-spice leaves and see the coffee, cacao, papaya, and pineapple growing along the sides of the walkways through the gardens (at various times of the year).

**Continued on Page 8** 



#### Play Day at Caves Branch continued from Page 7

The low-intensity tour is located just steps from the lodge and is appropriate for families of all ages. The one-hour tour costs \$ 30 USD per person, and all profits go toward conservation research and community outreach.

#### **Cheese Tasting**

Sample the artisan cheese produced right on the property while learning about the cheese-making process. Fresh fruit, crisp slices of veggies, and bread are served with the cheese, and wine can be added to the experience. Tasty bites may include Parmesan, Provolone, Spressa, Trappist, Old Barbender, and Feta cheese.

This savory adventure costs \$30 USD (+ tax) per person and is available by reservation on Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday. Wine options are additional.



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#### **Day Reservations**

Day packages can also include lunch or dinner in the charming, open-air, covered dining room. Enjoy a delicious meal while watching Howler Monkeys and exotic birds in the nearby treetops above the Caves Branch River. Want a little pool time? Add that to your day package as well!



Whatever your fancy, chances are you can put together a lovely day at Caves Branch Jungle Lodge. Reservations are required at least 24 hours in advance, and can be made via 1-866-357-2698 (international), +501-610-3451 (local), +501-610-4613 (WhatsApp), or email info@cavesbranch.com. For more information, visit their website at https://www.cavesbranch.com.

# Moon Bar @ Mangata Villas Portofino Restaurant Maruba Beach Klub where a new subdivision awaits North Ambergris Caye Island Emergency Services Sir Barry Bowen Bridge May - July 2025

#### North Ambergris Caye



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urday, 11am – 9:30pm. WhatsApp 610-3584 or 610(ELVI) E-mails: reservations@ elviskitchen.com | info@elviskitchen.com

**Paradice Cream** - Paradice Cream Parlor offers its customers a variety of over 30 flavors of homemade ice cream. Open Daily, 11am - 9:30pm; TEL: 501-226-5959





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com/spbtiatic/ for hours.



The Cork & Cooperage - The only Wine and Bourbon Bar in San Pedro focusing on premium, current vintage, New World Wines and Spirits. On Pescador Drive across from Caramba in the center of town. Open 10am-10pm daily.

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#### **Important Information**

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.

ACES Wildlife Rescue: Don't take matters into your own hands. Call 623-7920 for wildlife conflicts and rescue.

Al-Anon Meetings: Wednesdays, 5:30PM, SP Catholic Church Hall islabonitaalanon@yahoo.com

Ambergris Caye Masonic Lodge: ambergriscayemasoniclodge@

gmail.com 672-2265

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

Belize Tourism Board: 227-2419

**Belize Tourism Industry Association (BTIA):** 227-5717 Dr. Otto Rodriguez San Pedro Poly-Clinic II: 226-2536

**Emergency Veterinarian care:** 610-3647

Hope Haven: 226-2333

**Island Emergency Services:** Certified medical emergency service.

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Narcotics Anonymous: By request at 623-0316.

National Aids Commission Island Committee (NACIC): HIV Testing/ Treatment/Stigma and Discrimination and Pre and Post Test

Counseling. 650-7021.

Rotary Club of Ambergris Caye: Join Rotary at our weekly meetings Wednesdays at noon at THE FACTORY. Find us on Facebook! RRR Response: Emergency response team Call 627-1117

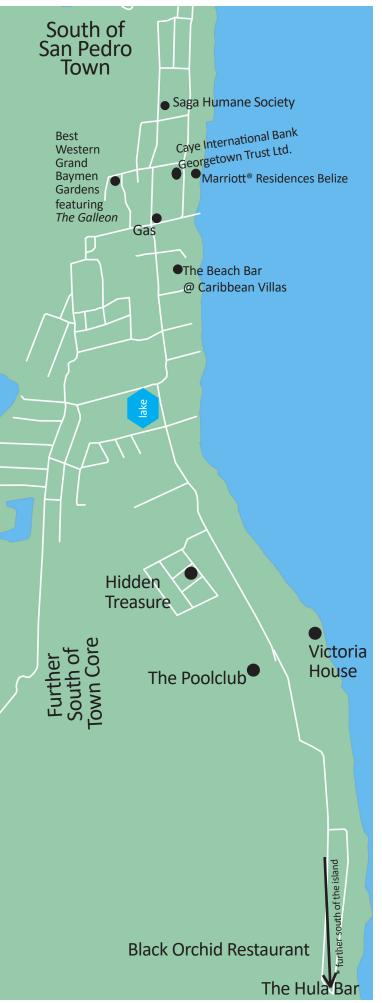
Saga Society: A non-profit "humane society" to address the stray

cat and dog population in San Pedro. Phone 226-3266.

San Pedro Police Department: 206-2022 San Pedro Fire Department: 206-2372

San Pedro Tourist Guide Association: 226-2391

SP Post Office: 206-2260. SP Town Library: 206-2028



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### "HandmadeByBze" Exhibit celebrates Belizean Artisans



On February 20, 2025, the Institute of Creative Arts opened a new exhibit at the Museum of Art within the Belize City House of Culture. The traveling exhibit, titled "HandmadeByBze", celebrates Belizean craftsmanship and creativity, showcasing 27 artists' traditional and contemporary handmade designs. Hailing from around the country, the featured artists display their unique talent using various materials. Each masterpiece embodies the talents of its maker, utilizing clay, jippi jappa (crafted from the Jipijapa palm), calabash gourds, bamboo, stone, wood, slate, embroidery, crochet, and even butterfly wings!

The extraordinary artisans featured include Victoria Bedran: Clay Sculptor, from Cayo; Keith Francisco: John Canoe "Jankunu" Headdress maker from Dangriga, Stann Creek; Candelaria Kukul: Jippi Jappa Weaving, from Aguacate Village Toledo; Austin "Bobby" Sanchez: Drum maker, from Seine Bight, Stann Creek; Daniel Cab: Calabash carver and painter from Punta Gorda Town, Toledo; Emilio Perera: Handbag Designer from Belize City; Victor "Raskeemo Marin: John Canoe "Jankunu" mask maker from Dangriga, Stann Creek; Mercy Sabal: Traditional Doll Maker, from Dangriga, Stann Creek; Seraphim Gabourel: bamboo carpenter from Harmonyville, Cayo; Anthony Vacaro Sr., Sculptor: stone, wood from Maskall Village; Elmer Panti, Sculptor: Slate, from San Jose Succotz, Cayo; Susano Blanco, Sculptor: wood, from August Pine Ridge, Orange Walk; Humberto Chulin: Banana Fiber Weaving from Banana Bank, Cayo; Emmeth Young: Drummaker from Gales Point Manatee; Zyania Alonzo: Crochet: handbag from Belize City; Maria Angelita Magana: Traditional





"HandmadeByBze" Exhibit

**Continued from Page 13** 

embroidery and Terno-Stitch from San Joaquin, Corozal; German Magana Sr., Sculptor: Clay, from San Jose Succotz, Cayo; Esteban "Ebano" Cano, Sculptor: Stone, from Santa Elena, Cayo; Baron Neal: Butterfly Art, from Santa Elena, Cayo; Frank Tzib: Mayan Glyph Artist from San Antonio, Cayo; Miranda Mes, Mayflower Women's Group: Traditional Embroidery from San Jose Village, Toledo; Margaret Welcome: Tie-Tie or "Titai" Basket Weaver from Teakettle, Cayo; and Chris Salas, Carpenter: logwood from Isabella Bank.

The exhibit travels throughout the country and concludes in July. Within the next few months, there will be many opportunities to experience HandmadeByBze from wherever you may be. If you are in the area, don't miss out on this authentic experience. To learn more about the artisans, please visit https://tinyurl.com/handmadebybze.

#### **EXHIBIT SCHEDULE**

11th April - 24th April – Corozal House of Culture 28th April -8th May – Banquitas, Orange Walk 9th May- 22nd - Benque House of Culture 23rd May – 5th June - San Ignacio-Santa Elena House of Culture

6th June – 19th June - Dangriga House of Culture 20th June – 3rd July - Seine Bight Welcome Center 4th July- 18th July - Punta Gorda Welcome Center









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#### CONVENIENT

With a wide range of services, including mortgage loans, wire transfers, debit cards, term deposits and the option to bank in multiple currencies, Caye International Bank is a convenient option for those who want to explore international banking.

We understand that investing in a foreign market can be challenging, which is why we offer personalized support to our clients. We can provide the banking services you need to succeed financially offshore.

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#### **LOANS DEPARTMENT**



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# TIKI TIME AT THE HULA BAR!

Just a short drive south of San Pedro Town, you'll discover Hula Bar, a unique over-thewater restaurant and bar that perfectly blends tropical flavors with breathtaking views. This charming spot offers guests a relaxing dining experience amidst the serene beauty of the Caribbean Sea.

Hula Bar, south Ambergris Caye's newest addition, is a vibrant escape that transports you to a tropical paradise. Featuring tiki-themed cocktails and island-inspired décor, the ambiance is enhanced by bamboo accents, tiki torches, and lush greenery, creating the perfect backdrop for a leisurely time.

The menu boasts a creative selection of cocktails, each crafted using fresh, local ingredients. From classic mojitos and margaritas to signature cocktails infused with tropical fruits and spices, every drink promises a refreshing experience served in stylish glasses for added visual delight.

The talented bartender introduced us to some of the house's signature drinks during our recent visit. I particularly enjoyed the Tiki Titi cocktail, served in a 'Sexy' cup. It's a refreshing, zesty concoction, perfect for those who appreciate a citrusy twist. This drink combines the smooth taste of vodka with the bold tang of grapefruit juice and the bright, tart notes of freshly squeezed lime.

Alternatively, you might try the Trade Vic's Grog, which features dark Jamaican rum paired with the tropical flavors of pineapple and passion fruit, creating a delightful and exotic cocktail experience.

But be warned, their cocktails pack a punch and should be enjoyed responsibly.



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#### The Hula Bar continued from Page 16

The menu is thoughtfully designed to cater to a wide range of palates and preferences, ensuring there is something for everyone. Classic favorites like crispy chicken nuggets and whimsical Hello Kitty pancakes will bring smiles to little ones' faces, while those seeking a taste of the islands can indulge in fresh and flavorful ceviche.

We decided to try the unique Spicy Tuna Tostones. This inventive dish harmoniously blends Latin and Asian flavors. The base consists of fried, smashed green plantains, known as tostones, providing a crispy and hearty foundation. They are artfully layered with creamy guacamole, adding a rich, buttery element that complements the dish's texture. Topped with spicy Ahi tuna, this dish is a delightful display of contrasts, combining fresh, creamy and a hint of heat to tantalize the taste buds.

We also sampled Argentine empanadas. These handheld pies are not your average 'local' empanda. They feature flaky pastry filled with options such as seasoned beef, chicken, or a vegetarian blend of spinach and mozzarella. They were served with homemade chimichurri sauce, which beautifully enhanced the rich flavors of the empanadas.

For all sushi lovers, The Hula Bar features a weekly Aloha Maki Night (follow them on Facebook @Thehulabar for actual dates), offering delicious rolls and fresh nigiri.

Visit Hula Bar from Wednesday to Monday, open daily from 8AM to 10PM. Hula Bar will impress whether you're in the mood for a refreshing morning beverage or a relaxing evening cocktail. For reservations, don't hesitate to contact 226-4852.4852. You can also follow them on Instagram @ thehulabar.



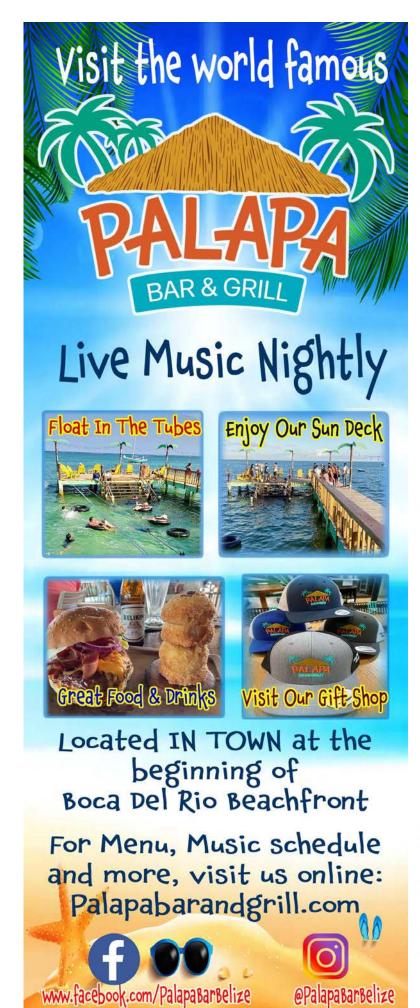






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#### Calendar of Events

May

#### **The Chocolate Festival of Belize**



#### May 16th to 18th.

Celebrate cacao, culture, and the beauty of Southern Belize in collaboration with partners sponsors. This event will take place across several locations in the Toledo

#### Made in Belize Expo - May 17



This unique opportunity brings together entrepreneurs, microbusiness owners. wholesalers, retail buyers, and customers from across the country at a central location. It will be held at the Macal River Park in San Ignacio Town.



variety of live entertainment, including a canoe race, a beauty pageant, and a motocross show.

The theme, "Integrating Sustainable Food Systems: Mitigating Climate Change. Strengthening Agricultural Resilience," emphasizes our commitment to sustainability in agriculture. This event will take place at the Agriculture Showgrounds in Belmopan City.

#### June

#### Hopkins Mango Street Festival - June 14 & 15



Immerse vourself in the vibrant culture of Hopkins while enjoying delicious mango treats and exploring everything the festival has to offer. This event will be held in Hopkins Village in the Dangriga District.

#### Dia de San Pedro - June 28 & 29



Join us for a celebration honoring San Pedro's namesake and Patron Saint. This annual event combines religious, cultural, and festive activities that are synonymous with La Isla Bonita, San Pedro It will be held in San Pedro Town, Ambergris Caye.



#### JULY

#### San Pedro Lobster Festival

Prepare for a celebration of delicious lobster flavors and unforgettable memories! The Lobster Crawl runs from July 1st to 12th, followed by a Block Party on July 13th at the Honourable Louis Sylvestre Sporting Complex.

#### **Placencia Lobster Fest** July 4 to 5

Calling all seafood enthusiasts! Join us for an unforgettable celebration centered around everything lobster, featuring fresh seafood, live music, amazing food,

#### and plenty of fun!

Caye Caulker Lobster Festival - July 18 to 20 Discover the original Lobster Fest in Belize, celebrated in Caye Caulker Village. Enjoy live music, dancing, Belizean arts and crafts, and a variety of delicious food.

#### Bengue Fiesta July 10 to 12



Benque Viejo del Carmen hosts an annual celebration in honor of the town's patron saint, Nuestra Señora de Monte Carmelo (Our Lady of Mount Carmel). Enjoy live entertainment, food, and drinks at the Cancha Marshalleck Field in Benque Viejo del Carmen Village.

#### AUGUST

#### Grand Caribe Deep Sea Classic - August 1 to 2

Calling all fishing enthusiasts! Join us on Ambergris Caye for deep-sea fishing at some of the best marine spots around. This tournament is one of the largest in Belize with over \$150,000 in prizes up for grabs. It will take place at Grand Caribe Resort in Ambergris Cave



#### San Pedro Classic Fly-Fishing Tournament - August 14 to 16



Participate in this three-day tournament focused on community involvement and open to all participants. It will be held at the Holiday Hotel in San Pedro Town.



## COME AND VISIT OUR TASTING ROOMS IN SAN PEDRO & PLACENCIA VILLAGE

# The Tiburon Tasting Rooms

Tiburon Rum's Tasting Room is a must-see. Come visit us at Placencia Village or San Pedro for an exclusive rum tasting with our friendly and knowledgeable staff. Or simply pop in for a t-shirt and some rum to go.

Placencia Village Open everyday from 10am – 7pm

San Pedro Open everyday from 10am-7pm



