

MAYA WORLD EXTENSION

A Journey into the World of the Ancient Maya & the Crooked Tree Bird Sanctuary

Trip Details

3 days / 2 nights

Price

\$579 USD Contact us for current Cdn prices

2009/10 Departures

This trip can be arranged for any date.

Call 1-800-667-1630 for details.

Activities

Hiking,
 Mayan Ruins Exploration,
 Rainforest Trails and Waterways,
 Birding,
 Photography,
 Natural History Interpretation

Accommodation

2 nights hotel



3 DAYS / 2 NIGHTS

The Mayan Sites...

Lamanai – The ruins of Lamanai lie scattered along the lagoon of the New River within a tropical rainforest in central Belize. The archaeological reserve is spread over 950 acres, however, the central area of the site covers approximately half a square mile. Mayan “Lama’an’ain”, translates into “submerged crocodile” and, was one of the longest continuously occupied Mayan cities—from about 500 BC to 1675 AD due in part to its situation on a major trade route, the New River.

The first major excavation was by David M. Pendergast, of the Royal Ontario Museum. During a series of field seasons beginning in 1974, his team mapped 718 structures stretching out along the shore of the lagoon. Much of Lamanai's importance is reflected in the large, imposing Late Pre-Classic temple-pyramids, which usually built over top of Early Classic constructions. For example, buried deep inside a 600 AD masked temple lies a well preserved Late Pre-Classic temple dating back to 100 BC

In addition to the many Mayan structures in the park, Lamanai is also known for the remains of two 16th century Catholic churches and a 19th century sugar mill including a huge flywheel and boiler. Due to the long occupation of the site by varied peoples, the artifacts of Lamanai include those of stone, clay, wood, bone, shell, jade, gold, copper, glass, and iron. Also of interest, there are at least four troops of howler monkeys living there and the marshlands around the lagoon support many species of water birds, mammals, and reptiles.

Altun Ha – Translates into “stone water”, which comes from the ancient Mayan reservoir, or aguada, that Belizeans call “rock stone pond”. Altun Ha was an important Classic Period



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Mayan sites cont'

site situated to take advantage of the trading that occurred between the waters of the Caribbean and the deep interior of the Mayan Civilization. Altun Ha is one of the most excavated sites in Belize. The complex of Altun Ha is located 31 miles (50 kms) north of Belize City. The entire city covered three square miles (5 km²) and the population is estimated to have been 8,000 to 10,000 people at its peak. Within the central portion of the site there are more than 275 structures. Though quite small in size, this Mayan site has become famous mainly for a large jade head, representing the sun god

Kinich Ahau, that was discovered in the main temple. This head is the largest Mayan jade artefact discovered to date, weighing 10 lbs. It is now the national symbol of Belize and seen on the corner of every Belizean banknote.

Chau Hiix - First discovered in 1990 Chau Hiix is a relatively small site with limited excavation, occupied between 1200BC and 1500AD. The extent of the settlement remains unknown, but covers at least 6 square miles (10 kms²). Remains of Mayan palaces, pyramids, ballpark and plazas are evident. Seasonal lagoons contain enormous agricultural complexes composed of dams, canals, and raised fields, suggesting that Chau Hiix may have had one of the largest controlled hydrological systems in the Maya area. Currently, there is an observation tower and encompassing boardwalk, built in 1998, which offers a clear view of the site.

Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary – Located 33 miles (53 kms) northwest of Belize City and just 2 miles off the Northern Highway, the Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary consists of a large network of inland lagoons, swamps, and waterways. The sanctuary provides both the abundant food sources and the safe resting areas necessary to support a large and diverse population of birds. There are literally hundreds of species within the sanctuary, including, snail kites, tiger herons, snowy egrets, ospreys, black collared hawks, and of course the reserves most famous resident, the massive jabiru stork. The best time for viewing resident and migrant birds is December until June, during Belize's dry-season. Those visiting in the later months of the dry season (Feb.- Jun.) are treated to a concentration of wildlife, which congregate in the park's shrinking lagoons, as freshwater resources across the country dry-up.

Recommended Tour-books:

Eltringham, Peter. 2002.
Belize: The Rough
Guide. London. Penguin
Publishers.

Perottet, Tony. 2000.
Belize: Insight Guide
Singapore. Houghton
Mifflin Publishers.
-Great photographs and
written by a Belizean!

Recommended Reading:

Rabinowitz, Alan. 1986
Jaguar, One Man's
Struggle to Establish the
First Jaguar Sanctuary
New York. Island Press.



A Note About the Ecology...

Flora...

We begin our trip, immersed in the rich savannah, grassy lowlands, lagoons and broadleaf rainforests of Central Belize. Within the savannah and lowland habitats of Belize, the dominant plant species is the Caribbean pine, but there also exists an abundance of other species such as grasses, palms, palmettos to cecropias and miconias. Although, this ecosystem is not as diverse vegetation as the broadleaf tropical rainforest, it does possess a unique system that relies on specific ecological influents. Fire is the major ecological influent, which contributes to the continuous dominance of this system. This can be seen through-out the lowland savannah zones as charred stumps and burned bark on many of the trees, which seems like a destructive force to the untrained eye, however, this is an important factor in the regions ongoing renewal. The cycle of burns renews growth in the region, and certain species cannot release their seed without fire! The lagoons and riverine environments of the lowlands also harbor an tremendous diversity of plant-life, which ranges from small thinboled trees, to large kapoks along the floodplain. Also, small Cecropias and various leguminous trees are abundant, and heliconias tend to dominate the understory. Various arums are also common as are palms, especially morichie palm.

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Fauna...

While traveling inland into the savannah and wetland habitats of northern Belize, we have great opportunities to view a diverse array of wildlife. Travelers flock to the region to see the diverse bird life found throughout the savannah and marshlands; over 250 different species have been spotted in this region (approximately 2/3 of Belize's total). During the dry-season, when the birds tend to congregate in shrunken pools and riverbeds, it is not uncommon to see one hundred species or more on an average day. Some of the birds seen are: the jabiru stork, the belted kingfisher, the tri-colored heron, the boat-billed heron, the great and snowy egret, the snail kite, the tiger heron, the osprey, and the black-collared hawk. While traveling along the river or lagoons we are also likely to spot some of Belize's interesting land creatures, such as the Morelet's crocodile, turtles, and green or spiny iguanas. Also, some of the mammals common to the area include collared and white-lipped peccary (warrie), brocket and white-tailed deer, opossums, weasels, porcupines, and armadillos.

Typical Daily Itinerary:

Please note as this is a trip extension it does not have a Day 0.

Day 1: For those beginning their Island Expeditions trip with this extension arrive at the Belize International Airport where you are met by an Island Expeditions representative and transferred to the Birds Eye View Lodge, in the Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary. After checking into our accommodations we have a chance to meet our fellow travelers, explore the nearby Creole village and settle into the rhythm of 'Belize Time'. Transfers from the airport are included

Accommodation: (Lodge)

Meals: Dinner

Day 2: After a nice breakfast the group departs for the Mayan Ruins of Lamanai. This day of exploration includes a complete guided tour, visiting the many temples, plazas, palaces, and museums within the park boundaries.

Once we have had a chance to tour the ruins, we depart Lamanai by boat for a scenic ride into the crooked Tree Area where we have tremendous birding and wildlife opportunities: Iguana, Parrot, Toucan and even Morlet's Crocodile can be seen along the banks of the new River Lagoon. Upon arriving on the shore, we transfer overland for 45 minutes to Crooked Tree Village. We overnight at Birds Eye View Lodge, along the banks of the Crooked Tree Lagoon.

Accommodation: (Lodge)

Meals: B,L,D

Day 3: An early morning coffee and binoculars in hand, we enjoy the waking wilderness and many hundreds of birds feeding along the shores of the Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary Lagoons. The protected area was created in 1984 primarily to preserve resident and migratory birds, and consists of a network of inland lagoons, swamps and waterways that shelter one of the world's largest flying birds, the jabiru (jabiru mycteria.). After breakfast we enjoy a morning boat tour in the lagoons. After lunch we have time to relax and gather our bags before departing to the Mayan site of Altun Ha. Considered one of the major Mayan ceremonial centres of Belize, Altun Ha also functioned as an important trading centre between the interior and the Caribbean Sea during the classic period (250-900 AD). However, Altun Ha has been dated as far back as 600 BC. Within the site,

What's Included...

All meals
Accommodations,
and transfers
described in the tour
Professional Guiding
Services

What's Not Included...

Meal on 'Day 0'
Alcoholic Beverages
Gratuities
Airport Departure Tax
Extra costs due to late
Arrivals and other
circumstances beyond
our control



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there are more than 275 structures and there are up to 250 to 300 unexcavated mounds.

We return to the Belize City around 4:00 pm. Those traveling onto another program with Island Expeditions will continue from here to the Tropical Education Centre. All other travelers will be dropped off at the Belize International Airport, or will be dropped off at the Belize Biltmore Plaza, in Belize City, to continue with their independent arrangements.

Meals: B,L

Please Note: For those adding this extension at the back end of their IEC trip in Belize, transport through to one of the rendezvous points in Belize City where you will meet up with your Maya World Guides should be arranged in advance with our office.

Accommodation...

On the night of 'Day 1 & 2 we will be staying at Birds Eye View Lodge, situated on the water's edge of the Crooked Tree Lagoon. This comfortable Belizean-style hotel offers private bath and lakeside views. Over top of the hotel there is a deck and bar, which is a perfect place to catch the evening breeze and reminisce over your recent discoveries.

Transportation...

At the start and end of your trip transportation to and from either Belize City Municipal Airport, Biltmore Plaza Hotel or the Belize International Airport is included in the trip cost. All transportation by land and boat during the trip is included.

Thinking about seeing other parts of Belize with IEC?

The Mayan World Extension combines well with all Island Expeditions trips. The Glovers Reef & River of Caves and the Coral Islands & Mayan Caves trips both offer a unique experience, visiting some of the more isolated areas of the Barrier Reef and the surrounding atolls. The Coral Jaguar Expedition combine exploration of the Barrier Reef with 3 days venturing into the remote areas of the southern Belizean rainforest.

Getting back to Belize City ...

At the tail end of your Maya World Extension, return transportation will be provided back to Belize City. Whether you are connecting to another IEC trip, or are traveling home, we will make arrangements to drop you off at the Belize Biltmore Plaza to rendezvous with your next trip, or drop you off at the International Airport before your flight home.

Thinking About Traveling Independently, Before or After Your Trip?

With over 20 years of exploration in Belize, our very knowledgeable and experienced office staff can offer you a wealth of travel information to help you plan the best vacation possible! However, we do recommend that you read up on the country and find what interests you. Once you find an area of interest, give our office a phone call.



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