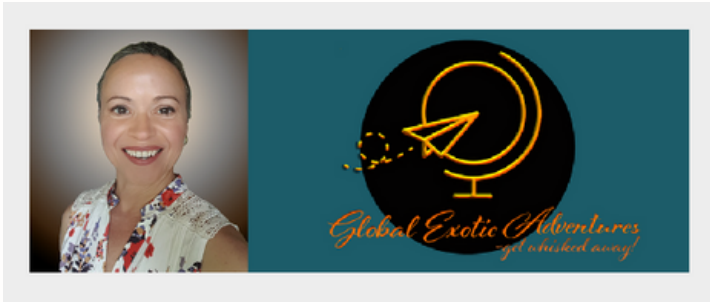




Three ways to recharge, relax
and refresh in

Belize





I am Juliet Weller, your personal travel advisor. I craft deluxe journeys for people with discerning taste, and travel-holics who yearn for the wonder of new experiences. These are bespoke, immersive, transformative vacations that bring to life the cultures, sights, and opportunities to create truly lasting memories with the people that mean the most to you.

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Three Ways to Recharge, Relax and Refresh in *Belize*

1. Jungle Adventure

While neighboring Mexico is home to well-known temples, the Mayan Empire's reach extended deep into the Yucatán Peninsula; today, you'll find vestiges of their power scattered across the jungles of Belize's interior. Perhaps the finest example lies 70 miles west of the capital, Belmopan, where more than two dozen palaces, plazas, and temples cluster on a ridge overlooking the Mopan River. When you set out to explore the Xunantunich archaeological site, you won't find yourself elbow-to-elbow at monuments such as its ancient El Castillo pyramid. You have the sensation of having the ruins just or yourself, no crowds, no lines, and you'll be rewarded with views over the emerald expanse that extend across the border with Guatemala.



A close look at ancient Mayan archaeology at the Xunantunich ruins.

Photo credit: Getty Images



Each bungalow at Blancaneaux Lodge features a hand-woven thatched roof and antique colonial furnishings.
Photo credit: Blancaneaux Lodge

Nestled in the 107,000-acre Mountain Pine Ridge Reserve, 90 minutes east of the temples, Blancaneaux Lodge's 20 wood-and-thatch villas on the banks of Privassion Creek share the dense tropical rain forest with a legion of birds, butterflies, howler monkeys, and iguanas. Filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola famously fell in love with this verdant swath in the Belizean mountains nearly four decades ago, which led to the opening of the first of three Family Coppola Hideaways resorts he owns in the country. And while Blancaneaux certainly channels the wild, a rustic communion with nature it isn't: think private plunge pools, "shell phones" (a conch shell intercom system), and an Italian tree house-style restaurant complete with a wood-fired brick oven.

2. Coastal Retreat

The charming coastal village of Placencia at the tip of a 16-mile-long peninsula is flanked by a lagoon woven with mangrove forests on one side, and azure Caribbean waters lapping at the other. When Coppola set his sights on the area in 2001, Placencia was still a bucolic fishing hamlet; since then, it's become a vibrant holiday destination. At his plush Turtle Inn, seaside living translates to salty breezes slinking through the shutters of 25 Balinese-inspired cottages and an open-air spa specializing in Thai massages.



Guests who book a stay at Turtle Inn receive a complimentary breakfast (with ocean views).
Photo credit: Turtle Inn



Garifuna music lessons at the Lebeha Drumming Center

Farther up the coast, the unassuming village of Hopkins is the cultural center of Belize's Afro-Indigenous Garifuna community. Visitors can sample dishes such as hudut (a coconut, plantain, and fish soup), bundiga (fresh snapper soup with coconut and green bananas), and wangla (melted sugar hardened with toasted sesame seeds) and learn about Garifuna music and culture while taking drumming lessons at Lebeha Drumming Center.

3. Seaside Escapes

Some have speculated that Madonna's ballad "La Isla Bonita" was inspired by the popular Ambergris Caye island.

While that may or may not be true, any of Belize's idyllic isles could serve as muse to an enamored songwriter. The Royal Belize private island resort can host 15 of your nearest and dearest across five opulent suites spanning three villas. It is a paradise for water sports, given that the resort abuts the Belize Barrier Reef, the world's second largest.



The tranquil waters of the Caye Marine Reserve, an easy day trip from Royal Belize.
Photo credit: Getty Images



The Great Blue Hole

At Cayo Espanto, another private-island hideaway, guests can arrive via helicopter, getting a bird's-eye view of the reef en route – as well as the Great Blue Hole, the biggest marine sinkhole in the world. The four-acre island's seven villas are situated for utmost privacy, out of sight from other vacationers. The bungalows are gorgeous. Every one of them has a little private beach, dock, and pool. You won't want to leave.

Ambergris Caye is Belize's largest island and a favorite destination, thanks in part to its proximity to the Blue Hole and the reef. The sophisticated 34-room Las Terrazas resort might be another reason. While the 70-foot infinity pool and Caribbean Sea views are compelling enough to keep you on the property, there's a whole world to explore just offshore. Take a snorkeling excursion to Hol Chan Marine Reserve and Shark Ray Alley. You'll be swimming so close to so many sharks, you'll never forget it.



The beach at Royal Belize