

BELIZE FIRST GUIDE TO
MAINLAND
BELIZE



LAN SLUDER

Belize First Guide to Mainland Belize

Published by Equator Publications, Asheville, N.C.
Printed in the United States of America by Whitehall Printing Co.

Text, photos (except where noted) and book design © copyright 2000 Lan Sluder. All rights reserved. Parts of the section on Belize's butterfly farms have appeared, in slightly different forms, in *Caribbean Travel & Life*, *The Globe & Mail* and the *St. Petersburg Times*. Other attributed photos and text are used by permission and are the property of the original copyright owners.

Cover design and maps by Robert O'Hair, New Orleans. Cover photos by Lan Sluder, Sheila M. Lambert, Fran Dwight and Brooks Lambert-Sluder.

ISBN: 0-9670488-2-6

For subscribers to BELIZE FIRST MAGAZINE, *Belize First Guide to Mainland Belize* is Vol. V, No. 1 and No. 2 (double issue) of BELIZE FIRST, the # 1 magazine on travel, life and retirement on the Caribbean Coast. Subscriptions to BELIZE FIRST include three book-format issues plus a Belize ITMB Traveller's Map and cost US\$29 in Belize, the U.S., Canada and Mexico and US\$49 elsewhere.

ISSN: 1521-2815

Web edition of BELIZE FIRST at www.turq.com/belizefirst/ or www.belizefirst.com.

EQUATOR

287 Beaverdam Road • Candler, NC 28715 USA • Fax 828-667-1717
e-mail: BZEFIRST@aol.com • www.turq.com/belizefirst/ or
www.belizefirst.com

Welcome to Mainland Belize



Lan Sluder

You're going to love mainland Belize. You'll enjoy going backabush to see the exotic wild animals, birds and butterflies of the rainforest. You'll dig seeing some of Mesoamerica's most interesting Maya sites. On the Caribbean Coast, you'll get right in the swim of things at some of the best beaches in Belize. You'll get a first-hand — and friendly — look at Belize's fascinating mix of cultures: Garifunas and Mennonites, Mestizos and Creoles, Mayas and Americans and more. If you're up to it, you can go deep into the longest cave systems in Central America, go fast down a river on a kayak, canoe or tube, go up a mountain on a bike, on a horse or on your hands and knees. You may even decide you want to live here or invest in a second home, a little farm with citrus trees, or a cottage beside the Caribbean, at prices which are a fraction of what you'd pay in the U.S.

It's all here: Rainforest, ruins, recreation. Without the crowds and tourist traps present in so many other destinations.

The *Belize First Guide to Mainland Belize* is designed to make your travel and exploration easy. Over the years, we've heard from literally thousands of Belize travelers and would-be visitors. We've listened to their questions, and then we put together this guide to answer those questions in logical, easy-to-read fashion. For example, we've learned that people want to know about crime and personal safety, whether they can drink the water and about how to save money on booking accommodations and arranging travel, so we've highlighted these topics. First and foremost, we think travelers are interested in **candid hotel reviews**. For most people, making a decision about a hotel is the toughest part of travel. A hotel is where you spend much of your money and your time. That's why many of our hotel listings are lengthy and detailed. Unless you're an absolute dumbo, you don't need to be told where to buy tee-shirts or how to find the post office. A quick look-around or a query of a front desk clerk will give you that information. We've concentrated on providing information — candid, ad-free insights — that you can't easily get elsewhere.

Each destination in Belize, from the “Sugar Coast” in the far north to the wet and wild “Deep Green Coast” in the far south, has its own section. We’ve **rated** the various aspects of each destination — *Natural Beauty, Wildlife & Birding, Hotels, Restaurants, Beaches, Bugs, Health & Hygiene, Fishing, Diving & Snorkeling, Maya Sites, Attractions, Adventure, Value, Safety, Cultural Tourism, Shopping and Overall Appeal* — on a scale of 1 to 10. The higher the number, the better.

Within each section, we’ve included **star ratings** of hotels, lodges, B&Bs and inns. We’ve visited and rated more than 150 hotels, using a scale of from one to five stars -- ★ to ★★★★★.

Here’s how the scale works: Only accommodations that meet our standards earn one or more stars. (Note that some hotels may be too new to rate, and others may be left out because we simply haven’t yet visited the hotel.) Stars are awarded based on a checklist which includes the appeal of the location, decor and design, cleanliness, friendliness, value, service, amenities such as swimming pool and other factors. We also take into account how well management meets the expectations of guests. This is based on feedback from BELIZE FIRST readers, from comments we’ve followed on Internet bulletin boards and forums and from our own personal experiences as paying guests at the hotels and resorts. A backpackers’ hotel or a small B&B isn’t going to earn four or five stars. However, a three-star B&B can deliver a wonderfully personal travel experience at a good price, and a one-star hotel with shared baths can be a bargain offering the chance to get to know the local culture. We’re *not* here to promote Belize or to do PR for hotels or attractions. We’re here to report.

We’ve also **rated activities and attractions** such as Maya sites and museums on a similar one to five star system -- ☆ to ☆☆☆☆☆ -- so you can avoid wasting your time.

You may not agree with our ratings. Tastes differ, sometimes a lot. But we’ve tried to be consistent, so even if you disagree with our interpretations you can use them as a trusty scale to compare one area to another.

Change is inevitable, especially in a still-developing area such as Belize. Cooks leave, managers change, owners sell. We believe the information in this guide is more up-to-date than that in any other guide to Belize, but by the time you read it, some things will have changed, and our information will be wrong. Please let us know, preferably by e-mail to bfzfirst@aol.com, about any changes you encounter.

Table of Contents



What You Need to Know Before You Visit Belize.....	7
Sugar Coast: Corozal and Northern Belize.....	61
Big Orange: Orange Walk District.....	77
Belize City: Hub of Belize, by Peter Eltringham.....	89
UnBelizeably Central: Rural Belize District.....	111
Hummingbird: Belmopan and the Hummingbird Highway.....	123
Wonderful West: San Ignacio and Cayo District.....	135
Belize's Six Butterfly Ranches.....	167
High, Cool Hills: Mountain Pine Ridge.....	171
Side Trip to Tikal, by Harry Pariser.....	183
Garifunaville: Dangriga and Hopkins with Cockscomb.....	193
Hiking Cockscomb Maya-Style, by Michael Shapiro....	211
Turquoise Coast: Placencia Peninsula.....	217
Fishing Placencia, by Bill Kiene.....	244
Deep Green Coast: Punta Gorda and the Far South.....	247
Driving Belize.....	261
Further Reading and Viewing.....	269
Lodging Indexes.....	275
General Index.....	281