

A photograph of a wooden suspension bridge crossing a river in a dense, lush jungle. The bridge is made of wooden planks and is supported by ropes. The water is a vibrant turquoise color, and the surrounding trees are tall and green. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating a bright, airy atmosphere.

Belize beyond the beach

Belize is beloved for beautiful beaches such as those in Placencia, Hopkins Bay and Ambergris Caye, just for starters. But as much as this tiny nation on the northeastern coast of Central America is a haven for water worshipers, that's hardly all to its story. San Ignacio, a bit more than 100 miles west of Belize City and in the Cayo District, is one great place to explore. It's ideally located for plenty of fun that has nothing to do with the beach.

Make yourself at home



San Ignacio Resort Hotel, Belize

Make your home base the [San Ignacio Resort Hotel](#). Not only is this stylish boutique hotel ideally located close to restaurants and shopping, it's a gem with jungle views, excellent cuisine, pool, and friendly staff. It's set on a 17-acre private estate just 5 minutes from the town of San Ignacio.

Explore jungle ruins



Xunantunich

One of your first stops should be the Mayan ruins. When you enter **Xunantunich**, you might feel like you're in the middle of a movie set, your own version of Indiana Jones. Climb to the top of El Castillo, a 130-foot tall temple. The reward is huge—unbelievable views of Belize and Guatemala. Xunantunich was the epicenter for everything from ceremonies and rituals to everyday living in ancient Maya civilization. Try to make sense of all the symbols and drawings in the stones. It's otherworldly, you have to wonder how all those humongous boulders were moved around without modern technology. Do go with a guide so you get all the history.

Continue on to **Cahal Pech**. Here you'll get a glimpse of the high life, as it served as the royal palace for an elite Mayan ruling family. Cahal Pech, which was established in 1,000 BC, was thriving for a time, but there is a mystery as to why it was abandoned by 800 AD. If you get lucky, you might stumble upon Jaime Awe, a renowned archaeologist from

Belize who, along with his students, continues to excavate on the site. It's pretty cool to see first-hand, especially if there's a discovery while you're standing there. Is that a human bone a researcher picks up? It might be.

Explore more via horseback

If you want to add more adventure to your trip to Xunantunich, The San Ignacio Resort Hotel offers a guided horseback riding tour. You'll start at the Hannah Stables and traipse through Cayo via the Western Highway and hit the jungle trail in all its majesty greenery. When you get to San Jose Succotz, you'll cross the hand-cranked ferry and make your way to the ruins. The tour ends with a stop at popular restaurant **Benny's** for some of the best local fare.

Canoe a cave

Keep the mystery going with a canoe ride through **Barton Creek Cave**. We don't want to spoil it for you, but your imagination will be on high alert as you wind your way through this giant crack in a mountain. You'll be fascinated and likely creeped out at the same time. There are all sorts of natural formations that tell a story about burial grounds, human sacrifices and ancient Mayan life. This is one boat ride you won't forget. If you're interested in canoeing without the cave, one place to do that is the Macal River with the magic of the Maya Mountains. Take your time winding your way through San Ignacio's tropical river. The exotic birds and iguanas you'll see on the riverbanks are a bonus.

Zipline through the rainforest

Thrill seekers will find their sweet spot at **Calico Jack's Ziplining**. Get your heart pumping gliding through jungle rainforest. There are 9 runs, 15 platforms, a jungle lift, and 2,700 feet of ziplining. If you dare, there's also the canopy at Actun Loch Tunich. Hike the Maya Mountains to what locals call "the monster of all caves." The aerial views of the rainforests are worth the trip and your boldness will be rewarded when you leap off the ledge of a cliff for a 300-foot high repelling ride.

Hold an iguana



Iguana Conservation Project

Another benefit of staying at the San Ignacio Resort Hotel is the attractions right on the property. The **Green Iguana Conservation Project** is an interactive exhibit that might change your view of iguanas. Up close and personal you realize they are as nervous about you as you may be about them. You'll be encouraged to hold one. Go ahead, give it a try. It's an IG moment for sure. You'll also learn about the lifecycle and importance of the iguana to the ecosystem.

Learn about medicinal plants

The hotel's 17-acre private estate is home to all sorts of medicinal plants and herbs, which you can hear about on the Medicinal Trails tour. There's a remedy for what ails you, as well as herbs that just might keep the doctor away.

Spot some rare birds



Birdwatching at San Ignacio Resort Hotel

Birding fans will enjoy the 6am birdwatching tour. Wake up with some coffee, then off you go with a guide to explore the abundance of birds in the resort's backyard. There are dozens of species, including the national bird, the keel-billed toucan, woodpeckers and the blue tanager, among others.

Stroll through formal gardens

There's plenty of other greenery in Belize. See some of the best of it at the **Belize Botanical Gardens** and the **Green Hill Butterfly Farm**. Green Hill is home to the largest butterfly display in the country. It's 3,300 square feet of fluttering color.

Steep yourself in indigenous culture

Your trip won't be complete if you don't spend time at the **San Antonio Maya Community**. Spend several hours hearing stories from folks in this second-generation Mayan village. You'll make corn tortillas, enjoy a lunch and to try your hand at making ceramic pottery. Hint: It's not as easy as you might think. It is truly an art and big fun, too. The stories you'll hear will stick with you.

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