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Belize, Please

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Adventure during the day, luxury at night



Courtesy San Ignacio Resort Hotel

Welcome to the jungles of San Ignacio, Belize, the perfect place to choose your own adventure. One day, spelunk through caves where ancient Mayans offered up sacrifices to their gods. The next, hop on a horse, canter through the lush landscape to a waterfall and cliff jump into the water. It's your move. Then, after your day of activity, retreat to the San Ignacio Resort Hotel and unwind at a quaint dinner or watch the sun sink into the treetops while sipping a Belikin lager, a local favorite.

What to do

Explore a cave! Exploring the Belize caves with a headlamp is like the ultimate treasure hunt. Sparkly stalagmites hang from the narrow caverns, where you'll find broken pottery pieces that ancient Mayans

once sacrificed to the rain gods. One great option: the cave at **St. Herman's Blue Hole National Park** near Belmopan. It's worth hiring a tour guide who knows all the nooks and crannies (and can point out the bats), as well as relay local lore. Or, chase a waterfall! The best way to do so is by horseback. Arran Bevis from **MET Adventure Outfitters** leads epic trips. He's like a modern-day Tarzan, parting branches with a machete and pointing out trees you could strike open should you need water. metbelize.com



IT'S A JUNGLE CRAVE HOUSE OF FLAVOUR. Courtesy Crave House of Flavour

Where to eat

The atmosphere at **Crave House of Flavour** is so quaint, it's like dining in a friend's living room, sharing carafes of sangria. Yet the food is what you'd expect from a high-end, big-city restaurant. The ever-evolving menu might include beer-braised short rib risotto or crispy cassava crusted fish fillets. Save room for dessert because there's an ice cream shop next door. For more casual fare, try **Ko-Ox Han Nah**, a hole-in-the-wall meat shop and deli (a fave among locals) that offers tacos and rotating specials, like steak with chimichurri sauce and Belizean meatballs. Wash your meal down with a tasty frozen margarita.

Where to sleep

The **San Ignacio Resort Hotel** is the perfect basecamp for adventure, offering a number of guided trips, from exploring ancient ruins to tubing through caves on a not-so-lazy-river. Wake up with the sun

at the treehouse-like resort, perched on a 17-acre private reserve, and you'll see more than 85 species of birds flying about (you may even spot a Keel-Billed Toucan). Binoculars are set out on the breakfast table so you can bird-watch while sipping coffee and enjoying fry jacks (airy, puffy pastries that are a less-sweet cousin to beignets). Trek the resort's medicinal trail to learn about local herbs or visit the green iguana rescue, where you can feed the friendly creatures as they crawl up your outstretched arm. Book this room: The two-bedroom, two-bath Royal Suite (\$594 to \$660 per night) comes with a Jacuzzi on the balcony. sanignaciobelize.com

Where to shop

At the **downtown farmers' market**, you'll find fresh local produce and a smoothie shop with rope swings instead of seats. Looking for souvenirs? Hit the gift shop outside Cahal Pech for beaded jewelry, leather satchels and wooden flutes.

Don't miss

In the summer, head to **Cahal Pech**, where world-renowned archaeologist Jaime Awe and his team will likely be excavating. As you watch them dig, you can pepper them with questions about the ancient Mayans. Then wander around the Mayan site, which dates back to 1200 B.C.E. and includes a hilltop home once inhabited by the elite, a sports arena, courtyards and a steam room. cahalpech.com

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