

THE CAYES

ATOLLS & OUTER CAYES

GLOVER'S REEF ATOLL • LIGHTHOUSE REEF ATOLL • TURNEFFE ISLANDS ATOLL • SOUTH WATER CAYE • TOBACCO CAYE

Superlatives cannot describe these precious gems of coral or the peacefulness out here.

A refugee from the world could not get farther away than the atolls and outer cayes of Belize. These 450 precious gems, set in a sea of shimmering aquamarine, range from mere specks of coral awash at high tide, to exotic resorts with hot water and air conditioning. Snorkelers breathe in colors unimagined. Divers plunge into world-class dive sights. Boaters hallucinate on blue vistas. Bird watchers flock to see 98 species. Abundant waters lure anxious fishermen. Researchers work to save the earth.

Superlatives cannot describe these islands, pronounced “keys,” from the Spanish “*aylas*.” Scattered up to 50 miles from the mainland, they stretch 185 miles north to south. Beyond the main reef, three atolls — rare necklaces of coral surrounding shallow lagoons — peak above the surface. The entire Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System became a UN World Heritage Site in 1996.

[Two cayes have airstrips.](#) Otherwise, chartered boats transport visitors and resorts make the arrangements. Trips from Belize City take from 20 minutes to five hours.

GLOVER'S REEF ATOLL

Seventeenth-century English pirate John Glover used these islands — 15 miles long by four miles wide — to raid Spanish merchant ships and hide the treasure. Today Glover's Reef Atoll is the treasure — a marine reserve since 1987, enjoyed by boaters, divers, anglers, kayakers, campers, and researchers. Its pristine lagoon harbors 750 coral patches, while just outside the ring of islands, 50 miles of sheer drop-offs from 40 to 2,600 feet, plus numerous shipwrecks, wait to entertain divers.

On nine-acre Northeast Caye, Glover's Atoll Resort has thatched cabins — some over the water — plus dorms, camping, diving, snorkeling, fly fishing, and instruction. Middle Caye sits at the heart of the 127-square-mile marine reserve, managed by the Wildlife Conservation Society, with a research center to facilitate science, conserve nature, and educate the public. Southwest Cayes consists of two islands. Isla Marisol Resort, a private dive and water sports resort, occupies the 18-acre north island, catching great sea breezes. Manta Resort, featuring thatch-roof cabanas, diving, snorkeling, and fishing, occupies the 14-acre south island.

Seventy miles southeast of Belize City, Glover's Reef Atoll can take five hours to reach by boat. Fast boats from Dangriga make the trip in just over one hour.

LIGHTHOUSE REEF ATOLL

Striking corals, brilliant beaches, and extreme peacefulness await sojourners to Lighthouse Reef Atoll — 50 miles east of Belize City, 20 miles long, four miles wide, with an airstrip. Two lighthouses warn ships of the shallows: one on Sandbore Caye to the north; the other — first constructed in 1828 — on Half Moon Caye to the south.

Thousands of coral heads thrive in brilliant turquoise water no more than 30 feet deep. One exception — the famous Blue Hole — plunges to 410 feet. The sinkhole became a Belizean icon in 1977, when renowned marine researcher Jacques Cousteau first explored its depths in a mini-sub. His excellent documentary established a new prize for divers worldwide. At the crest of this thousand-foot circular reef, snorkelers in clear waters delight to exquisite corals, energetic fish, colorful sponges, and graceful sea fans. The rim descends to 90 feet at 60 degrees, then drops vertically to 120 feet. Caverns perforate the walls. Forty-foot stalactites measure six feet thick at their tops — largest ever found underwater. The hole does not sparkle with light or teem with fish, but rather looms like an eerie netherworld. Prehistoric bull sharks prowl its depth, often witnessed by intrepid divers.

In 1982 Belize established the 45-acre Half Moon Caye Natural Monument, the first protected area in Belize and first protected marine area in Central America. Belize Audubon Society, which manages the park, maintains a visitor's center, picnic area, and nature trails. Reptiles, turtles, and red-footed booby birds with white plumage flourish here. Offshore at Half Moon Caye Wall — a shallow drop-off — huge nuggets of coral lie on a sandy bottom. Eels sway in the currents until a diver approaches, then retreat shyly into their holes. Tunnels and caverns pierce the wall. Groupers and eagle rays [keep watchful eyes on visitors](#).

Lighthouse Reef Resort, an upscale dive resort on Northern Caye, [includes 11 villas, luxury suites, mini-suites, cabanas, and the airstrip.](#)

SOUTH WATER CAYE

Thirty minutes from Dangriga sits idyllic South Water Caye, an amazing 15-acre coral island atop the barrier reef. Divers can practically swim to the drop-offs from shore. Black Beauty and Silverside are two outstanding walls. South Water Caye Marine Reserve, the largest at 185 square miles, takes in all the waters and islands around the named caye. [Research institutions maintain facilities nearby, most prominently the Smithsonian Institute Research Center, on tiny Carrie Bow Caye.](#)

Accommodations here include Blue Marlin Lodge, a full-service dive and fishing resort in a luxurious setting. Pelican Beach Resort offers student group facilities and honeymoon/ family cottages. [International Zoological Expeditions](#) provides research facilities, private cabanas, and an internet café.

TOBACCO CAYE

Some of the best diving waits only five minutes from pristine five-acre Tobacco Caye, on the reef 10 miles east of Dangriga. Renowned for excellent shore diving, snorkeling, and world-class fly fishing, the caye sits in South Water Caye Marine Reserve. Schools of tarpon pass through Tobacco Caye Channel from April to November. Permit and bonefish swim nearby.

Several accommodations occupy Tobacco Caye, including Reef's End Lodge and Tobacco Caye Diving. Boats travel daily to the caye from Dangriga. Between Tobacco Caye and Hopkins Village sits the 16-acre Coco Plum Caye, site of Coco Plum Island Resort.

TURNEFFE ISLANDS ATOLL

Turneffe Islands Atoll, Belize's largest at 30 miles long and 10 miles wide, encircles myriad shallows and lagoons. Site of two lighthouses — an 1885 beacon on Mauger Caye to the north, and a second tower on Caye Bokel to the south — the archipelago supports upscale resorts, research facilities, and an airstrip, 25 miles east of Belize City.

This ring of mangrove islands — bordered by spectacular coral formations and blessed with some of the best bonefishing flats in the world — promises world-class angling, both on the flats and just offshore in inky blue waters plunging

thousands of feet. Although best known for wall diving — 70 named dive sites surround the atoll — Turneffe has plenty of shallows inside the reef for excellent snorkeling. At the Elbow, a popular dive site at the southern tip, see schools of grunts, groupers, snappers, and jacks.

Blackbird Caye Resort, Turneffe Flats on Northern Bogue Caye, and Turneffe Island Lodge on Caye Bokel — all dedicated dive and fishing resorts — ooze with tropical island ambience. Blackbird - Oceanic Society Field Station has seaside cabanas for students and researchers. [Blackbird Caye has the airstrip.](#)

ACCOMMODATIONS

Advertised accommodations are listed here. While this index does not include all properties, more appear in the Belize Tourism Board directory (pages 00-00) and the Belize Tourism Industry Association directory (pages 000-000).

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Blackbird Caye Resort. Turneffe Islands Atoll. 223-2767, info@cayeresorts.com. 18 individual AC seaside cabanas. Private porch with chairs and hammock. Private bathroom with shower, hot water, and daily maid. Restaurant/bar. Diving, snorkeling, and fishing. Great wall diving and Blue Hole trips. Groups, families, and children welcome.

Blackbird - Oceanic Society Field Station. Turneffe Islands Atoll. 220-4256. 6 beach cabanas with two full-size beds. Seaside porch, private bath, and hot water. Seaside dining *palapa*. Transfers and excursions. Hands-on natural history programs led by a naturalist. All-inclusive snorkeling and history programs. Study coral reef ecology, dolphins, crocodiles, and manatees. Educational family and research diving certificate programs.

Blue Marlin Lodge. South Water Caye. 522-2243. 9 rooms, 3 deluxe domed cabins, 5 deluxe seafront cottages, 8 private cabins. AC and/or fans. Mini-fridge. Exclusive diving/fishing lodge offers all-inclusive and custom vacation packages. Private beach, gift shop, dive shop, clubhouse with satellite TV, restaurant/bar, and meetings for 30. Diving, fishing, snorkeling, swimming, bottle-hunting, and island/mainland tours.

Coco Plum Island Resort. 866-488-6153, 520-2041. 5 cabanas. AC, private bath, hot water, and veranda. On 16-acre Coco Plum Caye in the Coco Plum Range, 30 minutes from Hopkins. Waters are shallow enough to walk between islands. Discover starfish, tropical fish, and shells. Diving, swimming, snorkeling, kayaking, fly fishing, and reef and rainforest tours.

Glover's Atoll Resort. Glover's Reef Atoll. 520-5016. glovers@btl.net, www.glovers.com.bz. Thatched beach cabin with two beds, economy beach cabin, and camping. Private nine-acre Northeast Caye for solitude. Diving, snorkeling, and swimming from shore. Full PADI dive shop, instruction, fly fishing, windsurfing, kayaking, boat rentals, and marine ecology courses. Package includes kitchen and boat transfers from mainland.

Isla Marisol Resort. Glover's Reef Atoll. 520-2056, sales@islarisol.com, www.islarisol.com. 11 cabanas. Premium dive operator offers service and privacy on remote Southwest Cayes. Unobstructed northeast breeze makes AC unnecessary. Unmatched snorkeling and wall diving. Best fly and bonefishing. Kayaking. Fresh seafood from local fishermen. Fast boat from Dangriga takes just 65 minutes. Dive package: one week, room and transfers from Dangriga, 17 tank dives, three meals per day, taxes, and park fees for US\$1750 per person, double occupancy.

Lighthouse Reef Resort. Lighthouse Reef Atoll. 223-1205. 11 villas, suites, mini-suites, and cabanas. Palm-shaded beachfront diving resort. Accommodations include AC, mini-bars, private baths, and porches for sunset watching. Laundry service. Diving, fishing, snorkeling, kayaking, and birding. Meals and dives included in seven-night package.

Manta Resort. Glover's Reef Atoll. 223-2767, info@cayeresorts.com. 12 individual AC cabanas. Remote 14-acre coconut palm island is a World Heritage Site. Private porch with chairs and hammock. Private bathroom with hot water. Daily maid. Excellent restaurant/bar in the middle of Manta Lagoon. Fly and deep-sea fishing. Stunning snorkeling and dive sites from shallow lagoons to a 2,000-foot wall.

Pelican Beach. South Water Caye. 522-2044. Dorms and classrooms near the center of the caye at Pelican University. Cottages with names like Heron's Hideaway and Osprey's Nest, tucked among the trees. Watch waves crest over the reef from second-story Pelican's Pouch at the south end.

Reef's End Lodge. Tobacco Caye. 522-2419. 8 rooms, 2 cabanas. Half hour from Dangriga. Rooms with two double beds, one single bed, private bath, fans, and veranda. Cabanas with two double beds, fans, private bath, veranda, and hammock. Restaurant offers panoramic view of reef and islands. Full dive shop. Reef and offshore diving, snorkeling, and fishing. Inland tours.

Turneffe Flats. Turneffe Islands Atoll. 220-4046. 8 beachfront rooms. Private resort on northeast side of atoll, only 20 feet from water's edge, caters to small groups of divers, anglers, and snorkelers (limit 16 guests / 12 anglers per week). Remodeled main lodge. Redecorated rooms have a bright Caribbean flair. Personal service, central AC, restaurant, and lounge.

Turneffe Island Lodge. Turneffe Islands Atoll. 220-4011. 12 standard rooms and 7 luxurious cabanas. Ocean views just steps from the water's edge at a private island resort on the southern tip of Turneffe Atoll. AC, ceiling fans, restaurant, and bar. Meetings for 24. Specializing in diving, fishing, and snorkeling. Kayaking and sailing.

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