



## Pre-Departure Information Packet

*The information in this packet will help answer questions about your upcoming trip and ensure that you are well prepared.*

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## Before You Leave

This information is intended to assist you with your preparations for your trip. Before you leave home for a ReefCI trip, there are several details that you must ensure are in order, including passports, vaccinations, and insurance. We have included some guidelines on what you should bring with you including suitable clothing, diving equipment, and other personal items.

### Passports and Entry Visas

Check that your passport is valid – it takes time to apply for a new one!

Belize was formally British Honduras and gained independence in 1981. Therefore, British, Canadian, and US passports are valid and there are no special visa requirements for trips up to 1 month. If you plan to stay for longer, passports can be extended locally. Visa extensions cost \$25USD (about £15) per month. More information can be found at this link for [Visa and Entry](#) requirements.

### Vaccinations and Protection

There are currently no vaccination requirements for Belize. However, it is a good idea to be up-to-date on diphtheria, typhoid, hepatitis, tetanus, polio, cholera, and rabies before you leave home. It is recommended that you discuss your trip with your doctor and get advice prior to departure.

### Preventative Medicine

**Malaria and Zika:** There are no mosquitoes on our island! We are blessed due to our location 25 miles from the mainland, the strong trade winds, and the absence of fresh water and suitable breeding habitat on the island. However, there are mosquitoes on the mainland. While in rural areas or the jungle, it is advisable to prevent mosquito bites at all times by using mosquito repellents containing DEET and wearing long sleeved shirts and trousers.

**Traveller's Diarrhoea:** Diarrhoea can strike when least expected. Often it is caused by change of diet and climate and lasts around 48 hours. Treat water with care, drink only bottled water and be moderate with food and drink. Take care with your personal hygiene, washing hands frequently. If you do get diarrhoea, drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration and consider taking some electrolyte solution to restore the salts lost in your body.



**Sun and Heat:** When you first arrive and until you have a good tan, cover yourself up. Drink lots of bottled water – far more than you would at home. Your body will be adjusting in the first week and may lose a lot of salts. Use a high factor sunscreen at all times (min. factor 25). Remember to re-apply after diving. A good lip balm is also advisable, as well as hats and dark sunglasses. Use calamine lotion and moisturizing cream to cool prickly hot skin and sunburn.

### **Fitness & Health**

ReefCI trips are available to anyone over the age of 16. Under 16's are welcome with a responsible adult or parental written consent. There are no upper age limitations.

**A dive medical is recommended prior to departure. Your doctor can arrange this or do it for you.**

Guests must be able to pass a medical examination to prove they are physically fit to dive or sign the PADI Medical Form. ReefCI will send you a copy of the form prior to departure. ReefCI will also send you the standard PADI liability forms for e-signature prior to your trip.

**Medical Kit:** There is a first aid kit on the island and basic medical items can be bought locally. However, you should certainly bring with you an ample supply of any medicine or drug which you use regularly. Your day-to-day kit should include, something to combat pain and headaches (e.g. Paracetamol) and traveller's diarrhoea (e.g. Imodium, Arret). Also antiseptic cleansing tissues, antihistamine, insect repellent containing DEET, something for the relief of sunburn e.g. calamine lotion, electrolyte solution (e.g. Dioralyte) for heat exhaustion.

There is a hospital and a number of good doctors in Placencia.

### **Diving Emergencies**

In the extremely unlikely event of a diving accident, ReefCI's staff is fully trained in emergency management and procedures. The nearest hyperbaric chamber is in San Pedro, Ambergris Caye. **It is important that you have dive insurance that covers this. Please be aware that ReefCI operates a non-decompression policy and requires safety stops for every dive.**

### **Insurance**

**Travel and diving insurance are mandatory.** Most travel insurance policies can include dive insurance up to 30 metres. If you are travelling north before or after your ReefCI trip and wish to dive the Blue Hole, for insurance purposes, please be aware that it is a 40-metre dive.



ReefCI recommends [Divers Alert Network \(DAN\)](#), which offers comprehensive dive insurance as part of their membership package.

### Air Travel

**Airport security:** In recent years' security checks have been stepped up in major international airports. Bear this in mind when packing any electrical appliances in your luggage. You will probably be asked to remove batteries and hand them over to security staff before your flight. Sharp objects, such as knives and scissors, should be packed in your main luggage, as most carriers will not allow them inside the aircraft cabin. **Allow extra time to check in where possible.** In most international airports, the minimum check in time is 2 to 3 hours prior to departure.

**U.S. Airports:** Be aware that security is extremely tight at most USA major airports. Any person entering the United States under the visa waiver program is required to hold an approved [ESTA Travel Authorization](#).

If you are connecting from a non-US country, expect a line for immigration. Thankfully, most airports now have new ESTA approved machines making it much quicker than in past years. If you have an overnight stay in North America, check-in the next day can be slow. **Allow 3 hours if possible.**

**Belize City:** From Belize International Airport, fly down on a 'hopper' plane to Placencia with Tropic Air or Mayan Air. The flight takes about 45 minutes and will range anywhere from \$230-260 USD round trip and is an exciting ride. Most guests choose this option. Tropic Air and Mayan Air provide 7-9 daily flights on the weekends to/from Belize International and Placencia; the first flight starting at 7:00 am and the last flight around 5:00 pm. I would definitely do a quick flight search at [Tropic Air](#) and [Mayan Air](#) to find the best price.

### Money & Exchange

There are a number of banks in Placencia where you can access funds via debit or credit card. The banks have international ATM's and can give cash advances on switch, delta or credit card.

We recommend that you have some U.S. dollars in cash with you for the journey and for the first few days after arrival, plus you will need to pay for certain items in cash on the island (see below). **U.S. and Belizean dollars are accepted everywhere.**

**Spending money:** Your spending money requirements will depend on how often you plan to go out socializing and what extra trips you plan to take.



Beers are around \$4-10 BZD which is about \$2-5 USD. A rum and coke is about the same. There is an honesty bar system on the island.

**Weekend accommodation is not included. Please check out our [website link](#) and email us once you have booked your accommodation so that we can update our records.**

**ReefCI does not include meals on weekends and only includes breakfast on Fridays.** If you want to eat out, prices vary depending on the restaurant you choose. Belizean places are much cheaper than those serving American food. A typical American meal costs circa \$25-50 BZD or \$12.50-\$25 USD and a typical Belizean meal can be as little as \$10 BZD or 5 USD.

**You will need to bring enough cash (preferably US dollars) to pay for the following items on the island before you leave, as we do not accept credit cards or PayPal in country:**

- Marine Park Fee (\$25 USD/week)
- PADI Courses (Open Water Certification, Advanced Open Water, Rescue, etc.)
- Alcoholic Beverages (e.g., beer, rum)

**Tips are not included and are always appreciated! Our guests often ask us what they should do regarding gratuities for staff. It's always a difficult one to answer because it is personal. However, a general protocol is to leave individual tips for your guides and instructors and leave an amount with the person in charge to be distributed between the staff.**

## When You Arrive

Please grab a taxi or arrange with your hotel to meet you at Placencia airstrip. The village is only about 10 mins from the airstrip and a taxi is around \$7 USD.

- Almost all things (restaurants, hotels, bars, shopping) in Placencia village are within walking distance.
- Most of the hotels have Wi-Fi.
- There are laundry facilities in town.
- For camera/mobile phone chargers etc, you will need a US 2-pin power adapter. Voltage is 110V.

Be prepared for the boat ride out to the island on Monday morning. It takes about 1-1.5 hours to get out to the island and sometimes the sea can get choppy. Make sure you apply a high factor sun screen prior to the trip. Your luggage will be stored in the hold of the boat, so make sure your waterproofs are out of your main luggage and easy to get to. **To help us keep our boat light, it would be very helpful if you can pack a light bag and**



**leave any heavy un-needed items for storage at your mainland hotel or with ReefCI staff to securely store until your return on Friday.**

## Belize

**The Belizeans:** The Belizeans are very friendly towards tourists and harassment is not an issue. In fact, there is a law in Belize where locals can get up to a \$2,000 fine or 6 months in prison if a tourist reports them for harassment!

Most of the local people know each other and will get to know you too. They speak English and Creole.

### Alcohol and Drugs

Despite the laid-back feel of the place, and the ever-present aroma of marijuana around town, please do not be fooled. Drugs, including marijuana, are illegal in Belize. The police are very strict and will arrest you for the smallest quantity.

**ReefCI operates a strict no drug policy. Drugs are not allowed on the boat or the island.**

Local rum drinks and beers are available on the island. If you want to drink international drinks such as Grey Goose vodka or Bombay sapphire gin or red or white wine, please let us know in advance and we can supply it.

Please keep diving safe and do not drink alcohol before or in-between dives. You must be 18 years old to drink alcohol in Belize.

## PADI Qualifications

While on the project you will get the opportunity to gain or improve your dive qualification in the crystal-clear waters of the Caribbean.

### Beginner Divers

The PADI Open Water qualification is included so if you don't have it on arrival it will take place during your first week on the island. The course generally takes a minimum of 3 days and guests have only Monday-Friday on the island so it will take up the majority of your first week on the project.

To complete your Open Water qualification, you will need to bring the PADI Open Water manual with you, a logbook, as well as a \$100 USD administration fee to be paid in country upon completion or you can pay via our online booking process on our website.



We welcome beginner divers but if you do not have prior dive experience, to get the most out of the conservation experience, we recommend you try and book for a minimum duration of two weeks.

### Open Water Divers

If you are already a diver, we understand that our guests often haven't dived for a while. No worries, we offer a shallow shore dive as a refresher for the first dive on Monday.

Your existing diver certification will mean you can get straight on with the conservation projects during week one.

If you would like to complete your Advanced Open Water course, so that you can get involved in deeper dives, you will need to pay an additional \$150 USD for the PADI Advanced course. You are advised to bring a PADI Advanced Open Water manual with you. We do have spare manuals for those who wish to wait and choose to do the course after talking to our instructors upon arrival.

### Advanced Divers

Your experience will mean you are able to join the research immediately, though you are welcome to have a refresher course on the first day. If you are interested in getting further qualifications such as your Rescue Diver or Divemaster qualification you can also do these for an additional cost. Let us know if this is something you are interested in and we will be able to give you more details.

## What to Bring

- **A re-usable water bottle** – There is plenty of purified water available on the island to re-fill your bottle with
  - **Towels** (hand towel and a beach towel). **ReefCI can provide towels** however, it is very difficult to purchase high quality towels locally, and thus any towel donations would be greatly appreciated
  - Water resistant luggage is not mandatory but helpful, a dry bag or Ziploc bag, for all electronics and valuables
  - A large plastic garbage bag to transport wet items back to Placencia on Friday
  - Swimwear, at least a couple of bikinis or shorts as you will be in the water most days
  - Shorts, at least a couple of pairs. Quick-drying materials recommended
  - Vest (tank) tops and t-shirts. Quick-drying materials recommended
  - Long pants/trousers
  - Thin long sleeved fleece for the evenings (only during winter months) and a lightweight waterproof shell/jacket (thicker for the boat during winter months)
- Keep this handy for the boat journey, just in case!**



- Walking boots or trainers for jungle visits, walking, etc. Flip flops, sandals, or crocs too
- High factor (SPF) sunscreen and lip balm (especially for the boat rides), after-sun lotion
- Sunglasses and a hat
- Mosquito repellent recommended with DEET
- Something light to sleep in i.e. thin nightdress for women
- Spray in hair conditioner to help conserve water
- Flashlight and/or Dive Torch with spare batteries
- Underwater housing for those who are interested/passionate about photography
- Books, Kindles, playing cards
- Computers, iPods/iPads, musical devices for the evenings if you have any favorites, along with power adapters (US)
- Your passport

**We would appreciate it if you could use biodegradable and phosphate free shampoos and soaps on the island such as Dr. Bronner's. It is not possible to buy these locally in Belize, so any donations at the end of our trip would be greatly appreciated. We would also appreciate biodegradable and phosphate free dish detergent.**

### **For Diving**

- A full 3mm wetsuit is recommended; shorty wetsuits may be OK for some people. Water temp can get as low as 26°C (78.5°F) in the winter months.
- Booties.
- A dive mask and snorkel
- PADI certification cards and Log Book (if applicable)
- **People wishing to learn to dive need to purchase the PADI Open Water manual, Recreational Dive Planner and logbook. [www.padi.com](http://www.padi.com)**

**Divers planning courses need to bring the PADI manual for the planned course and whenever possible work through the knowledge reviews.**

**Those wishing to do night dives MUST bring a dive light/torch.**

We do not supply dive computers or dive watches but they are NOT mandatory in order to dive with ReefCI.

ReefCI uses the *Paul Human Reef Fish, Reef Coral and Reef Creatures* identification books. These are great informative books that you may wish to purchase as reference books prior to your ReefCI trip. They are big heavy books so we don't expect you to bring them with you, unless you have space, we have copies on the island for use during your stay.



### Wish List

**It is very difficult for us to get supplies. We would sincerely appreciate your donations of spare items you could bring should you have them available and have space in your luggage:**

- Graphite pencils for underwater use
- Towels & bed linens, again it is very difficult to purchase high quality towels & bed linens in Placencia so any donations will be greatly appreciated
- Pillows
- Dive slates
- Any dive equipment i.e. BCD's, regulators, wetsuits, fins, masks, torches, etc.
- Batteries
- Recent dive magazines or fashion magazines
- Reusable shopping bags
- Torches (dive lights)
- Games for the evening
- Medications (e.g., Sinutabs, anti-histamine, etc.)
- Toiletries
- Tea bags
- Chocolate!!!!
- English and Dijon Mustard

### Typical Trip Itinerary

**All guests meet on Monday morning to depart for the island. We will give you directions where and when prior to your trip via email.**

ReefCI offers three different conservation programs of focus. Click on each to learn more about them and which one is right for you.

1. [Lionfish Program](#)
2. [Marine Conservation Program](#)
3. [Internship Program](#)

The itinerary below is a sample, your itinerary will vary depending on your program of interest. We aim to ensure that people get the most out of their trip. However, it is also based upon flexibility and can be adapted according to individual requirements. The survey dives will be dependent upon the individual's buoyancy control.



Monday	Leave Placencia, island orientation, refresher/recreational/lionfish dives
Tuesday	Fish day - fish I.D., commercial fish surveys and lionfish spearing
Wednesday	Coral and invertebrates day - Coral and invert I.D., coral watch surveys and lionfish spearing
Thursday	Commercial species survey, Lionfish spearing, ReefCI check survey
Friday	Survey dives, return to mainland

PADI dive courses run throughout the week. Completion of PADI courses cannot be guaranteed. However, if not completed, students can be referred.

Itineraries are subject to the length of the trip. Shorter or longer trips are available to those who require them. Itineraries and dives are also subject to weather conditions.

In terms of the survey work, each day will differ but you could be working in the following areas:

- Lionfish population monitoring and control
- Queen Conch surveys
- Lobster surveys
- Commercial fish surveys
- Reef health surveys – ReefCI check & Coral watch
- Whale shark monitoring
- Coral reef bio-diversity

### **Accommodation**

During the week (Monday-Friday) your accommodation will be on the island where you will have the option of either the main house or beachside cabanas. In the house, there are double rooms suitable for couples, twin rooms and family rooms suitable for groups of friends or families. The cabana bathroom facilities are shared (pedal-toilets) though the rooms in the house are all en-suite. There is a friendly communal area with colourful underwater murals on the walls. There are plenty of hammocks around the island to relax in.

A generator is kept in its own room to reduce noise pollution. It is run all night on the island allowing guests to charge their laptops, iPhones, iPods and cameras etc. and use a fan if the sea breeze is not enough. This generator is turned on in the evening so during the day electricity is limited.



## Meals and Drinking Water

All meals and drinking water are provided for you while you are at the island. There is an honesty book system on the island, which has a small selection of sodas, beers, and rum drinks available at an additional cost. At weekends, guests are responsible for their own meals and accommodations on the mainland in Placencia.

### We are Known for our Great Food! Sample Island Menu

<b>From 6am-9am:</b>	Percolated coffee, tea, fresh fruit, and biscuits available
<b>Breakfast:</b>	Bacon, eggs, refried beans and tortilla/fried jacks or banana pancakes with eggs and ham or sausages, fresh bread, cheese and refried beans
<b>Lunch:</b>	Island chicken pasta salad or chicken wings and fries or spaghetti bolognaise
<b>Dinner:</b>	Fresh baked fish with coconut milk, lime, cilantro and garlic, yellow ginger rice and carrot salad. OR, Fresh baked lasagne with mixed salad and garlic bread OR, Lionfish fingers with cilantro, garlic tartar sauce, coconut rice and mixed vegetables
<b>Dessert</b>	Chocolate rum cake with rum butter sauce OR, Pineapple upside down cake OR, Coconut tart

## Communication with Home

Internet is available during the mornings, evenings and sometimes between dives. The internet service via satellite can be a bit temperamental and is not always guaranteed.

**Please let those at home know before you leave that you are on a private island 25 miles from the mainland and communication may be limited.**

## Terms & Conditions

Terms and conditions include, but are not limited, to the following. The emphasis is upon flexibility and the approach is not regimented. People are required to adhere to the dive protocols at all times, this will be fully explained to you when you arrive on site. There are



guidelines for safety reasons. However, people can choose what they want to do. We appreciate that some people wish to do as much diving as possible while others will want to combine the diving with relaxation and other activities. It is important that people are respectful to the host country's environment and cultures.

## Cancellation Policies

Deposits are non-refundable, but are transferable.

If you cancel your trip 30 days or more prior to departure, 50% of the balance is non-refundable. If you cancel within 30 days the entire balance is non-refundable.

If ReefCI cancels the trip prior to departure, 100% of the balance and the deposit are refundable, except in cases of natural disaster and *force majeure*.

### **Force majeure.**

ReefCI will not be liable for failure to perform agreed obligations if such failure is as a result of Acts of God (including fire, flood, earthquake, storm, hurricane or other natural disaster), war, invasion, act of foreign enemies, hostilities (regardless of whether war is declared), civil war, rebellion, revolution, insurrection, military or usurped power or confiscation, terrorist activities, nationalization, government sanction, blockage, embargo, labour dispute, strike, lockout or interruption or failure of electricity or telephone service.

Should diving or island transfers not take place due to *force majeure*, natural disaster or unforeseeable circumstances including anything that can risk safety such as rough sea conditions, monies will not be refunded.

If the transfer to the island has to be deferred due to rough sea conditions, guests are responsible for their own accommodation on the mainland. Please check with your insurance company if you want to include additional costs for accommodation in your agreement. Wherever possible ReefCI will try to reschedule cancelled trips to a future date within a 12-month period, subject to availability. If a person does not complete their PADI course there will be no refund.

## Contact Us

We are happy to answer any questions you may have by email or phone. Please email us at [anthony@reefci.com](mailto:anthony@reefci.com) with your questions. We always respond within 24 hours or sooner. Alternatively, feel free to call Anthony in the USA at +1 513-334-9393 if you wish to speak to ReefCI directly.