



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 \$25 USD (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 all vaccinations before you leave home.

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 by using mosquito repellents and wearing long-sleeved shirts and pants.

Sun and Heat: When you first arrive and until you have a good tan, cover yourself up. Drink lots of 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.

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. 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



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, and electrolyte solution (e.g. Dioralyte) for heat exhaustion.

Insurance

You do not need to have specific dive insurance or travel insurance but it is highly recommended. Most travel insurance policies include diving insurance. Moreover, most travel insurance policies will include dive insurance up to 30 meters (98 feet) which will cover you at ReefCI. If you would like to get only diving insurance, I highly recommend Divers Alert Network - [DAN](#). Dive insurance is for your medical safety and possible costly medical bills and travel insurance will hurricane proof your visit. Divers insurance covers dive accidents including decompression illness, accidental death and dismemberment, permanent and total disability and the medical costs associated with these types of accidents. I recommend it, but some come without it and some never leave home without it.

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 which will require a helicopter evacuation. Divers are responsible for the cost of a helicopter airlift, so we recommend diver's insurance. Please be aware that ReefCI operates a non-decompression policy and requires safety stops for every dive to ensure your safety and prevent accidents.**

Money & Exchange

The currency of Belize is the Belizean dollar (BZE) which is a 2 to 1 exchange rate with the US dollar. US dollars are accepted everywhere in Belize – which makes things very convenient and easy when making purchases. There is absolutely no need to exchange notes for foreign currency. All prices at restaurants and other local establishments are listed in Belize dollars (BZE) but all establishments happily take US dollars as payment. So, a 4 BZE hamburger is 2 USD or a 10 BZE souvenir is 5 USD - just remember 2:1 ratio. U.S. and Belizean dollars are accepted everywhere in Belize.

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.

Please Note: Credit card payments will only be accepted for products and services while on the island. ReefCI does NOT accept cash due to counterfeit and currency exchange issues. Make sure to have your credit card with you on the island.

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.



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 minutes from the airstrip and a taxi is around \$7 USD into town.

- 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 hour to get out to the island and sometimes the sea can get choppy. Make sure you apply a high factor reef-safe sunscreen 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

Belizeans are very friendly towards tourists and harassment/crime is not an issue. We have had countless solo travellers through the years (many as young as 16) and have never had an issue! Placencia and the country relies on tourists, hence they have created an extremely safe environment for tourism to thrive! If I had to describe Placencia in a word – friendly! They speak English and Creole.

Alcohol and Drugs

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

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.

Mixed alcoholic drinks and beers are available on the island for an additional cost. 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.



Diving Certification with ReefCI and PADI Qualifications

Beginner (Uncertified) Divers

Many of our volunteers come to ReefCI to learn to dive. Our island is a wonderful place to learn with calm clear waters and little current. We swap the cold swimming pool for the Caribbean Sea and the classroom for a hammock under a palm tree! We love teaching new divers and introducing them to the wonderful world beneath the waves. It's like going to another world without leaving earth.

In order to be certified on the island, you will need to complete the PADI eLearning portion of your Open Water course prior to your arrival to our island. PADI is the world's leading scuba diver training organization that governs and regulates scuba standards and diver certifications. You can get started immediately with the classroom portion of your certification course and work at your own pace using the PADI eLearning system at home. With this convenient online study option, you will complete the classroom/theory portion and theory exam of your Open Water course before your arrival. At the end of the eLearning program, you must print out your eRecord and bring a copy of it with you to the island. Once on the island, we will finish off the appropriate in-water diver portion of the course. For PADI Open Water certifications this entails the five confined session dives plus four open water dives. This will take 3 days on the island. PADI charges around \$185 USD for the eLearning and the cost is paid to PADI via their website. We find our guests like to avoid the book work and theory portion of certification courses while on the island and this provides the best option to get in the water immediately upon arrival to our island. **You must click [here](#) to register for PADI's online eLearning and complete it before your arrival. Don't forget to print out your eRecord and bring a copy of it with you to the island upon completing the eLearning.** ReefCI charges \$150 USD to complete the PADI Open Water certification on the island, which will entail the in-water portion of your certification course which includes the five confined session dives and the four open water dives.

PADI Certification Courses Offered on the Island

If you are already a certified diver, we understand that it may have been awhile since your last dive and you might be a bit apprehensive. No worries, we always do a shallow shore dive as a refresher for the first dive on Monday. Your existing diver certification will mean you jump right into our conservation programs and dives on day one.

We have many dive courses available to help you develop your scuba and marine conservation skills while on the island volunteering with us. Below is the price our program charges for each PADI certification course and how long it will take you to complete the certification course on the island.

PADI Certification Courses Offered on the Island

- PADI Open Water Certification – \$150 USD (3 days)
- PADI Advanced Open Water Certification – \$200 USD (1 week)
- PADI Rescue Diver Certification – \$250 USD (1 week)
- PADI Dive Master Certification – \$400 USD (4 week minimum stay)



PADI Specialty Certification Courses Offered on the Island

- PADI Specialty Course: Invasive Lionfish – \$100 USD (2 days)
- PADI Specialty Course: Coral Reef Conservation – \$100 USD (2 days)
- PADI Specialty Course: Fish Identification – \$100 USD (2 days)
- PADI Specialty Course: Deep Diver – \$100 USD (3 days)
- PADI Specialty Course: Emergency First Response – \$100 USD (2 days)

***Please Note:** The PADI Open Water, Advanced, Rescue, and Dive Master require the PADI eLearning prior to arrival. The PADI Specialty courses do NOT require the PADI eLearning prior to arrival; however, you must be a fully certified Open Water diver before taking any PADI Specialty Courses.

Click [here](#) to learn more about taking a dive certification course with ReefCI and find the answers to our frequently asked diving questions.

What to Bring

Non Reef-Safe Sunscreen Banned from our Island

Non reef-safe sunscreen is banned and not permitted on our island. All volunteers must bring only reef-safe sunscreen. On average 14,000 tons of sunscreen slide off of humans and onto the world's coral reefs each year, exposing these gorgeous underwater ecosystems to chemicals that kill them. The science has become irrefutable, chemicals in sunscreen (most notably oxybenzone and octinoxate) kill developing coral, increase the bleaching of coral and damage the developing polyps.

List of the Best Recommended Reef-Safe Sunscreens on the Market

- Badger SPF 30 Unscented Sunscreen Cream
- Stream2Sea SPF 30 Mineral Sunblock
- Thinksport SPF 50 Sunscreen
- All Good SPF 30 Sport Sunscreen Lotion
- Coral Safe All Natural Biodegradable Sunscreen
- Sun Bum Reef Friendly Ingredients Sunscreen
- Raw Elements SPF 30 Certified Natural Sunscreen

Unfortunately, there are no places in Belize to buy reef-safe sunscreen. So, it's important you get it before your trip departure.



What to Bring For Diving

You must bring your own dive mask, booties, fins, and wetsuit. These items are size specific to each individual -especially wetsuits, fins and booties for your feet. We do not provide dive computers since almost all of our volunteering dives and conservation efforts are at depths less than 18m/60ft. However, a dive computer is mandatory for any diver that wants to dive deeper than 18m/60ft or for those taking the PADI Advanced Open Water certification course with us. There are no reliable places in Placencia, Belize to buy or rent these items; therefore, it's important you have them prior to your trip departure.

We provide the rest of your dive gear – BCD's, tanks, regulators, and weights for a \$25 USD per week dive gear rental fee. You are welcome to bring your own dive gear if you prefer. Anyone wishing to participate in our optional night dives **MUST** bring their own dive light/torch. Please note that in order to participate in night dives one must be a certified Advanced Open Water diver.

Wetsuit Needed? The surface water temperature is consistently around 80F/26C, but much cooler at depth so a 3mm wetsuit (long) is just about right for most people. However, it just depends on how much you feel the cold; some do dive without one while others prefer a wetsuit. During the months of October through March, the water temperature is a degree or two cooler and most choose to wear wetsuits during these months. April thru August some dive with just a rash guard. I highly recommend bringing a 3mm wetsuit regardless of the time of year; being cold while diving is no fun at all. It is reassuring to know you have one in case you need it. Moreover, a good wetsuit is a good investment as there is nothing better than getting one that is custom fit to your exact height and weight.

What to Bring For the Trip in General

- **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
- Sunglasses and a hat
- Mosquito repellent



- 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.

Wish List

We always appreciate donations of new or spare items!! We are constantly in need of the following supplies:

- Reef-safe sunscreen
- Biodegradable and phosphate free shampoos and soaps
- Lionfish spears (any size - see [here](#) or [here](#) for an example of a good spear)
- Saltwater fishing lures (any kind – we are not picky)
- Dive equipment i.e. BCD's, regulators, wetsuits, fins, masks, torches etc..
- Kitchen items (cup/plate/bowl sets, pots, pans, silverware, small cooking appliances (waffle maker, blender, mixer, toaster, deep fryer etc..))

Typical Trip Itinerary

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

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 volunteering 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 (if spotted)
- Coral reef bio-diversity
- Weekly beach cleanups

Accommodation

Accommodations are basic but clean and comfortable and can best be described as hostel-like. If you are expecting or wishing a 5-star resort then our island is not for you. For groups, friends and couples, there are twin, family, and double en-suite rooms in the main building/cabana that you can see on the website [here](#). For singles, there are individual cabanas that surround the island. Every cabana has incredible views of the Caribbean! Imagine waking up to the sound of waves lapping against the shore and a spectacular Belizean sunrise! A/C is not needed on the island as the strong trade winds provide a continuous cooling breeze on the caye. (we do have fans in each room if needed)

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 mixed alcoholic drinks available at an additional cost. At weekends, guests are responsible for their own meals and accommodations on the mainland in Placencia.

All dietary requirements are catered for (food allergies, vegan, vegetarian, no seafood, dairy, tree nuts etc). No worries - we have vegans, vegetarians, pescatarians, gluten free eaters, diabetics, and nut allergy volunteers that come to the island every year. Our chef is quite accustomed to meeting the needs of our volunteers. Don't worry, we will make sure your dietary needs are met.

Internet and 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. There is no cell service on the island. We are in a very remote location in the ocean; so unplug, relax, and enjoy the simple island life.**



Island Sustainability Guidelines for Volunteers

1. Electricity

We are depending on a generator to supply our island with electricity. To minimize carbon emissions, gas consumption, and noise on the island, it is usually powered from 5am till 7:30am and 5:00pm till midnight. We are currently saving for a solar powered electricity system but until then ***please help us to be efficient and switch off lights and fans when you are not in your room!***

2. Fresh Water

Fresh water is extremely precious resource on our island! We have to collect rain water for our systems and during the dry season rain becomes very rare. Once our reserve is empty, we have to import water which will cut into our dive time as we need the boat for water transport.

Please help us to preserve fresh water by using hand sanitizer or switch off the water when you shampoo your hair. We want you to feel comfortable on our island, but please minimize your water consumption with one quick shower at the end of the dive day!

3. Waste Water Management

Waste water systems in Belize cannot process toilet paper or hygiene products. The tanks will overflow into the drain fields and ruin the septic system.

Please help us and use the trash bins for your convenience. Our housekeeping team will keep your bathrooms clean!

4. Internet on Tom Owens Caye

We do have internet on the island during generator hours. Unfortunately, satellite systems have a slow upload speed and with numerous personal devices connected the internet speed will slow down.

Please help us and put devices in airplane mode and avoid auto updates as well as streaming. Stay in touch with friends and family via email or social media. Share your Belize experience #ReefCI

5. Non Reef-Safe Sunscreen Ban

Non reef-safe sunscreen is banned and not permitted on our island. All volunteers must use only reef-safe sunscreen.

We want all of our volunteers to enjoy the beauty of reef ecosystems and together we hope to set the example for a more sustainable future. We only have one reef and we all have an opportunity to do this one small thing to protect it.