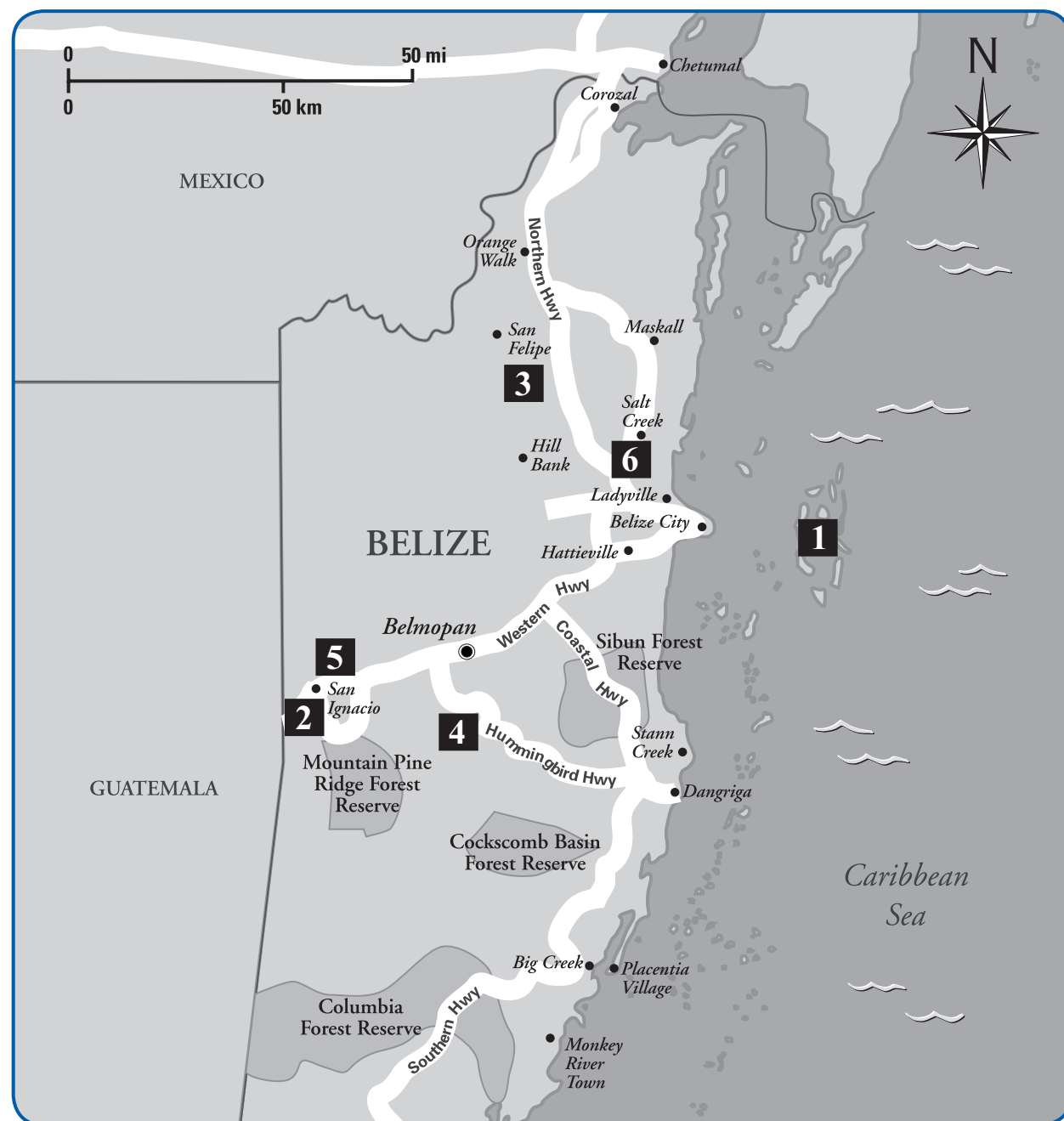


ten days.) When western Europeans were still living in wooden huts with dirt floors, the Mayans had already built intricately carved stone palaces, massive temples and cities all without the use of iron tools, knowledge of the wheel or the availability of draft animals. Compared to the 26 letters of the western alphabet, by 400 BC the Mayans had developed a complex hieroglyphic system of writing which used over 800 symbols.

And yet, three centuries before the arrival of Columbus the entire Mayan civilization, dozens of kingdoms and city-states were suddenly abandoned. They were overgrown and eventually disappeared into the jungle. In archeological time, it happened almost instantly. Until recently historians could only speculate as to how and why the Mayans as a civilization vanished; was it war or perhaps disease? Then scientists discovered that throughout the Mayan cities, at the time of

the fall of their civilization, microscopic pollen from weeds had replaced pollen from trees. In other words, the Mayans in clearing farm land may have cut back the forest so drastically that they changed the weather patterns. Drought set in, top soil blew away, crops failed on a massive scale and an entire ancient civilization collapsed in upon itself virtually overnight.

Our present generation grasps the fact that the rainforest is the beating heart of planet earth. Yet, frighteningly more efficient than the Mayans could have ever dreamed of being, this generation with clear intention persists and permits repeating that which the Mayans did with innocent ignorance. The global rainforest continues to be slashed, burned up, cut down, sawed asunder and chopped to bits. Each and every month approximately 9,000 square miles fall to fire and the ax ... 9,000 square miles ... that's an area the size of Belize.



PLACES OF INTEREST

BELIZE CITY PLACES OF INTEREST

The **Museum of Belize** is located at 8 Gabourel Lane in a former British prison dating to the mid-1800s. It is now home to a very interesting collection of Maya and colonial period artifacts which combine to tell the history of the region and country.

Beyond Belize City

There are four general types of natural and man-made wonders in Belize; all of which are easy to explore: the crystalline waters and vibrant coastal reefs, amazing caves, the rainforest with all kinds of birds and animals and the mysteriously majestic ruins of the ancient Mayas.

1 The **Turneffe Atoll** (30 x 10 miles) is part of the nation's barrier reef which is second in size only to Australia's Great Barrier Reef. Approximately 200 small islands comprise the atoll providing over 70 of the most stunningly beautiful snorkeling and scuba dive sites in the world. The water visibility is excellent and the variety of marine life is simply spectacular.

2 The **Mayan Ruins of Xunantunich** (shoo-Nahn-too-nich – "Stone Woman") is located in the Belize River Valley near the Guatemala border. With over twenty-five amazing palaces and pyramids, this is one of the largest Mayan ceremonial sites and the oldest archeological dig in the country. The view of the surrounding area from atop the main temple (El Castillo) is inspiring.

3 The **Mayan Ruins of Lamanai** are found deep in the vibrant rainforest near the banks of the New River. Dating back over 3,000 years this was once the home to over 60,000 Mayans. The stone ruins and giant carvings of great kings are magnificent...even more so when one keeps in mind that every stone was laboriously carried into this jungle by boat from quarries far up river.

4 The **Branch River Caves** give visitors the opportunity to tube down an incredible underground river through caverns filled with ancient stalagmites and stalactites. Set within a dense tropical forest, exploring this intricate cave complex while floating on the gentle current is both fun and interesting.

5 The **Maya Ruins of Cahal Pech** set high upon a hill overlooking the surrounding rainforest. It is believed to have been a royal residential site primarily reserved for kings and priests. The site dates to 1000 BC and many of the palaces and temples have been painstakingly excavated.

6 The **Mayan City of Altun Ha** is one of the best restored and preserved sites in Belize. The most valued and celebrated artifact, a single large carved piece of jade representing Kinich Ahau (the sun god) was discovered here. This city is believed to have been an important trading hub between the coastal regions and the interior. It was once home to over 10,000 Mayas.

SHORE EXCURSIONS To make the most of your visit to Belize City and the surrounding area we suggest you take one of our organized Shore Excursions. For information concerning tour content and pricing, consult your Shore Excursion Brochure or contact the Shore Excursion Desk. When going ashore, be advised to take with you only necessary items and secure any valuables onboard.

LOCAL CUSTOMS Bargaining: Though prices in restaurants and stores are usually fixed, bargaining is often practiced in open markets

and with street vendors.

Tipping: A tip of 10-15% is appropriate.

LOCAL CUISINE AND DRINK SPECIALTIES The favorite foods of Belize are the delicious dishes found throughout much of the Caribbean. Influenced by the Maya, European and Spanish settlers and the slaves of West Africa, staples include; fried plantains, tortillas, sweet potato, coconut milk and a selection of very popular hot sauces. Fresh seafood is a favorite together with roasted or stewed chicken and pork. The national dish is rice & beans. It is usually served with stewed chicken, beef or pork.

Belikin Beer is produced by the Belize Brewing Company. Their Lager and Stout are brewed in the time-honored German tradition. The most popular rums made in Belize are Caribbean Rum and 1 Barrel Rum. If you're looking for something different try Howling Monkey cashew wine. It is made from the cashew fruit which only grows in certain parts of Belize.

SHOPPING FACILITIES The main tourist shopping area in Belize City is the Fort Street Tourism Port. This shopping area is part of the pier complex where the cruise ship tenders dock.

LOCAL CURRENCY The official currency is the Belize dollar (BZD) Major credit cards are widely accepted. An ATM is available at the intersection of Front St. and Queen St., across from the Post Office.

POST OFFICE AND TELEPHONE The main Post Office is located a few blocks west of the Fort Street Tourism Port at the intersection of Front St. and Queen St., just north of the swinging bridge. Postal drops are available in many of the pier shops offering postcards and stamps.

Dial the following access numbers to use a personal calling card:

AT&T: from hotels – 555 or from payphones - 811

MCI: from hotels – 557 or from payphones - 815

TOURIST INFORMATION The pier complex is known as the Fort Street Tourism Port. There is a Visitor Information booth located here.

TRANSPORTATION Car rentals, scooters and taxis are available at the Fort Street Tourism Port pier complex. Please note that licensed taxis have green license plates.

LANGUAGE English is the official language of Belize. Many of the people speak the English-Creole which is common throughout much of the Caribbean. Spanish is also common, especially among the population which has come to Belize from neighboring countries. Indigenous Mayans speak a dialect related to the language of their ancient ancestors.