

Summary

With pristine rain forests, expansive orange groves, banana plantations and cacao farms, the terrain of Southern Belize makes it truly unique. Throw in spectacular beaches, world-class fishing, a rich Mayan heritage and a more Afro-Caribbean vibe, it becomes clear why the area has such appeal.

Southern Belize has the perfect conditions for growing cacao - the fruit that is processed into chocolate. Cacao was used by the ancient Mayans as a unit of currency and also ground into a warm, dark drink often seasoned with spices. Today, cacao is produced extensively by Mayan farmers in southern Belize in the Toledo district and sold to the Toledo Cacao Grower's Association (TCGA), a Fair Trade Co-operative.

Cacao Crazy is a complete cultural and sensory immersion into the world of chocolate, for the ultimate chocolate addict: Visit a local Cacao farm and meet the growers, learn about the production process, enjoy a chocolate making master class and make your very own bar of chocolate. There will of course be plenty of opportunities for tasting, the culinary highlight being a Cacao dinner where Cacao features in every course.

The region boasts a rich cultural history, lush jungle terrain and pristine waters, so the itinerary can be tailored to include visits to Mayan ruins, snorkeling, diving or fishing day trips, horseback riding or trekking through the jungle or cave exploration, putting those extra cacao calories to great use!



Day 1 - Cotton Tree Lodge

Journey up the Moho River to the Cotton Tree Lodge, a tranquil retreat on 100 private acre estate in the rainforest. Check into your private cabana, hand crafted with traditional bay leaf thatch roof and native wood details. Featuring a screened Jacuzzi tub overlooking the Moho River, the 400 square ft cabana comes with a king bed, private balcony, louvered shutters, hand woven Mayan textiles, private bathrooms and tropical flower arrangements. Enjoy a welcome dinner and, of course, a chocolate tasting.

Day 2 - Off to the farm

Visit a local organic cacao farm that has been handed down through generations. Explore the farm and learn how the different plants, animals, and insects play their parts in sustaining this productive agricultural ecosystem.

After the farm tour, you visit the village of San Felipe where you meet with the farmer's wife and mother who produce chocolate bars, cocoa powder, and cacao wine. Learn how they make chocolate from scratch on a matate (grinding stone) made of volcanic rock, brought over from Guatemala. Help them crack and winnow the beans, grind in local allspice, sugar, and vanilla, and sample your completed work.

Day 3 - A trip to the market and an afternoon swim

Visit the Punta Gorda Farmers Market where cacao is sold. Meet with members of the Toledo Cacao Growers Association and learn about Fair Trade and the politics and economics of chocolate.

Spend the afternoon at the Rio Blanco Waterfall and National Park, where jaguar, ocelot, margay, river otter, and many species of birds and fish reside. Take a gentle trek to the falls and soak up the spectacular views. If you're feeling adventurous, jump off the 20 foot cliffs into the swimming hole. Limestone pools above and below the falls are perfect for wading and splashing, making it a refreshing way to immerse yourself in the jungle.



Day 4 - Underworld adventure or archeological exploration

Spend the day as you chose, perhaps in the grounds of the lodge swimming, hiking, biking, kayaking, or horseback riding. The lodge also offers regular scheduled tours and here are our picks:

Blue Creek Cave

The village of Blue Creek is surrounded by towering limestone hills, offering challenging hiking and a network of dry and wet caves to explore. To reach the cave, you'll hike approximately twenty minutes over moderate terrain, through the jungle and upstream along the banks of the green-blue Moho River. As you approach the cave, the river breaks into small waterfalls and beautiful clear pools for swimming.

When you arrive at the mouth of the cave, you swim upstream towards the cave's interior (headlamps, life jackets, and a trained guide are provided!). Witness spectacular stalactites, stalagmites, and other unique rock formations as you swim and hike upstream, hearing nothing but the echoes of water splashing around you. Archaeologists found Late Classic ceramics and an altar inside this cave, leading them to theorize that the cave was used specifically for ceremonial purposes. You can opt to kayak back from Blue Creek Village to Cotton Tree Lodge.

Explore the Mayan Ruins of Nim Li Punit

Nearly 30,000 people live in the Toledo District today, and 64% of those claim Mayan heritage. The Maya Ruins of Nim Li Punit are situated on a beautiful hilltop site near the village of Indian Creek, with spectacular vistas of Belize, Guatemala, and the Caribbean.

Inhabited from sometime in the middle Classic Period (AD 400 700) until around 900, Nim Li Punit is best known for the 26 stone stelae that were found there. Each stela was carved with hieroglyphics and used to record important information such as alliances, wars and battles, and family trees.

This site was only fairly recently discovered by oil prospectors in 1976, and has been well cleared and excavated to offer tourists beautiful grounds with a small, informative visitors' center.





Day 5: Get your hands dirty – round 1

Get your hands dirty and get involved in the chocolate making workshop. You will be fully immersed in the entire process from bean to bar, with round 1 being an introduction to roasting, winnowing, crushing, conching and recipe formulation.

Relax with a free afternoon to spend in the grounds of the lodge, or head out on a tour for the afternoon. The lodge offers cultural tours that introduce you to some of the food, music, and crafts of the Maya and Garifuna people. You explore the villages of either Santa Anna, Crique Sarco, Barranco, or Blue Creek, where you will be welcomed into village homes and to meet the local people and their families.

Day 6: Water bound

Head out from the jungle and into the open Caribbean waters on the Snake Caye Snorkeling Excursion. Head down the Moho River on a Mexican skiff towards the sea. Your guide will point out wildlife along the banks and explain the delicate mangrove ecosystems that line the river. Some of the trees you see are hundreds of years old, and provide homes for snook, machaca, and other river fish.

At the mouth of the river you turn north towards the Snake Cayes, a set of four small islands in the Port of Honduras Marine Reserve, a protected 'no take' zone. The shallow water surrounding them is full of coral, fish, turtles, conchs, lobsters, and other sea life. After a morning of snorkeling, head to Abelone Caye, a pristine desert island to enjoy lunch. Spend the afternoon swimming, snorkeling and island hopping. Make a stop at the ranger's station and climb their 20-foot observation tower for a panoramic view of the Belize coastline.

Day 7: Get your hands dirty – round 2

Pick up where you left off on day 5 with lessons in tempering, molding, and packaging. You even make your own chocolate bars to bring home! After your work is done, take a guided tour of the plantation where you can plant and tag your very own cacao tree.

Relax and enjoy the grounds and facilities before a farewell dinner at the lodge.

Day 8: Depart

Itinerary Price and Notes

Price from US \$2,100 per person including all outlined activities, taxes and transfers, on the basis of 4 travelers.

Accommodation at Cotton Tree Lodge is on an all-inclusive basis and includes accommodation in a deluxe cabana, all meals and soft drinks.

Price does not include airfare, scuba diving, spa treatments or additional activities not listed on this itinerary.

Tailor made for you

This is our recommendation for the duration and locations for this itinerary and serves as a guide to things to see and do in Belize, as well as a guide on price.

It is, of course, fully flexible. It can be expanded or condensed, can include time in Guatemala, time in a beach resort or on a private island. We can also incorporate specialist activities such as diving and deep-sea fishing.

At Absolute Belize, we pride ourselves on crafting vacations that are as unique as the people taking them. Tell us what you'd like to see and do, your preferred style of accommodation and the tempo you'd like to set, and your personal advisor will tailor make something just for you.

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Contact us

For questions on Cacao Crazy or any of our Tailor Made Travel itineraries please get in touch:

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