

The trip to Ambergris Caye could make a great Richard Scarry book, but instead of planes, trains, and automobiles, we'd call it cars, planes, and boats. We left the house at 5 am and cabbied it to the airport. Then we took: a 737 to Miami; another 737 to Belize City; a 10-seater Cessna Caravan for the 20 minute ride to San Pedro (the main town for Ambergris Caye).



Greeted at the airstrip by Moh with gold teeth from the hotel. He had a van waiting for the 1/2 mile to Fido's bar. Walked through the bar to the beach and onto the pier where our boat was waiting to give us a 20 minute ride to the hotel. We finally arrived at the hotel pier at about 2:30 central time. Pretty cool, huh?



At the hotel, we were rewarded with a welcome rum punch, which seems to be the drink of choice around the area, and then taken to



the water, and the doors open up so that there's a breeze. Mosquito netting not necessary (in February), but it was pretty.

our gorgeous room. Our bed looked out onto



After a quick rest, we were up and moving again, walking about a mile or so down the beach, which was filled with discarded and fallen coconuts, trashed plastic bottles of all sorts, and

other debris. The beach itself is fairly different from what we're used to. In most places, it's a strip about 12 feet wide that is the main road for getting up and down the caye, either by bike or foot. Private homes placed a large rope or small concrete footings at the edge of their property so people wouldn't venture off the strip. There's no road, though, so if not using the sand, your transportation to and from your house or hotel is by boat. Sand feels very fine on the feet but is packed hard. As soon as the sand hits the water, though, everything turns amazing. In the light aqua, warm, rolling surf, plants and fish hang out. Even really colorful fish.

That evening, Moh gave us a boat ride into town. Ate nicely prepared snapper and ceviche in a large restaurant on the beach. Walked around town a little. Took a boat taxi back to the hotel and slept really well.

Friday morning, we were up with the sun, about 6:15 am. Water wasn't working (lovely). Dressed and down at the pier by 6:45 for a boat to take us to our day trip. It was early, but racing along the water can have the same effect as a morning shower. Invigorating! The weather was cool, and the sun hid behind the clouds for most of the day.

In town, we changed to a super fast boat (two 150 horsepower engines for a 24-foot boat), and met up with a bunch of people who were also participating in the day trip. This boat took us across the water back to the mainland, along the route we had flown the day before. By boat it takes about 75 minutes and by plane, about 20. We went by some houses



built in the middle of the harbor or on single house islands.



Interesting people on this boat. Large man (liquor store owner) and his wife from Rochester, NY; a firefighter who plays rugby from London; a Sci-Fi Channel and voice-over actor and his girlfriend from Vancouver; and a man and his 17-year-old daughter from New Hampshire. On the way to the mainland, we passed Caulker Caye, a rich wildlife area, as well as a dolphin and many other fish. Our guide, Gustavo, was very knowledgeable about the land, the animals, and the area itself.

At the mainland, we started up the mouth of the Belize River, and chugged along for about 4-5 miles. On the way, we saw some cool iguanas, birds that we didn't know the names of (oh

Howard oh
Howard, where
are you?), and



other wildlife. The boat hitched up to a pier, and we all jumped out to get into a van.

At this point, Junior became our guide, and we headed out to the jungle for zip lining.

Now, we were expecting (as much as we expected anything) that the zipline would be similar to our experience in Ecuador. But, as Scott says, if the Ecuador zipline was like a motorcycle, this zipline was like riding a bicycle with training wheels. Here they put us in harnesses that triple locked and gave us helmets that actually fit. There were two half-inch lines, which we were attached to by two separate pulleys, and then double harnessed onto. The farthest interval was about 300 feet, and we were never more than 50 feet above the ground. It was still fun, but as our zipline host told us, it was made for the cruise ship crowd. He also told us about the flora and fauna in the jungle, including about a poisonous viper that they now have the antidote for. Wasn't the case 20 years ago, when his dad was bit, and then died (!). Very matter of fact about the whole thing.

Once we finished zipping, Junior broke out the beer and rum punch. Lunch -- rice and beans and chicken (extra veggies for me). Next cave tubing.

Changed into bathing suits, grabbed a tube and a helmet with a light on it, and trudged about 20 minutes through the jungle. Some cool deadly trees with the antidote trees nearby (can't



remember the names -- sorry). When we finally got to the put-in place, we were told to form our tubes into a chain, with each person hooking their feet on the tube in front of them (under the arms of the person in that tube). My legs were too short, so they stuck me in front. A guide pulled me through the caves like that, with the rest of the chain connected behind. We were pretty uncomfortable, and while the stalagmites and stalagmites were really interesting, I think we all would have preferred to float around by ourselves.

Anyway, the van ride back to the boat consisted of more beer and rum punches, which kept flowing on the boat as well, until the surf became too choppy and all the drinks started spilling. Gustavo and Junior dropped everyone off, and because our hotel was farthest north, we were last.

That night, we ate dinner at the hotel. Again, it was nice, and the food was good. But nothing memorable really.

Saturday morning was a later start. Set to go sailing on a catamaran to Hol Chan Marine Reserve and Shark/Ray Alley for snorkeling and then a stopover for lunch on Caulker Caye. Gustavo and Junior were our guides again. As we were sailing over to the reef at Hol Chan, the sun finally came out, which was



nice. It stayed out, and we weren't so prepared for that, but got some sunscreen at Caulker Caye later. Some would say too late, but at least we got it. Anyway, the snorkeling was AWESOME. At the first stop, Hol Chan, we saw beautiful corals and fish. Among the really cool sights: a sea turtle, two green moray eels peeking out of the coral, a starfish (I know it's not called that anymore, but I still do), a stupendous rainbow parrot fish, loads of grouper, some blue tang, cardinalfish, squirrelfish, porkfish, grunts, etc. After 45 minutes, we all



got back in the boat. On the way to Shark/Ray Alley, we pulled up along a small fishing boat, where two men were harvesting conch. Junior made an exchange of conch for \$10 BZD (\$5 US).

So when we pulled up at the Alley, Gustavo and Junior sent some bait down which brought out the spotted eagle rays and southern stingrays. Ultra cool.

Back on the boat, Gustavo started handing out the rum punch and beer again. We pulled up to Caulker Caye. Walked through the very small town and stopped for some ceviche. While eating, we saw a lazy dog sleeping in the middle of the beach/road until a golf cart came up beeping. He pulled himself up and moved. Then the Cake Lady came around. She spends mornings baking and afternoons selling from her cart. We got a slice of chocolate coconut pie and the carrot coconut bread and it was soooo good. Feeling the sun a lot by now, but we got back



on the boat and chilled with the drinks and some music all the way back to San Pedro. At one point, Junior served us each a bowl of fresh ceviche that he had made from the conch we got from those fisherman earlier. It was perfect. Pulling into Ambergris Caye, we saw skydivers dotting the horizon, and then.... ultralights (a hang glider with an engine)! THESE WERE COOL! They used to have a club of ultralight flyers at an old independent hangar right on South Dixie, between Perrine and Cutler Ridge (south of Miami) that we would see from time to time when I was a teenager. Always loved them. This put a little thought in our heads....

We stayed in town for dinner -- found a place called The Reef that had ... stone crabs!!! They were yummy and perfect. Apparently there are stone crabs in the bay year round. Cool. We also had another conch ceviche, and conch soup which were good. Walking through the town, we found it was definitely busier on a Saturday night. We bought three large conch shells for the girls, knowing full well that they may not make it through TSA. While waiting for the water taxi to take us back to the hotel, a kid begged Scott to take his picture. Sweet boy.



Sunday we had no plans at all. We slept late, late, did some reading, had something to eat, read on the beach, watched the reef, took a nap, had another snack, and drank a steady run of rum punches/beers, which helped with the sunburns from the day before. Stayed out of the sun, though. Late afternoon, took a walk to the north and saw some cool sights.



At one point, we decided to go into town for dinner, and found that everything closes up on Sunday nights. Did come across a hole in the wall place (our favorites) that had gigantic servings of ceviche and king crabs. But one of the highlights of our trip happened on the boat back to the hotel. It was about 9:15 and we were cruising over the water, when all of a sudden, we all saw a light



shooting across the sky. The captain stopped the boat and we watched this light arc completely across the sky from horizon to horizon. As it passed over, the contrails glowed yellow and remained bright for a few minutes. Boat engine back into play, and then a few minutes later, we heard a huge BOOM! So immediately everyone starts contemplating the possibilities: meteorite, plane on fire, aliens, etc. When we landed at the hotel dock, a couple there said Space Shuttle, but most people were steadfast in the plane on fire choice. Still talking about it talking about it and we went into the lobby, where the bartender turned on CNN which was showing... the Space Shuttle landing in Cape Canaveral that very minute [http://ambergriscaye.com/forum/ubbthreads.php/topics/368325/just heard an felt an explosio.html#Post368325](http://ambergriscaye.com/forum/ubbthreads.php/topics/368325/just_heard_an_felt_an_explosio.html#Post368325). It was Endeavor, making the ultimate landing for the entire shuttle program. This was very cool.

Monday morning we woke up hungry and lazy. We went up to the hotel restaurant and found out that we were provided with fruit and toast every morning as part of our room rate. Who knew? So we ate and then took another nap. Around noon we decided to check what was up in town. We had mentioned to Rosalie at the front desk that we were interested in finding out more about the ultralights, and she decided to have the owner meet us at the dock space in town. Our boat ride was really great this day, because the weather had turned hot and very calm (no breeze). Humidity was up there, and riding on the boat was a dream. The woman (forgotten her name, sorry) walked us over to the airstrip from the pier and while we hadn't decided definitely to take the plunge (or pay the expense), it was hard to deny our longing once we were under those

wings. So shoes came off, pilot earphones/mic and helmet on, stepped into the seat, and buckled up. Scott's pilot was a pilot's pilot. He talked to Scott about each of the preparations



and tasks that they were undergoing from take off to landing. My pilot was a



daredevil and did many fun tricks, cruising only five feet above the water for miles at a time, soaring up, turning hard to the right, plunging down, etc. Scott took the camera, after debating for a while whether to use the regular or zoom lens (he ended up with the zoom). The ride was absolutely wonderful,



and the air was so much cooler under those wings. We went over the entire caye and down over the reef and flew



flew.
Saw the skydivers land at one point. Landed on the same airstrip as the Cessna. One of the best things we've ever done!

Once we came back down on the airstrip, we ended up talking to the pilots for a while. Gradually came down off our highest high, but were feeling right and fine with the world. It was time for lunch!

Junior (the guide) had told us about his aunt's restaurant right next to the airstrip. El Fogón. Instead of a hole in the wall, this was a hole in a part of Miss Susanna's house with a couple of tables thrown around. She had an outdoor wood-fired stove that kept everything simmering. What she had cooking was what you could eat, and if you didn't want that, too bad. Fortunately, we were really into the snapper and conch fritters which were delicious. She also gave us watermelon juice, that we worried about drinking a bit, but not



enough to stop us from drinking it. Gooooood stuff. Fritters were far from healthy, but we figured one meal of fried stuff couldn't be too bad.

To get that meal moving around in our bodies (instead of banging around the bottoms of our bellies), we started off on a walk past the south part of town. First, we had to stop off and get some hats, cause we were both extremely pink already. Scott got a Belikin Beer (the monopoly of beer in Belize. Only other beer we ever saw was a Heineken once or twice) baseball cap, and I got a big floppy red hat.

As we walked down the beach, we passed local craftspeople with their wares on their tables. We usually just smiled and nodded to the entreaties, but one older man got our attention. We were walking by him, but he kept at us, asking if we liked his designs in slate (actually very amazing, most representing the Mayan calendar) and showing us the shoe polish he used to keep the slate looking dark and clean. He had the months of the Mayan calendar laid out on a piece of wood, in tiny slate designs. The Mayan calendar has 18 months consisting of 20 days each, and then one month of five days. Nice man, great salesman. We got the months for the girls and Ersil. While Pedro was making Marx's from scratch, we talked in Spanish with his wife Marta. Got along pretty well with Evie interpreting and Scott speaking. Really nice people.

After about an hour walk, we headed back into town and caught a water taxi towards our hotel. Stopped off about 1/3 way back at the Palapas Bar, which sits right in the water. Had trouble



getting the stoned waiter to understand us, but then we met up with the owner and his wife (Scott and Jody). He's a retired firefighter from Tampa who moved to Belize and bought this bar. It's a very cool place, and we had a great time there, but we later found out that business is not so great for him.

Back at the hotel, we had a bit (more!) to drink and a bite to eat before turning in.

Scott, actually didn't quite turn in yet -- he stayed up at the bar with the hotel owner and staff. Wind was silent for the most part, but our room was still really comfortable.

On Tuesday, we woke up, had some of the breakfast we had forgotten about the first



few days, and then got into the boat and the small plane. Had to give up the conchs before getting on the big plane (definitely a terrorist weapon), customs, running at MIA to make an earlier connection (which we got to in time but which was oversold so it didn't matter anyway), and the final plane home.