



## Pre-Departure Information

*The information below will prepare you for your upcoming trip and answer any questions you may have.*

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## Before You Leave

### Passports and Entry Visas

Check that your passport is valid – it takes time to apply for a new one! For American, British, and Canadian passports there are no special visa requirements for trips up to 1 month. Click [here](#) to verify if you need a visa to visit Belize. For stays longer than 30 days, passports can be extended locally for around \$25 USD per month.

### Your Scuba Certification Card is Required to Dive with ReefCI

In order to participate in our program, you must be a certified scuba diver or be taking the PADI open water certification course with us on the island. You must bring your scuba certification card (or a copy of it) with you to the island for verification. ReefCI accepts all scuba certification agencies including PADI, SSI, BSAC, NAUI, SDI, and several others. If you are taking the PADI open water certification course with ReefCI on the island, this card requirement does not apply to you.

### 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 – including the Covid-19 vaccination.

### Travel and Dive Insurance

Travel and dive insurance is **highly recommended** but not required. Should boat transport to the island or diving not take place due to a force majeure event (hurricanes, tropical storms, bad weather, natural disaster, rough/unsafe sea conditions, or unforeseeable circumstances, money will **not** be refunded. ReefCI highly recommends travel insurance that covers force majeure events as they can and have forced ReefCI to cancel trips for safety reasons. We strongly recommend [DAN Trip Insurance](#). The cost is minimal but it will save you hundreds of dollars if a cancelation takes place.

Dive insurance is not covered under the DAN Trip Insurance above. Dive 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. We recommend [DAN Dive Insurance](#), it is optional; however, it is the best way to protect yourself when it comes to dive accidents and the high costs associated with treating them.

**In the unlikely event of a serious diving accident that requires immediate life-saving medical attention please note that the nearest hyperbaric chamber and hospital is approximately 1 hour away in San Pedro, Ambergris Caye by helicopter evacuation. Divers are responsible for the cost of an emergency helicopter airlift (approximate cost 15,000 USD), so we highly recommend divers insurance.**



## 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 is irrefutable, chemicals in sunscreen (most notably oxybenzone and octinoxate) kill developing coral, increase the bleaching of coral, and damage the developing polyps. Hence, only reef-safe sunscreen/block is permitted on the island.

### 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. It is very important that you bring these items or you will not be able to dive!** 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 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.

We provide the rest of your dive gear – BCD's, tanks, regulators, and weights for a \$30 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 our night dives one must be a certified advanced diver.

### Dive Gear Recommendations

We understand for beginners and novices that it can be overwhelming when it comes to all the choices for dive gear. No worries - for our recommendations regarding wetsuits, dive masks, fins, and booties click [here](#) and our guide will make it easy and painless to find the right dive gear for you :)



**Wetsuit Needed?** The surface water temperature is consistently around 80F/26C, but much cooler at depth so a 3mm wetsuit (full or shorty) is just about right for most people. However, it just depends on how much you feel the cold; some dive with just a rash guard while others always dive with a wetsuit. 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.

I always dive in a full 3mm wetsuit year-round. I hate being cold and my 3mm full wetsuit always keeps me warm and happy 😊

### What to Bring for the Trip in General

- Lightweight waterproof jacket and pants. **Keep this handy for the boat journey, just in case of bad weather!**
- A dry bag or plastic bag to keep all your electronics dry during the boat ride and on island
- Reef safe sunscreen, sunglasses, hat, swimsuit
- Dive gear (see page above for required dive gear)
- Re-usable water bottle. There is plenty of purified water on the island. Stay hydrated!!
- Warm long pants and hoodie for the evenings (it can get chilly with the wind and diving)
- Towels (hand towel and a beach towel)
- Spray in hair conditioner to help conserve water
- Phones, computers, tablets, musical devices, games, books, playing cards for the evenings
- Your passport and scuba certification card

**Only bring biodegradable and phosphate free shampoos and soaps to 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
- Dive equipment donations (BCD's, regulators, wetsuits, fins, masks, torches, etc..)



## When You Arrive

Grab a taxi or arrange a ride with your hotel upon arrival at the Placencia Airport. Placencia is less than 10 minutes from the airstrip and a taxi is around \$10 USD into town.

- Almost all places (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 USA 2-pin power adapter. Voltage is 110V

### 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 several banks in Placencia where you can access funds via ATM, debit, 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.**

Tips for ReefCI staff are not included and are always appreciated!

### Prepare for the Boat Ride to the Island

The boat ride out to the island on Monday morning takes about 1 to 1.5 hours depending on ocean conditions. **Make sure your phones, computers, tablets, and other electronic devices are secured in a waterproof dry bag or plastic bag as luggage can get wet depending on the weather or ocean conditions. Make sure you apply a high factor reef-safe sunscreen prior to the boat ride if the sun is out. Getting sunburnt on the first day is no fun!**

### Drugs and Alcohol

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. ReefCI reserves the right to immediately dismiss any volunteer violating the policy without a refund.** Alcohol is available on the island for an additional cost. Legal drinking age in Belize is 18 years old.



## Diving Certification with ReefCI and PADI Qualifications

In order to participate in the ReefCI program, you must be a certified scuba diver or be taking the PADI open water certification course with us on the island

### Getting Your PADI Open Water Certification with ReefCI

In order to be scuba certified, you must complete the PADI eLearning portion of your PADI open water certification course before your arrival. PADI is the world's leading scuba diver training organization that governs and regulates scuba standards and diver certifications. With PADI's online eLearning, you will complete the classroom/theory portion of your open water course online before your arrival. PADI charges around \$200 USD for the eLearning and the cost is paid to PADI via their website. **You must click [here](#) to register for PADI's online eLearning and complete it before your arrival.** This link will affiliate you with ReefCI and lets us know you are registered and taking the course with us. After completing the eLearning, you must print out your eRecord (or snap a picture of it on your phone) and bring it with you to the island for our instructors. Once on the island, you will complete the required in-water training portion of the course with ReefCI, which takes 3 days in the water. ReefCI charges \$225 USD to complete the required in-water training portion of the PADI open water certification course.

### PADI Certification Courses Offered on the Island

If you are already a certified diver, we understand that it may have been a while 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 – \$225 USD (3 days)\*
- PADI Advanced Open Water Certification – \$275 USD (3 days)\*
- PADI Rescue Diver Certification – \$325 USD (1 week)\*
- PADI Dive Master Certification – \$750 USD (4 week minimum stay)\*

#### PADI Specialty Certification Courses Offered on the Island

- PADI Specialty Course: Invasive Lionfish – \$175 USD (2 days)
- PADI Specialty Course: Coral Reef Conservation – \$175 USD (3 days)
- PADI Specialty Course: Fish Identification – \$175 USD (2 days)
- PADI Specialty Course: Deep Diver – \$175 USD (3 days)
- PADI Specialty Course: Emergency First Response – \$175 USD (2 days)\*
- PADI Specialty Course: Underwater Photographer – \$250 USD (2 days)\*



**\*Please Note:** The PADI Open Water, Advanced, Rescue, Dive Master, Underwater Photographer, and Emergency First Response courses require the PADI eLearning prior to arrival which is an additional cost paid to PADI. All other courses do NOT require the PADI eLearning prior to arrival. You must be a fully certified open water scuba 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.

## Typical Trip Itinerary

Each week/day will differ but you will be helping and participating in the following areas:

- **Invasive Lionfish:** Spearfish to remove this destructive invasive species that is destroying native coral reef ecosystems.
- **Marine Conservation Education:** Learn about coral reefs and marine animals and discover how we can protect our oceans and reefs.
- **Biodiversity Identification Dives:** ID dives (fish, sea turtles, sharks, invertebrates, coral) to increase one's knowledge and understanding of reef ecosystems.
- **Beach Clean-ups:** Weekly beach and island trash/plastic removal on islands of the Belize Barrier Reef.

Depending on the season and length of stay you might not take part in all of these activities above but it is a good bet that you will experience most of them.

### Marine Conservation Education Program Schedule and Weekly Itinerary

All new arrivals to the island will complete week 1 schedule while on the island. Those who are with us as rollovers (volunteers with us multiple weeks in a row) will be on our cycle two, three, and four schedules. Please click on the links below to see each detailed weekly schedule that includes dives, conservation presentation topics, and meals.

- [Marine Conservation Education Program](#)
- [Week 1 Schedule/Itinerary](#)
- [Cycle 2 Schedule/Itinerary](#)
- [Cycle 3 Schedule/Itinerary](#)
- [Cycle 4 Schedule/Itinerary](#)



## Accommodations

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. The location of our island however is 5 stars as every room has incredible views of the Caribbean Sea! Imagine waking up to the sound of lapping waves and a spectacular Belizean sunrise! Our large main cabana building houses couples, families, groups, and singles. We also have individual single cabanas that surround the island. Bathroom and shower facilities are shared by all. We do not have air conditioning on the island as the strong trade winds provide a continuous cooling breeze. However, rooms can occasionally become stuffy so all rooms have fans if needed. Take a peek at our accommodations on our website [here](#).

## Meals and Drinking Water

All meals and drinking water are provided for you while on the island. Soda and alcoholic drinks are available at an additional cost. On the weekends, guests are responsible for their own meals and accommodations on the mainland in Placencia.

As an environmental conservation organization, we try to be as eco-conscious and sustainable as possible. According to scientists, a plant-based diet is the single biggest way to reduce your impact on the planet. Meat production affects not only climate change emissions, but also freshwater and land use, as well as water and air pollution.

**Since avoiding meat is the single biggest way to reduce your environmental impact on the planet, ReefCI strives to provide a mostly plant diet based with protein sources from the ocean (invasive lionfish). Thus, eating invasive lionfish is a win-win for the environment!! If you require a diet high in protein, we recommend bringing protein bars to supplement your diet.**

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

## No WiFi or Internet on the Island: Blissfully Disconnected

We have no internet or cell phone service on the island. The location of our island is very remote and too far from the mainland of Belize to receive a cell signal or internet service. We do have a satellite phone but it is only used by staff for emergency situations. There is no WiFi in nature, but I promise, you will find a better connection. Relax, unplug, breathe deep, and immerse yourself in the tranquility of the ocean and find your connection with nature.





## Island Sustainability Guidelines for Volunteers

### **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, help us protect it!***

### **Meat Consumption vs Sustainability**

According to scientists, a plant-based diet is the single biggest way to reduce your impact on the planet. Meat production affects not only climate change emissions, but also freshwater and land use, as well as water and air pollution.

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### **Electricity Conservation**

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 off-grid system but until then please help us to be efficient and switch off lights and fans when you are not in your room!***

### **Fresh Water Conservation**

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!***

### **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!***