

# OCEANIC SOCIETY EXPEDITIONS



## BELIZE

### **Blackbird Caye & Lighthouse Reef** *Snorkeling & Coral Reef Ecology*

2007-2008

Located just south of Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, Belize boasts the second largest barrier reef in the world. An exquisite maze of coral reefs set in clear turquoise waters is the focus of this seven-day land-based snorkeling expedition to Blackbird Caye at Turneffe Atoll. Offering six full days of coral reef snorkeling plus a visit to Lighthouse Reef Atoll, this expedition is one of the best ways for non-divers to discover Belize's spectacular coral reef systems.

Our trip begins with a 90-minute boat ride from Belize City to Blackbird Caye, located 32 miles from Belize City on the eastern side of Turneffe Atoll. Because of the atoll's distance from the mainland, the waters are clear and the reefs are pristine. Magnificently adorned with huge yellow tube sponges and myriad tropical fish, the reef offers unmatched snorkeling opportunities. Blackbird Caye is bordered by white sand beaches and situated adjacent to a series of coral islets that comprise Turneffe Atoll's fringing reef.

Participants stay at the Blackbird-Oceanic Society Field Station in comfortable beachfront cabanas, each with an open porch to the sea, in double occupancy rooms with private baths. Meals are served in a beautiful dining "palapa" with ocean views. Blackbird Caye is ideally situated for snorkelers. Most snorkeling sites are located within the shallow waters of the atoll and are only a short boat ride from the Field Station, offering snorkelers easy access to an extraordinary underwater paradise. Beach snorkeling is possible at our own Blackbird reef, located directly in front of our private beach.

In addition to daily snorkeling activities, you can explore our nature trail, and enjoy a visit to Soldier's Caye, a nesting site for the threatened crowned pigeons and feeding site for a variety of shore birds. Over 25 species of birds are found around the island including the magnificent osprey. The surrounding habitat serves as a feeding and resting area for dolphins, which we often spotted en route to our snorkeling sites.

A highlight will be a day-trip to Lighthouse Reef to visit the Blue Hole made famous by a Jacques Cousteau documentary for its unique stalagmites. Nearby Half Moon Caye Natural Monument, a bird sanctuary whose dense vegetation provides habitat for thousands of red-footed boobies and frigate birds, is a naturalist's dream. Floating along the inner coral rim of the Blue Hole, you can enjoy a panoramic view of this natural wonder while the outer rim reveals a profusion of shallow sea fans and colorful fish communities.

Your naturalist will help identify the many different fish species, and evening presentations include topics such as fish behavior, coral reef ecology and natural history of the islands.

## ITINERARY

**Day 1 U.S./Belize City/Blackbird Caye.** Arrive in Belize City and transfer to the Princess International Hotel and Marina. Afternoon boat transfer to Blackbird Caye (about 90 minutes). Evening trip briefing and welcome dinner. Seven nights in comfortable beachfront cabanas.

**Day 2 Blackbird Caye.** Morning snorkeling checkout session and beach snorkeling. Afternoon to nearby shallow water coral islets.

**Days 3-7** Snorkeling and natural history explorations to nearby reef snorkeling sites chosen for the shallow waters and easy access. This will provide the novice snorkeler a unique opportunity to discover the spectacular beauty of the undersea world: brilliant sponges, rich corals, and colorful tropical fish. Experienced snorkelers can appreciate the diversity and abundance of the marine flora and fauna found in Belize's tropical waters. Also, a natural history trip through the lagoon where we may see dolphins and manatees.

Weather permitting, one full-day excursion to **Lighthouse Reef Atoll**, one of the country's three coral islands. The reef's shallow walls, beginning at depths of only 25 feet, provide spectacular snorkeling in relatively shallow depths. Massive yellow sponges festoon the reef walls. This day-trip also includes a visit to **Half Moon Caye Natural Monument** which was established in 1982, the first natural reserve to be created under the National Parks System. The Caye is divided into two distinct ecosystems: the western region has dense vegetation supporting approximately 4,000 breeding red-footed boobies and frigatebirds; the eastern half of the Caye is composed primarily of coconut palms. Our itinerary for this day also includes a visit to the **Blue Hole** made famous by a Jacques Cousteau documentary for its unique stalagmites.

**Day 8 Blackbird Caye/Belize City/U.S.** Early morning boat will bring you back to Belize City in time to transfer to the airport for an afternoon flight home.

## TRIP INFORMATION

### Leadership

Leadership at Blackbird Caye will be a guide who will help identify the many different fish species and explain the natural history of the area. He/she will provide evening lectures and slide presentations; recaps on the days' activities including identifying marine life and explaining their behavior; and informative briefings on the next days' activities. Depending on the interests of the group, general subject matters may include marine ecology, coral reef biology, or oceanography. The guide will also be a resource for information about the nature and importance of biodiversity and environmental issues.

### Accommodations

Blackbird Caye, on the eastern side of Turneffe Atoll, is located 32 miles from Belize City. The Blackbird-Oceanic Society Field Station is bordered by white sand beaches and is situated adjacent to a series of coral islets that comprise the atoll's fringing reef. Because of its distance from the mainland, the waters are clear and the reefs are pristine. Participant accommodations are in six, comfortable double occupancy beachfront cabanas, each with an open porch facing the Caribbean Sea. Snorkeling from the white sand beach is excellent. The cabanas include private bath (bathroom facilities include flush toilet, sink and hot water stall shower), two full-size beds, small storage closet, a fan, and 110-volt AC electrical plugs, powered by generator usually 24 hours a day.

## **Travel / Vessels**

Crossing from Belize City to Blackbird Caye will be aboard a 43-foot transfer vessel with covered top. The trip takes approximately 90 minutes. This or a similar vessel will be used for the excursion to Lighthouse Reef Atoll.

Snorkeling and natural history excursions will be conducted from a 23-foot open skiff or similar, with canopy top and sturdy vertical swim ladder.

## **Meals**

At Blackbird Caye, the dining area is a huge “palapa” style restaurant and lounge with ocean views. Three buffet-style Belizean meals will be served daily, with an emphasis on vegetables, rice, beans, meat, seafood and occasional chicken. Fresh fruit is also offered on an occasional basis throughout the week (not with every meal). Special dietary needs can usually be accommodated with advance notice.

## **Climate**

Belize is subtropical. The cayes are tempered by tradewinds throughout the year. Air temperatures can range from 60° to 90°F. and water temperatures from 73° to 88°; both generally average in the 80°s. Rain is always a possibility.

## **About Belize**

Belize is an independent country and member of the British Commonwealth, with a parliamentary government. English is the official language.

## **Entry/Exit**

Passports are required for travel to Belize. Visas are not required for U.S. citizens. There is a US\$37.50 Belize airport departure tax payable in U.S. or Belizean currency.

## **Health Precautions**

There are no endemic diseases in Belize, and no vaccinations are required. Additional information will be included in your Detailed Information Packet, sent approximately 3 months prior to trip.

## **Health & Fitness**

This itinerary is designed for a leisurely pace suitable for nature study. Anyone in general good health can participate. Our vessels have sturdy vertical swim ladders, and some agility is needed for boarding and disembarking.

## **Skill Level**

All snorkelers, from novice to expert can enjoy this program. Our naturalist conducts a snorkel check-out to test equipment and to provide instruction for any interested parties. We suggest practicing with snorkel gear prior to trip.

## **Airline Information**

This program is offered as land-only package. Several airlines service Belize including TACA, American, Continental, Delta and US Air. Please call our office if you have questions about making airline reservations. **Flights should be scheduled to arrive before 3pm and depart after 12 noon.**

## **Airport Transfers**

Airport transfers can be arranged upon request for an additional fee.


## **Single Supplement**

If you are a single traveler wishing to share accommodations, we will try to match you with a roommate. If we do not find a roommate for you, there will be no involuntary Single Supplement Fee. If you request a single room, you must pay the Single Supplement Fee of \$425 regardless of signup date (see Terms & General Conditions). Please note that single accommodations are not always available.

## **Terms & Conditions**

All Oceanic Society Expeditions Terms & General Conditions apply. Please contact our office if you do not have a copy.

*Optional Extensions* available to see Crystal  
Paradise Resort in the Cayo District of Belize.  
Please call our office for information at  
800/326-7491.



## **Trip Costs & Dates**

***Please See Insert***

**Trip Includes:** Accommodations, meals, boat transfers, excursions, and leadership

**Does Not Include:** Airport transfers, Lighthouse Reef Wildlife Refuge Park  
entrance fee of US\$40, airport departure tax of US\$37.50, staff gratuities

**Single  
Supplement:** \$425 (by request, on space  
available basis only)

**Limit:** 10 participants

## 2007 Belize Snorkel Trip Dates

**2007 Dates:** 8 day trips Weekly/Saturday to Saturday and 5 day trips Weekly/Saturday to Wednesday

May 12-19	August 11-18	November 24-December
May 19-26	August 18-25	1
May 26-June 2	August 25-September 1	December 1-8
June 2-9	September 1-8	December 8-15
June 9-16	October 27-November 3	December 15-22
July 14-21	November 3-10	December 22-29
July 28-August 4	November 10-17	December 29-January 5
August 4-11	November 17-24	

### 2007 Trip Costs:

<u>8-Day Snorkel (Sat/Sat):</u>	\$1,850 Land Only
<u>5-Day Snorkel(Sat/Wed):</u>	\$1,460 Land Only

## 2008 Belize Snorkel Trip Dates

**2008 Dates:** 8 day trips Weekly/Saturday to Saturday and 5 day trips Weekly/Saturday to Wednesday

January 5-12	April 12-19	August 16-23
January 12-19	April 19-26	August 23-30
January 19-26	April 26-May 3	August 30-September 6
January 26-February 2	May 3-10	October 18-25
February 2-9	May 10-17	October 25-November 1
February 9-16	May 17-24	November 1-8
February 16-23	May 24-31	November 8-15
February 23-March 1	May 31-June 7	November 15-22
March 1-8	June 7-14	November 22-29
March 8-15	June 14-21	November 29-December 6
March 15-22	July 12-19	December 6-13
March 22-29	July 26-August 2	December 13-20
March 29-April 5	August 2-9	December 20-27
April 5-12	August 9-16	December 27-January 3

### 2008 Trip Costs:

8-Day Snorkel (Sat/Sat):	\$1,940 Land Only
5-Day Snorkel (Sat/Wed):	\$1,640 Land Only

We will honor a 5% discount for all repeat Blackbird Field Station visitors (except on Holidays).



# OCEANIC SOCIETY EXPEDITONS

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Non-profit

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