

Northern Belize



Northern Belize is probably the most passed-through region in the country. Many travelers save themselves a small chunk of change by flying into Chetumal or Cancun in Mexico and bussing straight down into Belize City and out to the cayes. Their general take on the transitory sojourn is less than complimentary. 'Flat terrain, farmland and uninspiring towns,' some have said. To these travelers, we say, 'Have fun in San Pedro!'

Are they gone yet? Excellent!

Now we can talk about the beautiful, chilled-out stretch of Belize that the masses miss entirely, keeping paths un-beaten, and hotel and food prices close to half that of the rest of Belize.

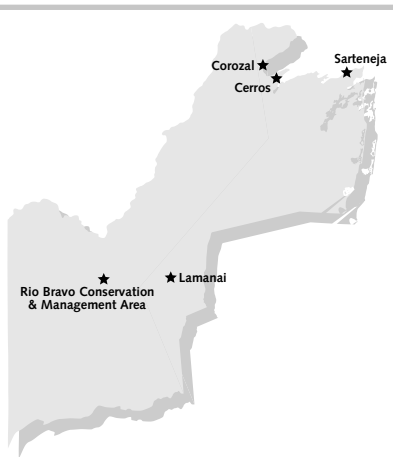
Northern Belize comprises two districts: Corozal and Orange Walk. From the road down from Mexico, the terrain of both appears to be mostly farmland and sparse jungle, with attractions for tourists thin on the ground. While the Northern Hwy lacks the gorgeous curves and panoramic vistas of the Hummingbird or Southern Highways, off this main road lie a plethora of places to explore, including pretty fishing villages, pristine jungles and ancient Maya cities.

Then there's the food! With its close proximity to Mexico, cuisine in Belize's north is far more colorful and diverse than it is down south; if you're ready to trade stew beans, rice and rum for ceviche, empanadas and tequila, you'll definitely want to head north.

Beautiful, inexpensive, untouristy and tasty: in a nutshell, that's northern Belize!

HIGHLIGHTS

- Taking a riverboat tour through the jungles and winding up at the magnificent Maya ruins of **Lamanai** (p167)
- Hanging out in the saltwater breezes and Spanish colonial charm of **Corozal Town** (p172)
- Enjoying the panoramic ocean views from atop the pyramid at the beachfront Maya ruins of **Cerros** (p178)
- Enjoying exceptional birding and wildlife watching at the **Rio Bravo Conservation & Management Area** (p169)
- Chilling in the laid-back fishing town of **Sarteneja** (p179)



■ POPULATION: 84,500	■ MONTHLY RAINFALL: Jan 4in, Jun 5in (Corozal)	■ HIGHEST ELEVATION: 777ft
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History

On the eastern fringe of the ancient Maya heartland, northern Belize supported many settlements through history without producing any cities of the size or grandeur of Caracol, further south in Belize, or Tikal in Guatemala. It was home to important river trade routes linking the interior with the coast: the north's major Maya site, Lamanai, commanded one of these routes and grew to a city of up to 35,000 people.

A Spanish expedition into northern Belize from the Yucatán in 1544 led to the conquering of many of the region's Maya settlements and, later, the creation of a series of Spanish missions distantly controlled by a priest at Bacalar in the southeastern Yucatán. Maya rebellion was fierce, and after a series of battles the Spanish were driven out of the area for good in 1640.

British loggers began moving into the region in search of mahogany in the 18th century. They encountered sporadic resistance from the now weakened and depleted Maya population, who had been ravaged by European-introduced diseases.

In 1847 the Maya in the Yucatán rose up against their Spanish-descended overlords in the War of the Castes ('Guerra de Castas' in Spanish), a vicious conflict that continued in diminishing form into the 20th century. Refugees from both sides of the conflict took shelter in northern British Honduras (as Belize was then called), with people of Spanish descent founding the towns of Orange Walk and Corozal, and the Maya moving into the forests and countryside. It wasn't surprising that intermittent hostilities took place in British Honduras. One group of Maya, the Icaiché, were repulsed from Orange Walk after fierce fighting in 1872. The border between Mexico and British Honduras was not agreed between the two states until 1893.

Caste War migrants from the Yucatán laid the foundations of modern northern Belize by starting the area's first sugarcane plantations. Despite the sugar industry's many vicissitudes, it is now the backbone of the northern Belize economy, with some 900 cane farms in the region.

Language

Because of northern Belize's proximity to Mexico and Guatemala's Petén, and the

NORTHERN BELIZE IN...

One Day

Take a trip up the bird-rich New River to the jungle-clad Maya ruins at **Lamanai** (p167).

Three Days

Spend a day chilling out on the cheap in **Corozal Town** (p172) before heading out by **solar-powered boat** (p177) for a day of Maya exploration at **Cerros** (p178) and another day of carbon-neutral decadence at **Cerros Beach Inn** (p178).

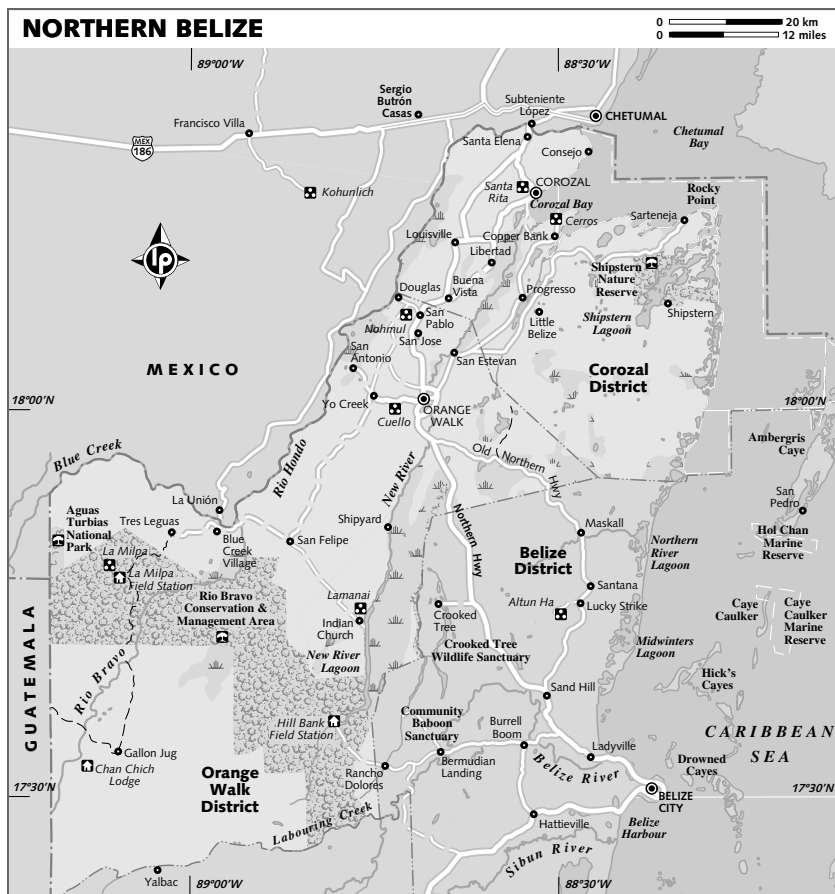
Five or Six Days

Follow the three-day agenda with an additional two days of horseback riding and jungle exploration at **Backpacker's Paradise** (p180) in Sarteneja. Spend the last day traveling slowly overland to **Orange Walk Town** (p163) and indulge in some street food followed by pastries at **Panificadora La Popular** (p166).

Mexican or Guatemalan origins of many of the people living here, Spanish is the first language of many northerners, be they Maya, Mestizo of Mexican origin or more-recent immigrant workers from El Salvador and Guatemala. See the boxed text, p262, for a quick Spanish lesson. However, nearly everybody speaks English as well.

Getting There & Around

The Northern Hwy links Belize City with the Mexican border via the region's two main towns, Orange Walk and Corozal. Several bus companies service the route, with some going as far as Chetumal, 7 miles into Mexico. Since the bankruptcy of Novelo's (once the flagship bus company of Belize), half a dozen companies have stepped in to service the region, and approximately 30 daily buses run each way from Belize City to Corozal Town. There are also daily buses connecting Orange Walk Town with Sarteneja (though the nicest way to get to Sarteneja is by boat from Corozal Town). Daily flights connect Corozal Town with Sarteneja and San Pedro (Ambergris Caye). At San Pedro you can connect with flights to and from Belize City. Presently, there are no regular flights servicing Orange Walk Town.



ORANGE WALK DISTRICT

Orange Walk is one of the more spread out and thinly populated districts in Belize. The Northern Hwy cuts through the panhandle that is the district's population center in its far northeast, and most of the communities and attractions scattered west of this are connected by a network of (mostly) unpaved roads. A casual glance at the government-produced Belize Travel Map shows a fairly extensive series of grid-roads west of the Northern Hwy that stretches out into towns with names like Shipstern and August Pine Ridge. Though this gives the impression of larger communities in rural Orange

Walk, these are actually Mennonite farming communities; the neatly drawn lines represent farming roads and boundaries created by the farmers themselves, and not major towns bustling with activity.

Further west and to the south, these grid roads disappear entirely, and you're in what Belizeans refer to as 'deep bush,' the backwoods jungle country that makes up most of Orange Walk District. It's here you'll find the vast Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area (p169) and, further out still, the village of Gallon Jug and the ultra exclusive Chan Chich Lodge (p171). Most casual visitors – those without a good 4WD or the hefty funds needed to visit the lodge – restrict their exploration of the district to

places within reasonable striking distance of Orange Walk Town.

ORANGE WALK TOWN

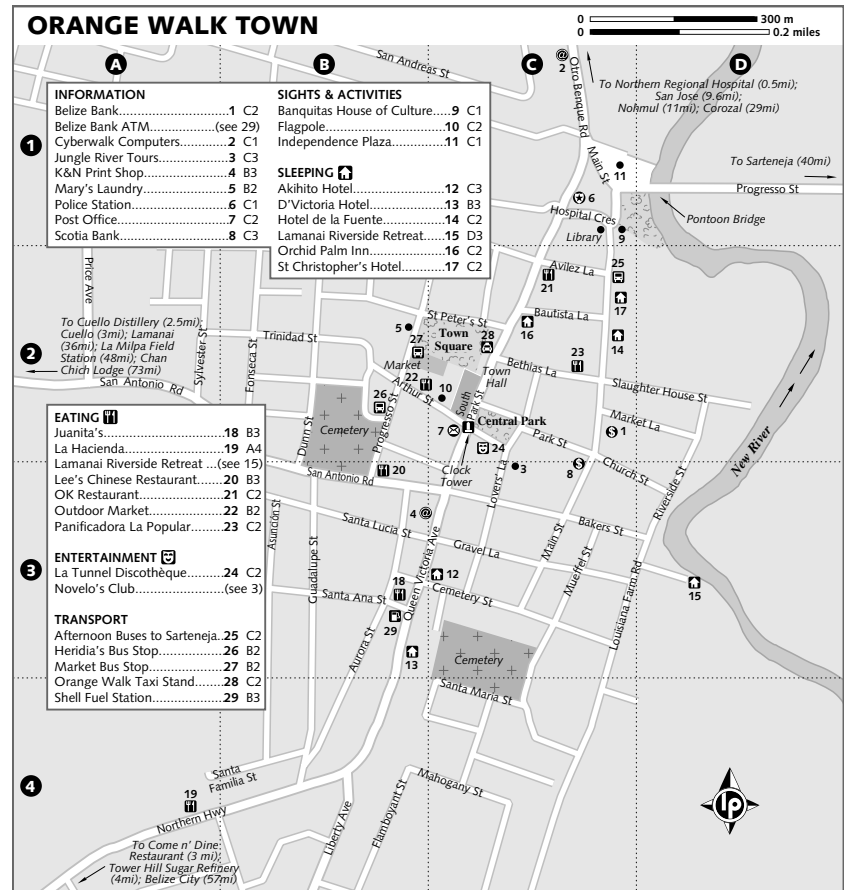
pop 15,990

Orange Walk Town is many things to many people: agricultural town, economic hub of northern Belize, meeting place of Mennonites, good place for street eats...but it generally isn't thought of as a tourist town. And chances are pretty good that this won't change any time soon. No, this town of 16,000 souls – just 57 miles from Belize City – doesn't have much to keep travelers around for more than a day or two, but what it does have makes it an excellent base from which to make the superlative trip to the ruins of Lamanai (p167) and longer

excursions into the wilds of northern Belize. Orange Walk has a fine location beside the New River, which meanders lazily along the east side of town, and there are a few very nice (and reasonably priced) hotels and restaurants for visitors who choose to hang around for a bit before leaving for other parts of Belize.

Orientation & Information

It's easy to find your way around Orange Walk Town. The Northern Hwy (known as Queen Victoria Ave while it passes through town) is the main thoroughfare. A recently built bypass now keeps the lumbering sugarcane trucks out of the town center, making the town considerably more peaceful than in years past. Central Park is in the center of town, on the



THE WAR OF THE CASTES COMES TO ORANGE WALK

Orange Walk Town was born as a logging camp in the 18th century, from where mahogany was floated down the New River to Corozal Bay. It began to develop as a town around 1850, when Mexican refugees from the War of the Castes arrived. These migrants, whose agricultural experience was welcomed by the British colonial authorities, started northern Belize's first sugar boom (which lasted from the 1850s to the 1870s).

The complex War of the Castes itself reached Orange Walk in 1872, when a force of some 150 Icaiché Maya attacked the town's British garrison. After several hours of fierce fighting the Icaiché were repelled, and their leader Marcos Canul was fatally wounded in the attack, which has gone down in history as the last significant armed Maya resistance in Belize. The Icaiché had been at odds with the British for several reasons, including encroachments by British loggers into lands that the Icaiché considered their own around the Rio Hondo (which today forms Belize's border with Mexico), and arms supplies from British Honduras to the Cruzob Maya (bitter enemies of the Icaiché).

east side of Queen Victoria Ave. Orange Walk lacks an official tourism information center, though hotels can provide local information.

Belize Bank (☎ 322-2019; 34 Main St; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Thu, 8am-4:30pm Fri) Accepts all major credit cards with BZ\$2 fee and BZ\$500 per day limit.

Cyberwalk Computers (☎ 322-3024; 115 Otró Benque; internet per hr BZ\$4; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Sat, 8am-5pm Sun) On the northern edge of town.

K&N Print Shop (☎ 322-0294; Queen Victoria Ave; internet per hr BZ\$4; ☎ 8am-noon, 2-5pm & 7-9pm Mon-Sat, 8am-5pm Sun) Downtown internet access.

Mary's Laundry (☎ 322-3454; Progreso St; washing per pound BZ\$1; ☎ 7am-5pm) Washes, dries and folds laundry, just like you wished mom would.

Northern Regional Hospital (☎ 322-2072; Northern Hwy; ☎ 24hr emergency services) At the north end of town, beside the Northern Hwy.

Police station (☎ 322-2022; Hospital Cres) Across from the library.

Post office (☎ 322-2345; cnr Queen Victoria Ave & Arthur St; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-4:30pm Mon-Thu, till 4pm Fri)

Scotia Bank (☎ 322-2194; cnr Park & Main Sts; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Thu, till 4:30pm Fri) Accepts all cards without fee; limit per day BZ\$800.

Sights

The modern **Banquitas House of Culture** (☎ 322-0517; Banquitas Plaza; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) has an attractively displayed exhibit on Orange Walk's history. It's especially good on the local Maya sites and has artifacts, maps and illustrations, as well as exhibits that change monthly. It's set in a pleasant, small, riverside park with an amphitheater.

The scant remains of two British forts in Orange Walk, Fort Cairnes and Fort Mundy, serve as reminders of the War of the Castes

conflict. A **flagpole** behind Orange Walk's town hall is the only remnant of Fort Cairnes, while **Independence Plaza** marks the site of Fort Mundy.

Close to Orange Walk Town, **Cuello** (*kway-yo*) is one of the earliest-known settled communities in the Maya world, probably dating back to around 2400 BC, although there's not very much left to show for it. The Maya of Cuello, a small farming community, were excellent potters and prolific farmers, and though archaeologists have found plenty here, only Structure 350, a nine-tiered pyramid, is of much interest to the non-expert. The pyramid was constructed around AD 200 to AD 300 but its lower levels date from before 2000 BC. The site is on private property owned by **Cuello Distillery** (☎ 320-9085; Yo Creek Rd), 2.5 miles west of Orange Walk (take San Antonio Rd out of town). The rum distillery, on the south side of the road, is unmarked except for a gate; the site is through and beyond it. The distillery is free to explore, but ask permission at the gate. A taxi to Cuello from Orange Walk costs about BZ\$25, roundtrip.

Meaning 'Great Mound' in Mayan, **Nohmul** (*noh-mool*) was, in its day, a much more important site than Cuello. In the late Classic Period this was a town of some 3000 people. The vast site covers more than 7 sq miles, though most of it is overgrown with grass and sugarcane. Although the ruins themselves aren't exactly spectacular, the view from the lofty acropolis of Structure 2 is; you can see clear across Orange Walk District, over endless fields of cane.

From the northern edge of Orange Walk, drive 9.6 miles north on the Northern Hwy to

the village of San Jose. At the north end of the village look for the sign directing you 1.3 miles west to Nohmul. The dirt road slightly forks twice – keep your eyes on the odometer and stay right; the actual site is not well marked. If you don't have a car, you can take a bus to San Jose, and walk the dirt road. A taxi from Orange Walk is about BZ\$30, roundtrip.

Tours

Sugarcane and street-tacos aside, the main reason travelers come to Orange Walk is to head out to the Maya ruins at Lamanai. We know of two reputable companies that do full day trips by riverboat there and back; both have guides who know their birds as well as their archaeology. They usually require a minimum of four people to make the trip, and you should reserve your place the day before, although you may be lucky on the morning you want to go. It's also feasible to take this tour on a long day trip from as far away as Belize City or Corozal.

One of the oldest ecotourism specialists is **Jungle River Tours** (☎ 302-2293; lamanai.mayatour@btl.net; 20 Lovers' Lane). Its Lamanai tour, which costs BZ\$90 per person, includes a buffet lunch and site admission. The Novelo brothers (of the same clan as the owners of the financially troubled Novelo's bus company) also do a variety of other tours from Orange Walk, including cave-tubing.

Offering similarly priced tours, **Reyes & Sons** (☎ 322-3327, 610-1548) also does river tours to Lamanai; Mr Reyes will also do a guided tour sans refreshments for BZ\$55. Reyes & Sons are not based right in Orange Walk Town (they keep their boat docked by the Northern Hwy bridge over the New River, 5 miles south of town), but they'll pick you up at your hotel with advanced notice.

Sleeping

Akihito Hotel (☎ 302-0185; 22 Queen Victoria Ave; d/tr with private bathroom BZ\$45/55; ☎ ☎) If you've never experienced the no-star ambiance of a low-budget hotel in China, comrades, here's your chance. This Chinese-owned (perhaps formerly Japanese-owned, judging by the name?) guesthouse has a similar feel to the thousands of hundred-yuan hotels from Guangzhou to Urumuqi. There's cheap Chinese food downstairs, too.

D'Victoria Hotel (☎ 322-2518; 40 Queen Victoria Ave; s/d/tr with fan BZ\$50/65/90, with air-con BZ\$80/92/115;

☎ ☎ ☎) The overall vibe of this medium-sized hotel is a bit drab, like a rust-belt Motel 6 that's seen better days. Rooms are clean, boxy and basic. There's cable TV, tiled private bathrooms with hot showers, and a backyard pool (empty on our last visit).

Lamanai Riverside Retreat (☎ 302-3955; Lamanai Alley; r BZ\$80; ☎ ☎ ☎) Located right on the river, the Lamanai has three wooden rooms, each with two beds, private bathroom and cable TV. Adjoining the retreat is one of Orange Walk's more picturesque eating and drinking spots (see p166), so the place can get a bit noisy in the evenings. The owner is involved in the cataloging and protection of the area's crocodile population, and will be glad to tell you all about the crocs and other animals that call the river home. Being right on the river, boats to Lamanai will pick you up here.

St Christopher's Hotel (☎ 322-2420; rowbze@btl.net; 10 Main St; r with fan/air-con BZ\$60/90, garden- or river-view with fan/air-con BZ\$70/100; ☎ ☎ ☎) This yellow-painted, well-run hotel offers large and clean rooms with private bathroom, tiled floors and cable TV. The newer, off-street, garden rooms are the nicest and quietest. You can embark right here for the boat trip to Lamanai.

Hotel de la Fuente (☎ 322-2290; www.hoteldela fuente.com; 14 Main St; s/d BZ\$55/120; ☎ ☎ ☎) Readers speak highly of this newly opened hotel in the heart of Orange Walk, and with good reason. The staff are friendly and helpful, and the rooms clean and cozy with comfy foam mattresses. All rooms come with air-con, free wireless, fridge and coffee maker. The cheapest room is a good deal, no less comfortable but fan-cooled only, and the most expensive one – the 'junior suite' – has a separate living room, full kitchenette with all utensils, and two beds. The latter is also rented monthly. Owners can arrange tours and point visitors in the right direction during their stay in Orange Walk.

Orchid Palm Inn (☎ 322-3947; www.orchidpalminn.com; 22 Queen Victoria Ave; s/d BZ\$60/130; ☎ ☎ ☎) Another new and clean little hotel in Orange Walk, it has the quaint feel of a small-town family-owned hotel (which it is). The Inn (winner of the coveted Belize Tourism Board's 2007 Small Hotel of the Year Award) has eight well-furnished and nicely decorated rooms that come in a variety of configurations, from one-bed singles to two-bed doubles with kitchenettes. The management provides free

wireless internet, fruit and coffee in the morning, and offers discounts for guests opting out of air-con.

Eating

Though a quick drive through town may not reveal it, Orange Walk is actually pretty good for eats. While there aren't many of what you'd call 'five-star eateries' in this working-class town, the place is known for its street food. Surrounding the town square are tiny cafés, snack stalls, fruit stands and pushcarts offering a veritable smorgasbord of northern Belizean and Mexican foods, including rice and beans, tacos, enchiladas, stewed chicken, ice cream and more. Everything is super cheap, between BZ\$1 and BZ\$5, and hygiene standards are generally pretty good. As for the food, put it this way: we have friends in Corozal who come to Orange Walk on Saturdays 'just to hang out and eat.'

our pick **Panificadora La Popular** (☎ 322-3229, Belize Rd; ☎ 6:30am-8pm Mon-Sat, 7:30am-noon & 3-6pm Sun) Should you find yourself in Orange Walk during daylight hours, *do not pass go, do not collect 200 dollars*; stop in at this amazing family-run bakery and get anything (and perhaps everything) chocolate on the shelves – the more gooey the better. Trust us on this one.

Juanita's (☎ 322-2677; 8 Santa Ana St; dishes BZ\$5-8; ☎ 6am-2pm & 6-9pm) You can tell by the dedicated locals who flock here that the food is satisfying. A simple, clean and very well-priced place, Juanita's serves eggs and bacon for breakfast, and rice and beans and other local favorites, such as cow-foot soup, during the rest of the day.

La Hacienda (☎ 302-3955, 322-0740; Northern Hwy; dishes BZ\$7-10; ☎ 11am-10pm Sun-Thru, 11am-midnight Fri & Sat) Travelers speak highly of this steak restaurant on the south end of town.

Come n' Dine Restaurant (☎ 302-3420; Belize Rd; BZ\$7-12; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner, closes at 10pm Fri & Sat) Located right next to the gas station on a crook on the Northern Hwy just a couple of miles south of town, this friendly restaurant serves up excellent stews, steaks & stir-fries. Stephanie Perry is one of the chefs at this fine place, and she's been cooking for missionaries around Belize for years. It serves some of the best Belizean food you'll find around.

OK Restaurant (☎ 322-1489; Queen Victoria Rd; mains BZ\$8-12; ☎ 10am-10pm, closes 3pm Tue) A place with a name that sets the bar at mediocre deserves

kudos for well exceeding expectations; this Chinese restaurant north of the park isn't merely 'OK', it's actually pretty darned good, serving up fine American-style Chinese dishes. There isn't much on the menu for vegetarians, but they'll happily make meat-free dishes on request.

Lee's Chinese Restaurant (☎ 322-2174; 11 San Antonio Rd; dishes BZ\$10-40; ☎ 11am-midnight) Another of Orange Walk's Chinese eateries, Lee's serves up a slightly superior range of Hong Kong-style dishes. The black bean crab is a good and spicy choice, as is anything with conch or lobster. Ambiance is somewhat more upscale, with a stylish dragon-theme decor kept cool by whirring ceiling fans. There's a bar with slot machines next door, owned by the same family, if you feel the need for some post-meal gambling.

Lamanai Riverside Retreat (☎ 302-3955; Lamanai Alley; mains BZ\$12-25; ☎ 8am-10pm) With its breezy deck and tables right by the river, you might expect more from this place. Though the menu is large and varied, meals are uninspired and overpriced. A nice place to hang out for the riverside view alone, but best to stick to drinks and appetizers.

Entertainment

Orange Walk is a town where farmers from all over northern Belize (including the area's sizable Mennonite population) come to swap tales, sell produce and eat Chinese food. If watching men in straw hats with Abe Lincoln beards lounging on the sidewalks isn't your idea of entertainment, there are a few other options. **La Tunnel Discothèque** (South Park St) is located just up from the office of Jungle Tours. The place is lively at night but dead in the day. And the Novelo brothers have a **club** right next to their Jungle Tours office where live music often plays (especially during political rallies). The bar at Lamanai Riverside Retreat is popular and usually fairly crowded on the weekends.

Getting There & Away

Orange Walk is the major northern Belize bus hub for buses plying the Corozal-Belize City route. At last count there were six companies servicing this route and between 25 and 30 buses a day going in each direction. All buses pass through the center of town before stopping on the west side of Central Park or around the market to pick up and drop

off customers. Buses heading north from Orange Walk begin at 7am and run until 9pm. Heading south to Belize City, buses begin at 5am and run until 8:45pm. The trip to Belize City takes between 1½ and two hours, and costs between BZ\$5 and BZ\$7; the trip to Corozal is slightly quicker and cheaper.

Buses to outlying regions depart from various points around the market (generally behind it), and schedules are subject to change. Your best bet for finding one of these buses is to go behind the market and look for a school bus bearing either the company name, destination name, or both. Heridia's buses depart for Copper Bank (BZ\$4, one hour, 11:30am and 5pm Monday to Saturday) from their **bus stop** half a block south of the market. Tillet's buses run out to Indian Church, less than a mile from Lamanai (BZ\$5, 1½ hours, 3:30pm Monday, Wednesday and Friday) from the **market bus stop**. Also from the market, Sarteneja buses go to Sarteneja (BZ\$5, 1½ hours, hourly from noon to 5pm Monday to Saturday). On Sunday, there's only one bus to Sarteneja (3pm).

LAMANAI

Perhaps the most fascinating Maya site in northern Belize, **Lamanai** (admission BZ\$10; ☎ 8am-5pm) lies 24 miles south of Orange Walk Town up the New River (or 36 miles by unpaved road). The ruins are known both for their impressive architecture and marvelous setting, surrounded by dense jungle overlooking the New River Lagoon. Most visitors approach Lamanai by guided river trip from Orange Walk not just to avoid the long and bumpy road, but to take advantage of the **river trip** itself, which goes deep into the home of the countless colorful and unusual birds that live in the area. Most guides who do the 1½-hour river trip are experts in both archaeology and the area's wildlife, making it an especially worthwhile experience. The river voyage passes through some of the most beautiful jungle and lagoon country in northern Belize, and the Mennonite community of **Shipyard**, before reaching Lamanai itself. There are a number of excellent tour guides in Orange Walk who specialize in the journey (see p165).

History

Lamanai not only spans all phases of ancient Maya civilization but also tells a tale of ongo-

ing Maya occupation and resistance for centuries after the Europeans arrived. This adds up to the longest known unbroken occupation in the Maya world. Lamanai was inhabited at least as early as 1500 BC, and was already a major ceremonial center, with large temples, in late Preclassic times.

It seems to have surged in importance (perhaps thanks to its location on trade routes between the Caribbean and the interior) around 200 or 100 BC, and its major buildings were mostly constructed between then and AD 700, although additions and changes went on up until at least the 15th century. At its peak it is estimated to have had a population of around 35,000.

When the Spanish invaded northern Belize from the Yucatán in 1544, one of the most important of the missions they set up was Lamanai, where they had found a thriving Maya community. But the Maya never readily accepted Spanish overlordship, and a rebellion in 1640 left the Lamanai mission burned and deserted. Maya continued to live here until the late 17th or 18th century when they were decimated by an epidemic, probably smallpox.

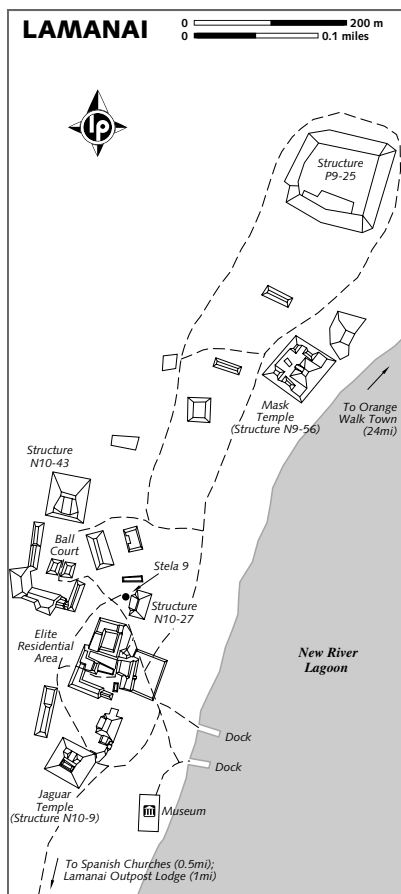
Archaeological excavations commenced as early as 1917, but large-scale digging, by David Pendergast of Canada's Royal Ontario Museum, only began in 1974. The painstaking work of uncovering more than 700 structures found here will take several lifetimes, not to mention huge amounts of funding.

Sights

Arriving at Lamanai by boat, you'll probably first be brought to the small **museum**, which exhibits some beautiful examples of pottery and obsidian and jade jewelry. Then you'll head into the jungle, passing gigantic guanacaste (tubroos), ceiba and ramón (breadnut) trees, strangler figs, allspice, epiphytes and examples of Belize's national flower, the black orchid. In the canopy overhead you might see (or hear) some of the resident howler monkeys. A tour of the **ruins** takes a minimum of 90 minutes, but can be done more comfortably in two or three hours, and encompasses a number of fascinating structures.

JAGUAR TEMPLE

This temple (Structure N10-9), fronting a 100yd-wide plaza, was built in the 6th century AD and modified several times up to at least the 15th century – a fine example of



the longevity of the Lamanai settlement. The stone patterning on the lowest-level turns depict two cleverly designed jaguar faces, dating from the initial 6th-century construction. On the opposite (north) side of the plaza is a set of buildings that were used as residences for Lamanai's royal elite.

STELA 9

North of the elite residential complex, this intricately carved standing stone in front of Structure N10-27 was erected in AD 625 to commemorate the accession of Lord Smoking Shell in AD 608. He is shown in ceremonial regalia, wearing a rattlesnake headdress with quetzal feathers at the back, and holding a double-headed serpent bar diagonally

across his body, with a deity emerging from the serpent's jaw at the top. The remains of five children – ranging in age from newborn to eight – were buried beneath the stela. Archaeologists believe the burial must have been highly significant, since offerings are not usually associated with the dedication of monuments.

BALL COURT

Not far west of Stela 9 is Lamanai's ball court, one of the smallest in the Maya world – but with the largest ball-court marker found yet! A ceremonial vessel containing liquid mercury, probably from Guatemala, was found beneath the marker.

STRUCTURE N10-43

North of the ball court, across a plaza shaded by trees, is Structure N10-43, the highest at Lamanai, which rises 125ft above the jungle canopy. Few large buildings in the Maya world were built as early as this one, which was initially constructed around 100 BC. This grand ceremonial temple was built from nothing on a site that had previously been residential, which indicated a dramatic surge in Lamanai's importance at the time. You can climb to its summit for fabulous panoramas over the rest of Lamanai, the New River Lagoon and plains and forests stretching out on all sides.

MASK TEMPLE

To the northeast along a jungle path, the Mask Temple (Structure N9-56) was begun around 200 BC and was modified several times up to AD 1300. It has a 13ft stylized mask of a man in a crocodile headdress emblazoned on the southern part of its west face. The name Lamanai meant Submerged Crocodile in the language of its ancient inhabitants, and this animal clearly had great significance for them.

Dating from about AD 400, this is one of the finest big masks in the Maya world and unusual in that it is made of limestone blocks rather than plaster. A similar mask is hidden beneath the façade on the northern side. Deep within this building archaeologists found the tombs of a man adorned with shell and jade jewelry, and a woman from almost the same date. The pair are thought to be a succession of leaders – perhaps a husband and wife, or brother and sister.

STRUCTURE P9-25

At the far north end of the Lamanai site, and often missed by tour groups, this large platform, 120yd by 100yd in area, supports several large buildings up to 92ft high. Next to it is a river inlet that once formed an ancient harbor.

COLONIAL STRUCTURES

Some 400yd south of Jaguar Temple are the remains of the thick stone walls of two Spanish churches, which were built from the remains of a temple by Maya forced labor. The southern church was built in 1544, and the northern one in the 1560s. Both were destroyed by the Maya, the second one in the 1640 rebellion. Unknown to the Spanish, the Maya placed sacred objects such as crocodile figurines inside the churches while building them.

A 300yd path opposite the churches leads to the partly overgrown remains of a 19th-century sugar mill.

Sleeping & Eating

Lamanai Outpost Lodge (☎ 223-3578, in US ☎ 888-733-7864; www.lamanai.com; 2-/3-/4-night package for 2 from BZ\$3000/4000/5000; 📍 🚗) For those who can afford it, the best option for fully exploring Lamanai is one of the package tours offered by this place. About 1 mile south of the ruins, this classy lodge is perched on a hillside just above the lagoon, and boasts panoramic views from its bar and gorgeous open-air dining room. The 20 thatched-roof bungalows, each with fan, private bathroom and verandah, are cozy and perfectly suited to the casual jungle atmosphere. Packages include meals, most drinks, transfers to/from Belize City and three guided, small-group activities per day. The list

of activities ranges from visiting the ruins to observing howler monkeys to starlight canoeing to nocturnal crocodile encounters. Birding is big here: almost 400 species have been documented within 3 miles of the lodge. Discovers are sometimes available online.

Getting There & Away

If you decide to go without a guide, you can get to Indian Church (next to Lamanai) from Orange Walk via Yo Creek and San Felipe via Tillet's Bus (p167). Returning to Orange Walk, you'll need to leave Indian Church at 4am.

RIO BRAVO CONSERVATION & MANAGEMENT AREA

If you're looking for true, wild tropical rainforest, this is it. Encompassing 406 sq miles in northwest Belize, the Rio Bravo Conservation & Management Area (RBCMA) takes up 4% of Belize's total land area. The area is managed by the Belizean nonprofit organization Programme for Belize (PFB; see below), and while independent trips are possible, PFB prefers travelers coordinate any visits to the area through them. The RBCMA harbors astonishing biological diversity – 392 bird species (more than two-thirds of Belize's total), 200 tree species, 70 mammal species, including all five of Belize's cats (jaguar, puma, ocelot, jaguarundi and margay). Rio Bravo is said to have the largest concentration of jaguars in Central America.

Parts of the territory of the RBCMA were logged for mahogany and other woods from the 18th century until the 1980s, but distance and inaccessibility helped to ensure the survival of the forest as a whole. The area also contains at least 60 Maya sites, including **La Milpa**. In the northwestern corner of the area

THE 4-1-1 ON THE PFB

The creed of ecotourism has always been to leave nothing but footprints (and light ones at that) and take away nothing but photos and memories. Established in 1988, **Programme for Belize** (PFB; Map pp96-7; ☎ 227-5616/1020; www.pfbelize.org; 1 Eyre St, Belize City; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) is a Belizean nonprofit organization that works with individual conservationists, private landowners and the Belizean government to demonstrate that the long-term benefits of land preservation outweigh the short-term profits of resource exploitation.

To this end, PFB has helped in the establishment of the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area. By planning your visit to Rio Bravo through PFB, you'll not only be assuring that your tourist dollars are redirected into conservation of the land; you'll be demonstrating the power that tourism has for promoting the change from resource exploitation to sustainable land use. PFB also offers a number of other programs, both for individual travelers and student groups. Contact the Belize City office for more information.

itself, La Milpa is the third-largest Maya site in Belize, believed to have had a population of 50,000 at its peak between AD 750 and AD 850. Its 5-acre Great Plaza, one of the biggest of all Maya plazas, is surrounded by four pyramids up to 80ft high.

At the RBCMA the PFB seeks to link conservation with the development of sustainable land uses. Programs include tree nurseries, extraction of nontimber products such as chicle, thatch and palm, experimental operations in sustainable timber extraction, and ecotourism. The thousands of visitors annually include many Belizean and international students.

History

Maya lived in this area as early as 800 BC. When Spanish expeditions first journeyed here the Maya were still using the same river trade routes, though by then their population was seriously depleted. Mahogany loggers moved into the area by the mid-18th century but were subject to intermittent attacks by the Maya for at least a century. By the late 19th century the Belize Estate and Produce Company (BEC) owned almost all of the land in northwestern Belize. The company carried out major timber extractions, floating mahogany and Mexican cedar out through the river system to the coast.

With the advent of rail systems and logging trucks, operations flourished until overcutting and a moody market finally prompted the BEC to stop cutting trees in the early 1980s.

Intensive chicle tapping also took place throughout the 20th century, and you can still see slash scars on sapodilla trees throughout the RBCMA.

Belizean businessman Barry Bowen, owner of the Belikin brewery and the country's Coca-Cola distribution rights, bought the BEC and its nearly 1100 sq miles of land in 1982. He quickly sold off massive chunks to Yalbac Ranch (owned by a Texan cattle farmer) and Coca-Cola Foods. Meanwhile the Massachusetts Audubon Society was looking for a reserve for migrating birds. Coca-Cola donated 66 sq miles to support the initiative (a further 86 sq miles followed in 1992), and Programme for Belize was created to manage the land. Bowen also donated some land, and PFB, helped by more than US\$2 million raised by the UK-based World Land Trust, bought the rest, bringing its total up to today's 406 sq miles.

Sleeping & Eating

It's a long trek out here, so most visitors stay overnight at one of the two field stations. **Hill Bank Field Station** (dm/cabana per person

incl meals BZ\$200/230; (P) is in the southeastern part of the RBCMA beside the New River Lagoon (upstream from Lamanai), on the site of an abandoned logging station where old wooden buildings and antique steam engines remain. **La Milpa Field Station** (dm/cabana per person incl meals BZ\$200/230; (P) is in the northwest of the RBCMA, 3 miles from La Milpa Maya site. The birding at La Milpa is exceptional, and spider and howler monkeys, coatimundi, peccaries and agoutis (as well as jaguar and ocelot tracks) are all commonly seen in the area.

Visiting arrangements for either place must be made in advance through the PFB. The stations' lovely thatched cabanas come complete with private bathroom, hot water, fresh linens, verandah and mosquito nets. The four-person dorm rooms incorporate eco-technology such as solar power and graywater recycling. There are plenty of hammocks in which to lie back and listen to birdsong.

The prices include all meals and two guided tours of your choice from the selection on offer: trail hikes, early morning bird walks, a visit to La Milpa archaeological site (from La Milpa Field Station), canoeing or nighttime crocodile-spotlighting at Hill Bank. At an extra cost you can visit nearby communities or Lamanai from La Milpa Field Station, or

take a lagoon boat tour from Hill Bank Field Station. There are also opportunities to meet visiting researchers and archaeologists.

Getting There & Away

Most visitors rent a vehicle to get to either field station: it's about a three-hour drive from Belize City to La Milpa (via Orange Walk, Yo Creek, San Felipe, Blue Creek and Tres Leguas), or two hours to Hill Bank (via Burrell Boom, Bermudian Landing and Rancho Dolores). Call Programme For Belize for detailed directions and advice on road conditions (the later stages of both trips involve sections on unpaved roads, which can be impassable after heavy rains). PFB can also help arrange transit for you from Belize City to La Milpa or Hill Bank.

CHAN CHICH LODGE

One of Belize's original ecolodges, **Chan Chich Lodge** (☎/fax 223-4419, in US ☎ 800-343-8009; www.chanchich.com; cabanas from BZ\$470, package deals available; (P) (Q) (R)) is located in the remote far west of Orange Walk District. Distance makes Chan Chich something of a destination in and of itself; many Chan Chich visitors come here via charter flight from Belize City and spend the whole of their Belize visit right here. The

KNOW THY MENNONITES *Christopher Nesbitt*

Visitors to Belize rarely fail to notice the abundance of one particularly interesting group of people. You'll see them all over, groups of Caucasians in this primarily non-Caucasian nation. Some will be dressed in quaint mid-19th century outfits, the women wearing head coverings and the men driving horses and buggies. Others may look more like extras in a country and western video. Sometimes entire families seem to be wearing clothes made from the same roll of cloth.

These are the Mennonites, an Anabaptist group with similar religious leanings to the Amish. Arriving in Belize in the 1950s, after fleeing persecution in Paraguay and Mexico, the Mennonites found in Belize a nation more than willing to give them refuge. Since then, these Mennonites have become a central part of the economy, producing much of the food eaten in Belize.

Belize is home to about 4000 Mennonites, with Mennonite communities spread throughout the nation. The largest of these are in Orange Walk and Cayo Districts, but there are also smaller communities at Springfield near Belmopan and at Pinehill in Toledo District.

Though to the outsider they may seem to be cut of the same cloth, there are in fact a number of different schools of thought among Belize's Mennonite communities. The main dividing line in the Mennonite community is between the Old Order Mennonites and the Progressive Mennonites. Old Order Mennonites drive horses and buggies. The men wear broad-brimmed hats, suspenders, long sleeved shirts and beards; and the women wear very dour clothes, completely covering the body except for the face and hands. They are isolationist communities, engaged in agriculture using horses and buggies, and coming out to engage in business with the rest of Belize. They live lives that seem timeless. With their quaint manner of dressing, and their rejection of modern conveniences, including electricity and internal combustion engines, their communities resemble the set of *Little House on the Prairie*, only with palm trees. In general, they are respected and

admired as very hard workers by most Belizeans, despite the fact (or perhaps because of it) that they religiously refuse to take part in Belizean politics.

Progressive Mennonites tend to wear overalls and plastic cowboy hats. The women still dress modestly, but not as severely as the Old Order Mennonites. They are involved in broad-acres agriculture, growing soybean and corn, working in construction and business, and are more fully integrated into the rest of Belize (though they still shun politics). Because these progressive Mennonites use modern farm equipment, drive, and don't share their more conservative brethren's aversion to mechanization, they're sometimes known locally as 'Mecha-nites.' Their communities, with their large, spread-out farms, auto parts and farm equipment dealerships, closely resemble parts of Iowa, only with palm trees.

Another group of Belizean Mennonites are those who immigrated more recently from the USA and Canada. Less conservative, but more scripturally observant than the Progressive Mennonites, this is the only group who engage actively in both proselytizing and the affairs of the non-Mennonite community. These more modern Mennonites live in communities that are not primarily Mennonite, and engage in mechanical work and agrochemical sales. Most Mennonites of this sect are based in Toledo District. One member of this community, Mr Laban Kroppf, runs a great bakery in St Margaret's village on the Hummingbird Hwy that ships cookies and pastries throughout the country.

Certain beliefs are central to all Mennonites, most notably simplicity in dress, modesty in behavior, and pacifism. Despite their small numbers, the Mennonites are a large part of the Belizean economy, providing foods, goods and services, helping to make Belize the country it is.

Christopher Nesbitt is an organic farmer who operates the Maya Mountain Research Farm in Toledo District (p253).

setting is picture perfect for a jungle lodge. Thatched cabanas – each with bathroom, fan, two queen-size beds and a wraparound verandah – share space with partly excavated ruins of an ancient Maya plaza. Its distance from anywhere deters drop-ins, and the limited number of cabanas (not to mention the price) keeps it uncrowded and helps maintain the feeling that you're really in the middle of nowhere.

Chan Chich lies within a private reserve of over 200 sq miles known as the Gallon Jug Parcel, maintained by Belizean businessman Barry Bowen after his purchase of the BEC's lands in the 1980s (see p170). Intensive agriculture is practiced in a small part of the reserve, but the rest is subject to strict conservation. The lodge offers guided walks, vehicle tours and other activities throughout the day (and some at night), and 9 miles of trails invite independent exploration. One tour goes to Gallon Jug, the center of the reserve's very orderly agricultural operations. Crops grown here include corn, soybean, cacao and organic coffee bean, and another program aims to raise the quality of local beef using embryo transfer technology from English Herefords.

The lodge is about 25 miles south of La Milpa Field Station (see p171) and 4 miles from the Guatemalan border. It's most easily reached by chartered plane from Belize City (about BZ\$500 per person roundtrip). Some make the drive from Belize City via Orange Walk Town (four hours, 130 miles), though the 73 miles from Orange Walk to the lodge are mostly unpaved. Reliable sources tell of a much shorter – and reasonably smooth – road reaching from Yalbac (10 miles north of the Western Hwy) to Gallon Jug, but said road has yet to appear on any map. If this road exists, it would cut travel time considerably. In any event, Chan Chich management will be glad to help arrange details of your voyage from start to finish.

COROZAL DISTRICT

Peaceful and secluded, Corozal is Belize's northernmost district. Its proximity to Mexico gives it a certain Spanish charm, while its distance from the rest of the country keeps it well off the beaten tourist track. More compact (by far) than Orange Walk District, most of the sights of Corozal District are well within strik-

ing distance – by boat or road – of Corozal Town itself.

The chunk of land that spreads south and eastward across the bay from Corozal Town is at once one of the least-visited and most visit-worthy spots in Belize. Though topographically not as dramatic as the west or the south (most of northern Belize is fairly flat), this part of the country is sparsely populated and filled with lovely jungle, not to mention the cool seaside town of Sarteneja and the amazing coastal Maya ruins at Cerros.

COROZAL TOWN

pop 9100

South of Mexico by 9 miles and 29 miles north of Orange Walk Town, Corozal Town has a vibe different from any other town in Belize. For one thing, though it feels prosperous (especially by Belizean standards), most of the town's wealth comes from its position as a commercial and farming center, not tourism. So while Corozal is a fine place to be a tourist, it escapes that 'tourist plantation' vibe that haunts so many other places in Belize.

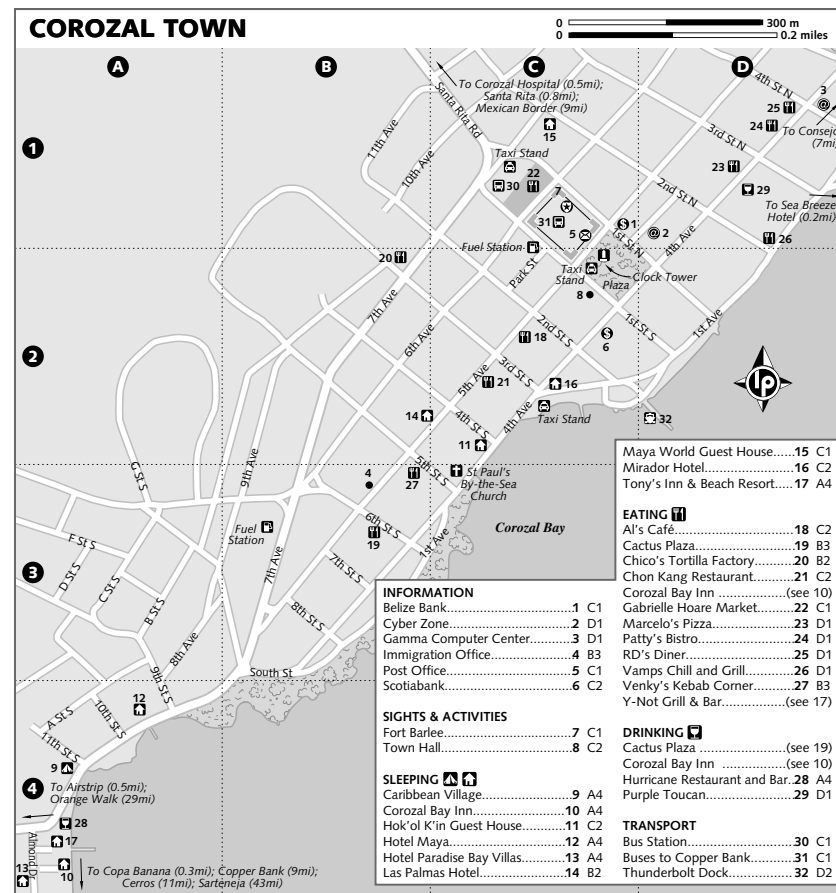
With ocean breezes, a selection of budget and midrange hotels, good food and easy access to all of northern Belize, Corozal is a good place to spend a few days either on the way to or from Mexico. The whole town is situated on Corozal Bay, and the waterfront is filled with parks, picnic tables, and beachside *palapas* (thatched-roof, open-air huts). Though the water is clearer on the other side of the bay (thanks to prevailing tides and a river bringing silt from western farmland), this side of the bay is fine for swimming as well.

History

The ruins of the Postclassic Maya trading center, now called Santa Rita (probably the original Chetumal), lie beneath parts of modern Corozal. Across the bay, Cerros was a substantial coastal trade center in the Preclassic Period.

Modern Corozal dates from 1849, when it was founded by Mexicans fleeing the War of the Castes. The refugees named their town Corozal after the Spanish word for cohune palm, a strong symbol of fertility.

For years Corozal had the look of a typical Mexican town, with thatched-roof homes. Then Hurricane Janet roared through in 1955 and blew away many of the buildings. Much



of Corozal's wood-and-concrete architecture dates from the late 1950s.

Like Orange Walk, the Corozal economy is based on sugarcane farming (though there's also quite a bit of trade with nearby Chetumal in Mexico as well). A large sugar refinery operated at Libertad, a few miles south of Corozal, from 1935 to 1985, but today all of Belize's cane is processed at Tower Hill near Orange Walk.

Orientation & Information

Corozal is arranged around a town square (encompassing the plaza, post office and bus station). The main highway passes through town as Santa Rita Rd and 7th Ave, briefly skirting the sea at the south end of town.

Belize Bank (☎ 422-2087; cnr 5th Ave & 1st St N; 8am-1pm Mon-Thu, 8am-4:30pm Fri) Situated on the plaza; ATM accepts all international credit cards, with BZ\$500 limit and BZ\$2 fee.

Corozal.com (www.corozal.com) Lots of links to local businesses.

Corozal Hospital (☎ 422-2076) This hospital is located northwest of the center of town on the way to Chetumal (Mexico).

Cyber Zone (☎ 602-6255; N Park St; internet per hr BZ\$4; 9am-9pm) Good internet service.

Gamma Computer Center (☎ 442-0225; 22 4th Ave; internet per hr BZ\$4; 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9:30am-1:00pm Sun) Internet & computer supplies.

Immigration Office (5th Ave, 8:30am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri) Provides 30-day visa extensions for most nationalities.

Post office (☎ 422-2462; 5th Ave; 🕒 8:30am-noon & 1-4:30pm Mon-Thu, till 4pm Fri) On the site of Fort Barlee, facing the plaza.

Scotiabank (☎ 422-2046; 4th Ave; 🕒 8:30am-2:30pm Mon-Thu, 8:30am-4pm Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Currency exchange and cash advances; ATM accepts all international cards with BZ\$800 daily limit and no fee.

Sights

ARCHITECTURE

If you enjoy looking at interesting architecture, then you'll want to spend a few hours walking around Corozal, as the town has a number of beautiful homes (in various states, from crumbling to fully restored) with a lovely Spanish Colonial feel. The coastal walk itself offers several fine examples of old Belize (not to be confused with Old Belize, p112), such as Corozal's old **market and customs house**, built in 1886 and one of only 11 buildings spared by Hurricane Janet. This building was once the town's museum but, alas, is currently vacant. There are a few dozen other lovely homes along the waterfront, and many more scattered throughout town.

Preceding the customs house is (what's left of) **Fort Barlee**, built by Caste War refugees in 1849, for protection from attacks by hostile Maya. Remains of the brick corner turrets are still visible on the fort site.

TOWN HALL

A colorful and graphic mural depicting Corozal's history by Belizean-Mexican artist Manuel Villamor Reyes enlivens the lobby of the **town hall** (☎ 422-2072; 1st St S; admission free; 🕒 9am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Sat), which faces the plaza. Episodes depicted in the mural include the War of the Castes, with the talking cross and the fall of Bacalar; the flight of refugees into British Honduras; the founding of Corozal; and Hurricane Janet.

SANTA RITA

These are the remains of an ancient coastal town that once occupied (give or take) the same strategic trading position as present-day Corozal Town, namely the spot between two rivers – the Rio Hondo (which now forms the Belize–Mexico border) and the New River (which enters Corozal Bay south of town, bringing with it much silt). Though at present much of Santa Rita remains unexcavated, the part that is restored is well worth the time you'll spend finding it.

To get to the restored **Maya temple** (admission free) of Santa Rita, head north on the main highway, about 1200yd from the bus station, then turn left at the Super Santa Rita store. Some 350yd past the store you'll find a wooded area on the right, and in the middle of this is the medium-sized and partially restored pyramid offering an amazing view of the surrounding town and bay. There's no visitors center, and you can pretty much visit whenever you want. If you can't find it, just ask a local where the ruins are; someone will tell you.

Tours

A popular destination for fishing enthusiasts and jungle explorers, Corozal is the base of operations to a number of good guides. If you're looking for plane tickets, contact Rosita at the Hotel Maya (see opposite).

Vitalino Reyes (☎ 602-8975; www.cavetubing.bz) is the man to meet if you're looking for a deeper understanding of the nature and culture of Belize. In addition to being a pioneer of cave-tubing (p219), Vitalino also leads tours to various Maya ruins including Cerros, Lamanai and Altun Ha, as well as taking visitors on jungle tours around Sarteneja. What makes Vitalino so unique is that he's constantly mingling the practical and historical aspects of local lore: one minute he'll be telling you about foraging techniques of the Ancient Maya, and the next he'll have you tasting jungle grasses, tree bark, and even termites (surprisingly refreshing, they taste like after-dinner mints). For a real treat, ask Vitalino to teach you about proper tarantula-handling techniques. Vitalino specializes in one- and two-day package tours combining popular Belize District destinations such as Tikal, Altun Ha and the Belize Zoo with cave-tubing expeditions. This is a great way to arrange group transit from Corozal to the Belize District, as Vitalino drives a large van.

The **Saldívar Brothers** (☎ 623-3920), Robert and Richard, specialize in nautical outings around Corozal. With their 40hp outboard motor, mahogany-outfitted skiff, they're well equipped to bring visitors around the coastal villages from Cerros to Sarteneja. The brothers are also expert fly fishermen, and lead fishing expeditions from Corozal Bay to the northern cays and reefs. Rates vary depending on time and distance, with the ballpark

figure for a full day going for BZ\$200 for a group of two or three.

Sleeping

CAMPING

Caribbean Village (☎ 422-2725; www.belizetransfers.com; 7th Ave, South End; camping per person BZ\$10, RVs BZ\$40) You can't miss this place; it's the plot of land right off the main road on the south end of town with all the RVs parked on it. Lot spaces include all connections (water, electricity, sewage); there's an additional charge of BZ\$10 for each person over two per rig. There's also a campground with toilets and cold showers. Internet is BZ\$5 per hour, and owners Henry and Joan Menzies are licensed travel agents who can help you book tickets throughout Central America.

BUDGET

Gurpick Sea Breeze Hotel (☎ 422-3051; 605-9341; www.theseabreezehotel.com; 23 1st Ave; r BZ\$35-55; 📶 📺 📺) Definitely our favorite budget hotel in all of Belize, the Sea Breeze is reminiscent of the kind of cheap and pleasant Key West hotel where Ernest Hemingway might have spent his last years. The hotel has 11 rooms, each with a queen-sized bed, desk and chair, and en suite with hot shower. The more expensive rooms have air-con, and all have cable TV and wireless internet. The feature that would have appealed most to Papa Hemingway might well have been the fully stocked bar on the second floor, complete with indoor and outdoor seating and a stunning view of Corozal Bay. Good food and strong coffee available on request.

Maya World Guest House (☎ 422-0191, 626-0131; byronchester@gmail.com; 16 2nd St North; s/d BZ\$45/53) An offbeat and artistically done guesthouse, Maya World consists of two houses and an enclosed courtyard. The front house is a restored two-story colonial home with a wraparound verandah complete with hammock; the one out back is a one-story building with four simple but functional rooms. The rooms in front are a bit brighter, but the ones in back have all been painted with scenes of splendor representing different places in Taiwan, the ancestral home of owner Chu Baoshan ('Byron'). All rooms have shared bathrooms with solar-heated showers. The garden in the center is at once fragrant and functional, containing herbs, vegetable plants, and a tall Neem tree, reputed to have many healing qualities. Guests have full run of the kitchen, and Byron will

cook you up some Taiwanese dishes if he has the time. Byron is also the proud owner of *The Loon*, Belize's only solar-powered speedboat. Ask him to take you on an eco-friendly tour of Corozal Bay!

Hotel Maya (☎ 422-2082; www.hotelmaya.net; 7th Ave, South End; s/d/tr/q BZ\$68/75/89/89, s/d/tr/q with air-con BZ\$89/100/100/126; 📶 📺) Run by the very friendly Rosita May, the Hotel Maya is a long-time budget favorite. Rooms are clean and enlivened by colorful bedspreads and paintings done by local artists. The attached restaurant serves a great breakfast, and lunch and dinner are available on request for groups. In addition to being a licensed travel agent, Rosita is also a great source of local information.

Hotel Paradise Bay Villas (☎ 422-0209; shannybelize@hotmail.com; 7 Almond Dr; villas BZ\$80; 📺) Run by a German named Hermann, this place offers fully furnished European-style apartments with two bedrooms, bathroom, living room, broadband internet and full kitchens. Honeymooners take note: master bedrooms have king-sized beds and mirrored ceilings.

MIDRANGE

Mirador Hotel (☎ 422-0189; www.mirador.bz; 4th Ave & 3rd St S; s/d/tr BZ\$70/90/110, s/d/tr with air-con BZ\$100/120/150; 📶 📺) A stately hotel resembling a miniature Belizean version of New York City's famed Flatiron Building, the 20 rooms of the four-story Mirador are all clean and nicely arranged, with hot shower and cable TV, and most with lovely ocean views. The rooftop patio is a sight to behold, offering hammocks, lounge chairs, and views clear out to Mexico.

Hok'ol K'in Guest House (☎ 422-3329; www.corozal.net; 89 4th Ave; r with fan BZ\$76-114, with air-con BZ\$92-135; 📶 📺) With a Maya name meaning 'rising sun,' this modern, well-run, small hotel overlooking the bay may well be the best value in town. The large, impeccably clean rooms are designed to catch sea breezes. Each has two double beds, a bathroom and a balcony with hammock. There's also a family suite available (BZ\$190) and a rather small economy room (BZ\$42). Hok'ol K'in also serves meals at reasonable prices (breakfasts are particularly good).

Las Palmas Hotel (☎ 422-0196, 602-5186; www.nestorshotel.com; 123 5th Ave S; s/d/q BZ\$90/100/150; 📶 📺 📺) Formerly known as Nestor's, this newly renovated hotel has rooms with a crisp, minimalist feel, with white stucco walls,

wooden furniture and a southwestern motif. The hotel has good security, though this does give it a bit of a gated community feel.

our pick **Corozal Bay Inn** (☎ 422-2691; www.corozalbayinn.com; Almond Dr; cabanas BZ\$120; 📞 📺 📺) Fronting the sea at the far south end of town, this relaxed, family-run place has cozy, tiled, mosquito-netted, air-con cabanas set around a broad sandy area. Each has a fridge, coffee maker, cable TV and hot shower. Hospitable staff, a good restaurant (see right), a social outdoor bar, good pool and informal atmosphere make this a hugely enjoyable place to stay.

Copa Banana (☎ 422-0284; www.copabanana.bz; 409 Bayshore Dr; r BZ\$120; 📞 📺 📺) The Copa Banana has five suites, which are more like full-service apartments, set in off the beach on the far southern end of Corozal. Each has clean and comfortable themed rooms (palms, beach, nautical etc), shared kitchen, washing machine, and dining and sitting areas. All are cable-TV and internet equipped. The owners offer weekly rates, free bicycles and free pickup from the bus station or the airstrip.

Tony's Inn & Beach Resort (☎ 422-2055; www.tonysinn.com; Almond Dr; r BZ\$164; 📞 📺 📺) Another of the southside Corozal resorts, Tony's has similar standards to the Corozal Bay Inn with a slightly more formal atmosphere. Uniform rooms are on two floors of a building surrounding a small garden, and have all the amenities you'd expect at this price range.

Eating

Travelers who are using Corozal as a way station before heading into Southern Belize may want to spend an extra day in Corozal just to eat some great food before heading out into the land of stew chicken and rice and beans. Check out the second floor of the **Gabrielle Hoare Market** (6th Ave; ☎ 6:30am-5:30pm Mon-Sat, till 3pm Sun) for cheap eats in a lovely setting.

BUDGET

Chico's Tortilla Factory (25 7th Ave; tortillas per dozen BZ\$1.25; ☎ 6am-5pm) Not a sit-down restaurant, but a fun place to go to watch flour tortillas being made; there's a small vegetable market outside where you can buy stuff to put in 'em for a meal on the cheap.

Vamps Chill & Grill (☎ 402-2141; ice cream BZ\$2-5; ☎ 10am-9pm Tue-Sun) This cute waterfront ice creamery has cones, banana splits, and other sundae-type stuff. A good place to bring the

kiddies to cool off and watch movies on the overhead TV.

Al's Café (☎ 422-3654; 5th Ave; snacks BZ\$1-2, mains BZ\$5-8; ☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Sat & 6-10pm Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat) A popular small sidewalk café, Al's does tasty Mexican snacks. Try the burritos with beans, chicken, cheese and very hot green sauce! No alcohol is served.

Romantic Restaurant (☎ 422 0013; cnr 4th Ave & 2nd St S; meals BZ\$6-10; ☎ 8am-midnight) Downstairs from the Mirador Hotel (p175), this big Chinese restaurant on the first floor is worth a visit should you get hungry for egg rolls or conch chowmei.

Marcelo's Pizza (☎ 422-3275; 25 4th Ave; pizzas BZ\$7-16; ☎ 8am-midnight; 📺) This pizzeria serves decent pizza, hamburgers, fried chicken and fish in small-town, fast-food joint ambiance.

Venky's Kabab Corner (☎ 402-0546; 5th St S; dishes BZ\$8-15; ☎ 10:30am-9:30pm) Chef Venky is the premier – and, as far as we know, the only – Hindu chef in Corozal, cooking excellent Indian meals, both meat and vegetarian. The place is not much to look at on the inside, but the food is excellent and filling. Two main dishes and a few sides easily serve three people.

MIDRANGE

Corozal Bay Inn (☎ 422-2691; Almond Dr; dishes BZ\$6-25; ☎ 7am-11:30pm) There's a wide variety of food on the menu here at the Inn's outdoor restaurant. Particularly good are the ceviche, garlic butter shrimp, and grilled steaks. Cheapest dishes tend to be Belizean standards such as stew chicken and rice and beans.

Cactus Plaza (☎ 422-0394; 6 6th St S; snacks BZ\$3-5, mains BZ\$8-20; ☎ 6pm-1am Wed-Sun) Cactus Plaza serves light Mexican meals from a building that looks like a cross between a Christmas tree and a Mexican fruitcake. There are tacos, *salbutes* and *panuchos* (fried corn tortillas with fillings), *caldos* (broths), as well as shrimp, sea-snail or mixed-seafood ceviches. There are also plenty of good drinks including *licuados con leche* (milkshakes) and fresh fruit juices. This place also has a disco from Friday to Sunday (see opposite).

Y-Not Grill & Bar (☎ 422-2055; Almond Dr; dishes BZ\$8-32; ☎ 11am-11pm or midnight) Well-prepared meat and seafood dishes served under a breezy thatch-roofed *palapa* right on the waterfront, with dockside seating stretching out into the bay. The bar offers a fine selection of not just booze-boat drinks, but virgin ones as well.

RD's Diner (☎ 422-3796; 25 4th Ave; meals from BZ\$10; ☎ 7:30am-9:30pm) Earth tones and high ceilings complement a menu offering a mix of Belizean, Mexican and straight-up continental fare such as burgers, salads and fried seafood. Service is a bit slow, and the coffee weak. The pastries are good, however.

Patty's Bistro (☎ 402-0174; 13 4th Ave; meals from BZ\$10; ☎ 7:30am-9:30pm) Another Corozal favorite, Patty's is best known for its conch soup (BZ\$12), a thick potato-based chowder with vegetables and chunks of conch meat that's a meal in itself. Patty's also has good Belizean and Mexican dishes.

Chon Kang Restaurant (☎ 422-0169; 32 5th Ave; dishes BZ\$10-30; ☎ 10:30am-11:30pm; 📺) Formerly known as Chon Saan Palace, this is considered one of the better Chinese eateries in town. Look for the Laughing Buddha statue at the door. There are also several other Chinese restaurants (Both Taiwanese and Cantonese run) scattered around town. Corozal's 'Chinatown' district is centered around Park St, one block north of 5th Ave and south of the central market (Gabrielle Hoare Market).

Drinking & Entertainment

Cactus Plaza (☎ 422-0394; 6 6th St S; ☎ 9pm-3am or 4am Fri-Sun) The disco at this unique-looking restaurant features a DJ on Saturday and karaoke on Friday and Sunday. Colorful low-relief murals demonstrate the same amusing taste as the building itself.

Corozal Bay Inn (☎ 422-2691; Almond Dr; ☎ 7am-late) With a fully stocked bar beneath a lovely enclosed and air-conditioned *palapa* offering outdoor ocean-front seating as well, the Corozal Bay Inn's bar is a very chilled spot in which to drink. An overhead disco ball and a full stage give rise to the notion that dancing and/or live entertainment may at times erupt. Food is also served well into the wee hours.

Hurricane Restaurant and Bar (South End; ☎ 4-11pm) A green beachside hut with outdoor seating, this newly opened place on the south end of town serves beer, booze and good bar grub.

Purple Toucan (☎ 422-2727; 52 4th Ave; ☎ 6pm-midnight) One of the more respectable bars in town, the Toucan has a pool table, dartboard and small backyard beer garden. Some food items are also available. Smaller items are good, but stay away from the steaks.

Shopping

Corozal isn't as flush with handicraft shops as most of the Garifuna-dominated southern Belizean towns. A cultural thing? Perhaps. Nonetheless, you won't want to leave without checking out the **Gabrielle Hoare Market** (6th Ave; ☎ 6:30am-5:30pm Mon-Sat, till 3pm Sun) where you'll find craftspeople selling handicrafts among stalls selling fruits, vegetables and fish. The 2nd floor has stores selling food and locally made clothing. In addition, many of Corozal's hotels have shops selling handicrafts. If you're really desperate for retail therapy, your best bet might well be a quick trip up to the 'Free Trade Zone' (see p178) on the Belize-Mexico border.

Getting There & Around

AIR

Tropic Air (☎ 422-0356; www.tropicair.com) and **Maya Island Air** (☎ 422-2333; www.mayaairways.com) both fly from Corozal to San Pedro (one-way/return BZ\$90/\$180, 25 minutes) and Belize City (via San Pedro; one-way/return BZ\$200/\$390, one hour) four or five times daily. Some flights stop at Sarteneja (BZ\$70, 10 minutes) en route. Corozal's airstrip (CZH) is about 1 mile south of the town center. Taxis (BZ\$10) meet incoming flights. Rosita at the Hotel Maya (p175) sells tickets for both airlines.

BOAT

Corozal is the natural jumping off point for trips to Cerros, Sarteneja and San Pedro. The largest water taxi service is **Thunderbolt** (☎ 422-0026, 226-2904), which runs regular skiffs with triple 250hp outboard motors and interior seating to Sarteneja (one-way/return BZ\$25/50, 30 minutes) and San Pedro (one-way/return BZ\$45/85, two hours) from its dock on 1st Ave. Call or stop by the dock for schedules. Boats leave from both sides (Corozal and San Pedro) at 7am and 3pm, and stop by Sarteneja from either direction. They'll also stop in Cerros if asked in advance. Your guesthouse should also be able to connect you with a guide and boat for group trips to either Cerros or Sarteneja.

One of the coolest – and definitely most environmentally friendly – ways you can get across the bay is by calling **Byron Chu** (☎ 422-0191, 626-0131; byronchuster@gmail.com), owner of both the Maya World Guest House (p175) and *The Loon*, Belize's only (to our knowledge) solar-powered boat. *The Loon* seats eight, runs silently, and gets across the bay in about twice

THE FREE TRADE ZONE?

Straddling the Belize–Mexico border at Santa Elena–Subteniente López, 9 miles north of Corozal Town, is a curious experiment in global capitalism going by the moniker ‘The Free Trade Zone.’ Though the name implies a kind of free-market free-for-all, with shops and stalls selling goods from both sides of the border at discounted rates to consumers from both sides of the border, the reality is, well...different. In practice, the Free Trade Zone resembles a shopping mall comprised of uninspired Wal-Mart clones and second-world duty-free shops, selling second-rate consumer goods from China, India and other export nations, and staffed partially by a combination of Belizean and Mexican workers. The last part, apparently, is where the notion of ‘free trade’ comes in (ie both Belizeans and Mexicans are free to work there). But not to shop, as Belizeans can’t just drive in, shop and go home (as can their Mexican counterparts) due to restrictive import regulations and duties on the Belizean side of the border. In essence, the Free Trade Zone is pretty much a bargain-basement shopping mall for consumers on the Mexican side of the border – one that Belizean customers can only utilize with some degree of bureaucratic wrangling.

Surely though, there must be something there for intrepid non-Belizean travelers heading into Belize? Perhaps hefty discounts on consumer goods that can be gifted to Belizean friends down the road, or at least the promise of a few cheap cases of Guinness to be stowed in the trunk of the rental car for later beachside consumption? Think again. The Free Trade Zone is not the Duty Free Zone, at least not as far as the Belizean side is concerned. All items bought within are subject to duty and tax, and any purchase of liquor or tobacco above the allowable limit will be confiscated.

About the only thing the Free Trade Zone is good for, at least from the traveler’s point of view, is this: according to one border guard on the Belizean side, leaving and returning via this crossing is a good way to renew your visa for 30 days for only BZ\$37.50 (the normal fee for exiting Belize by land) as opposed to the BZ\$50 it would cost you at the Immigration Office in Corozal.

the time (and at a fraction of the cost) of a gas-powered boat.

BUS

Corozal is a main stop for nearly all of the myriad bus lines that ply the Northern Hwy down to Belize City, all of which stop at the town’s main bus station. At last count, 30 buses daily were doing the 2½-hour run from Corozal Town to Belize City, from 3:45am until 7:30pm; in the other direction, a similar number do the 15-minute run to the Mexican border.

In Chetumal, Mexico, buses from Corozal stop at the Nuevo Mercado (New Market), about 0.75 miles north of the town center. A few continue to Chetumal’s inter-city bus station, a further 0.6 miles north, where buses leave for other destinations in Mexico. A taxi from the Nuevo Mercado to the bus station or town center is US\$1. From Chetumal to Corozal, buses leave from the north side of the Nuevo Mercado from about 4:30am to 6pm.

If you’re shooting straight through to Flores in Guatemala (eight to nine hours), the Línea Dorada (BZ\$40) and San Juan Travel

(BZ\$50) buses from Chetumal both stop at Corozal’s Hotel Maya (p175) at 7am – the hotel sells tickets.

Buses to Copper Bank (BZ\$2, 30 minutes) depart from behind the post office at 11am and 4pm Monday to Friday and 10:30am Saturday.

CERROS

This **Maya site** (Cerro Maya; admission BZ\$10; ☎ 8am–5pm) is the only major ruin in Belize that also sits on beachfront property. In late Preclassic times, Cerros’ proximity to the mouth of the New River gave it a key position on the trade route between the Yucatán coast and the Petén region.

The ruin is comprised of a series of temples built from about 50 BC. The temples are larger and more ornate than any others found in the area, and archaeologists believe Cerros may have been taken over by an outside power at this time, quite possibly Lamanai. Cerros flourished until about AD 150, after which it reverted rapidly to small, unimportant village status.

While the site is mostly a mass of grass-covered mounds, the center has been cleared

and consolidated. Climbing Structure 4 (a funerary temple more than 65ft high) offers stunning panoramic views of the ocean and Corozal Town just across the bay. Northwest of this, Structure 5 stands with its back to the sea. This was the first temple to be built and may have been the most important. Large stucco masks flanking its central staircase have been covered over by stone walls for their protection. Southwest of Structure 5, Structure 6 exhibits a ‘triadic’ arrangement (one main temple flanked by two lesser ones, all atop the same mound) that is also found in Preclassic buildings at Lamanai and El Mirador in the Petén.

Cerros is about 2.5 miles north of the village of Copper Bank, which is 8.5 miles from Corozal. All-weather roads run from Corozal to Copper Bank, punctuated by two rivers forded by hand-cranked cable ferry (see p180) and on to Cerros. Bus schedules to Copper Bank don’t permit day trips to Cerros, so most people visit on a guided tour from Corozal (typically costing BZ\$80 per person) or trek here from the Cerros Beach Inn (see below), just a couple of miles down the road.

Cerros can get buggy, especially during the rainy season; cover up and don’t skimp on the bug spray!

COPPER BANK

On the coast, a mile or so north of Copper Bank (and within striking distance of Cerros) sits our new favorite spot in northern Belize, **Cerros Beach Inn** (☎ 623-9530, 623-9763; cabanas d/q BZ\$80/120; ☎). What makes us love this place isn’t just its location, set as it is on the white-sand shore of the crystal blue side of Corozal Bay. Neither is it just the amenities: four beautiful, well-decorated thatched-roof cabanas

with fans, lovely beds, hot shower and sea-facing porch, on-site kayaks and fully wireless internet 24/7. Nor is it just the food (restaurant mains BZ\$8 to BZ\$20), prepared by the owner, a former pastry chef from Miami who makes not only the best ceviche we’ve ever had but also the most decadent chocolate cake. What makes us wish we could spend months here is a combination of all these things, plus one other factor: Cerros Beach Inn is (almost) totally ecologically sustainable (see the boxed text, p181). Come for the kayaking, cake and ceviche; stay for the low-carbon footprint.

For those without wheels of their own, getting to Copper Bank and Cerros is best done by boat. See opposite for information on buses from Corozal to Copper Bank, and p166 for buses from Orange Walk. Buses to both places leave from Copper Bank at 6:30am (Monday to Saturday) and 1:30pm (Monday to Friday).

SARTENEJA & AROUND

Sarteneja (sar-ten-eh-ha) is a fishing village near the northeast tip of the Belizean mainland, and a hidden gem for those looking for a beautiful and inexpensive place from which to explore both the nautical and jungle treasures of the region. The village spreads just a few blocks back from its long, grassy seafront, and it’s from this lovely seaside setting that visitors can head out to the Shipstern Nature Reserve and take birding, snorkeling, fishing and manatee-watching trips all along the fabulous coast of northern Belize. Of course, just chilling out in town is a good option. Sarteneja is also where you’ll find Backpacker’s Paradise (p180), a newly opened 27-acre jungle reserve that’s quickly becoming a destination for the young (and young at heart) looking for vacations off the beaten path.

GETTING TO MEXICO

The border crossing at Santa Elena (Belize) and Subteniente López (Mexico) is 9 miles north of Corozal and 7 miles west of Chetumal. If you are crossing from Mexico to Belize you will normally have to hand in your Mexican tourist card to Mexican immigration as you leave. If you plan to return to Mexico within the card’s period of validity you are entitled to keep it and reuse it for your return visit. Officials at this border may charge US\$10 to allow you to keep the card; this is still cheaper than the US\$20 you would have to pay for a new card on your return.

Travelers departing from Belize by land have to pay BZ\$37.50; this includes both the exit fee and a government-imposed conservation fee.

Bus travelers, heading in either direction, have to get off the bus and carry their luggage through customs.

Information

Tiny's Internet Cafe (☎ 660-2977; tino_bz@yahoo.com; internet per hour BZ\$8; 🕒 6am-8pm Mon-Fri, 6am-5pm Sat & Sun) With four computers, a printer/scanner combo, sandwiches, coffee and fresh pastry.

Sights

SHIPSTERN NATURE RESERVE

This large **nature reserve** (admission BZ\$10; 🕒 8am-5pm) has its headquarters 3.5 miles southwest of Sarteneja on the road to Orange Walk. The reserve protects 43 sq miles of semideciduous hardwood forests, wetlands and lagoons and coastal mangrove belts. Lying in a transition zone between Central America's tropical forests and a drier Yucatán-type ecosystem, its mosaic of habitats is rare in Belize.

All five of Belize's wild cats and a score of other mammals can be found here, and its 250 bird species include ospreys, roseate spoonbills, white ibis and a colony of 300 pairs of American woodstorks, one of this bird's few breeding colonies in Belize. The reserve is owned by a Belizean nonprofit organization, Shipstern Nature Reserve Belize, funded by the Swiss- and Dutch-based **International Tropical Conservation Foundation** (www.papiliorama.ch).

Admission allows access to both a **small museum** and **butterfly house** at the headquarters and a botanical trail. More exciting are tours using the reserve's safari-type vehicles. Charges for these are reasonable compared with many other 'ecotourism' operations in Belize, and can be split between up to eight people. The **Xo-Pol** area, 40 minutes from the headquarters, has a treetop hide overlooking a large forest-surrounded pond where you can hope to see crocodiles, waterfowl, peccaries, deer and, if you're lucky, a tapir. As always, you'll see most in the early morning. Any guesthouse in Sarteneja can help you arrange these longer tours, and the reserve staff will

transport up to eight people from Sarteneja for BZ\$10 roundtrip. Don't forget your long sleeves, pants and bug spray!

Sleeping & Eating

Sarteneja Village has a handful of small hotels, most of which also double as restaurants. There are also a couple of bakeries, grocery stores and bars scattered around the village.

Our pick **Backpacker's Paradise** (☎ 403-2051; www.cabanabelize.com; Sarteneja; camping BZ\$5, cabanas with shared/private bathroom BZ\$20/35) Peaceful, beautiful, affordable even by Central American standards, and run by some of the nicest folks you'd ever want to meet. Backpacker's is an idyllic 27-acre patch of unspoiled jungle and tropical farmland with camping, cabins and a great little restaurant. It's no surprise that all sorts of travelers (not just backpackers) are making the trek into northern Belize just to spend a few days here, walking on jungle trails, eating tropical fruit from the trees, swimming in the nearby ocean, or just lounging in hammocks in the screened-in communal spaces. The cabanas are screened-in huts with thatched roofs and king-sized beds. There's a communal kitchen, and owners Christian and Nathalie Genest (both excellent chefs) serve up a number of French and Belizean favorites. Horses and bicycles are available for rent, and there's plenty around Sarteneja to do, which helps make Backpacker's Paradise everything the name suggests and more.

Oasis Guesthouse (☎ 661-8631, 660-9621; Lagunita St; d BZ\$60; 📍) This new two-story guesthouse has four clean and comfortable double guestrooms with hot showers and TV. The rooftop patio offers a spectacular view of the bay and surrounding village.

Fernando's Seaside Guesthouse (☎ 423-2085; www.cybercaycaulker.com/sarteneja.html; N Front St; s/d BZ\$60/80) This small and colorful hotel has three rooms

CRANK YANKING

If you're driving or riding through the back bush of Corozal District from Corozal Town to Sarteneja, you'll wind up fording two rivers in a distinctly Belizean way – via hand-cranked ferries that run along thick cables strung from riverbank to riverbank. This throwback to the early days of industrialization owes its existence to the low traffic density plying the roads. With too few vehicles to make building a bridge feasible, the low-tech (and low impact) human-powered cable ferry was seen as a fine way to ensure that cars, bikes and motorcycles could get where they needed to go (even if only two at a time). The first is between Corozal and the town of Copper Bank, and the second on the way out of Copper Bank towards Sarteneja. They're slow, fun and, according to locals, run 24 hours a day. Best of all, they're free.

SUSTAINABLE FROM SCRATCH: BILL BELLERJEAU *Joshua Samuel Brown*

There's no shortage of resorts in Belize jumping on the ecotourism bandwagon by slapping 'Environmentally Friendly' onto brochures and business cards. In some cases, the heart is in the right place and the company makes (and keeps) promises to move from nonrenewable to sustainable energy practices.

Bill and Jenny Bellerjeau, owners of Cerros Beach Inn (p179), decided to go a different route. Instead of transforming an existing hotel, Bill built theirs from scratch, solar powered and completely off the grid. Lonely Planet spoke with Bill and found out how...and why:

How did you decide on this piece of land?

We started here two years ago, and there was no road, just bush. The first time my wife and I came here, we had to cut our way through the jungle with a machete. When we got to this patch of land by the beach, something told us that this was the place.

So three years ago there was nothing but jungle here, no pre-existing infrastructure to work with?

Just jungle. I stayed here for a year, building first our house and then the restaurant, living in a tent on the beach for the first two months. After that, I built the cabanas.

When it came time to decide on a power source, why did you go with solar?

There aren't any wires out here, so it was either that or burn diesel, and I felt that solar was cleaner, more sustainable. I'm also planning to incorporate wind power into the system in the near future.

What was the initial expense?

For the solar panels and batteries it cost around US\$16,000. We figure we'll have made it back after five years, judging by our average energy expenditure. I mean, we built this place to be very comfortable. We have 500 channels of cable TV, wireless internet, and the same conveniences of any other beachside hotel. We're a bit remote, but hardly spartan. To me, solar power is the best way to be both remote, energy independent, and totally comfortable.

Before opening up the Inn, did you consider yourself an environmentalist?

I've always cared about the environment, and I've been interested in solar power since I was a kid. Learning to set up a totally solar-powered system here was a necessity, which really made me jump into it with both feet. Now I'm a total believer. After two years, the solar system meets almost all of the Inn's needs. We're running cabanas, pumps, computers, stereos, a whole kitchen...all from solar power.

What parts of your operation aren't solar?

My showers are still heated by propane; I needed to set something up for hot water quickly, and solar water heaters work differently than photovoltaic (solar electricity) systems. But I'm planning to switch over to pure solar by the end of the year. I'll also be installing a 100% solar-powered Jacuzzi.

...which brings us to the subject of water. Where does yours come from?

We have two different systems: utility water for toilets and showers come from a solar-powered pump, and we also have rainwater stored in a water tank.

With so many places in Belize jumping on the 'eco-friendly' bandwagon, it's nice to see a place like Cerros Inn that's independent of the energy grid.

If I have my way, it always will be.

Innkeepers Bill and Jenny Bellerjeau are former professional chefs from the United States.

with two double beds, private bathrooms with hot showers and ceiling fans. The larger room has a thatched roof and tiled floor. Fernando can also help arrange snorkeling, fishing and other trips around the area, including to the Shipstern Nature Reserve.

Krisami's Bayview Lodge (☎ 423-2283; www.krisamis.com; N Front St; r BZ\$80; 📍 📞 📧) Next door to

Candelie's on the west end of the waterfront street, Krisami's has comfortable, good-sized rooms with big bathrooms, cable TV and large wooden beds. The Verde family that owns both Krisami's and Candelie's are caterers, so home-cooked meals (BZ\$10 to BZ\$12) are available on request; the family can also arrange tours and transport around the area.

Candelie's Sunset Cabanas (☎ 423-2005; candelies.cabanas@yahoo.com; N Front St; cabana with fan/air-con BZ\$80/120; (P) (♿) (🚻)) At the west end of the waterfront street, Candelie's has two comfortable cabanas, the air-con Wood Stork and fan-cooled Brown Pelican. Both are big and breezy, with two wooden queen-sized beds, huge showers, wireless internet and cable TV. There's also a dining room with an amazing mural depicting Sarteneja's history, and another room big enough to host workshops and meetings. Meals are available on request.

Getting There & Around

Sarteneja is 40 miles northeast of Orange Walk by a mostly unpaved all-weather road passing through the village of San Estevan and the scattered Mennonite community of Little Belize. Several buses per day run from Orange Walk, and at least one per day runs from Belize City. See p166 for information on buses from Orange Walk and p104 for buses from Belize City.

Tropic Air (☎ 422-0356; www.tropicair.com) flies at least twice daily to/from San Pedro (BZ\$80,

10 minutes) and Corozal (BZ\$70, 10 minutes). Other flights between San Pedro and Corozal may stop here on request.

The **Thunderbolt** (☎ 422-0026, 610-4475) ferry that does the San Pedro–Corozal run twice daily will stop in Sarteneja with advanced notice. The ride to Corozal takes 30 minutes and costs BZ\$30; to San Pedro you're looking at an hour and a half at sea and BZ\$50. Call for scheduling.

Five daily buses do the Sarteneja–Orange Walk run (BZ\$5, 1½ hours, hourly from noon to 5pm Monday to Saturday), returning the same day. On Sunday, there's only one bus from Sarteneja.

Drivers from Corozal Town can reach Sarteneja (43 miles) by taking the road toward Copper Bank but turning right 6 miles from Corozal at a junction signposted to Progreso and Sarteneja. This road meets the road from Orange Walk Town shortly before Little Belize.

You can rent good bicycles at Fernando's Seaside Guesthouse or Backpacker's Paradise for BZ\$4 per hour or BZ\$20 per day.