

Activity choices of first-time visitors to Belize

By Israel Manzanero, [Island Expeditions](#), and Tanja Warwick. Israel Manzanero, a senior tour guide at [Island Expeditions](#), provides local insight into marine-based activities enjoyed by different groups of first-time visitors to Belize.

Originally from inland San Ignacio, Israel has been leading marine-based tours in Belize for the last six years. His clients vary in terms of nationality and age, but they generally come from English-speaking countries, including the US, Canada, and the UK.



The Blue Hole is the most famous and internationally recognised attraction in Belize. Belize's Great Blue Hole has invited ocean-lovers to delve beneath the country's surface ever since it was made famous by French explorer Jacques Cousteau in 1971. Forty-seven years later, the giant sinkhole is still attracting noteworthy visitors, including Cousteau's grandson Fabien, along with billionaire Richard Branson. At the bottom of the giant sinkhole the duo found a conch graveyard, huge stalactites, and a lost GoPro complete with footage still intact. The intrigue of the mysterious Great Blue

Hole is still the initial draw for divers and adventurers. However, first-time visitors are pleasantly surprised to discover that there is more to Belize than this well-known dive site.

Why First-Time Visitors Go to Belize

The first-time visitors Israel Manzanero leads are initially attracted by the country's reputation for high quality kayaking, as seen in events such as Belize's annual Sea Challenge, a six-day, 200-mile sea kayaking race that spans the length of the country. Despite being their primary reason for travel, a glimpse of life beneath the surface is enough to make them forget all about kayaks. After sampling the snorkeling around Glover's Reef Atoll and Lighthouse Reef, clients often tell Israel that they can kayak anywhere else, but the caliber of snorkeling in Belize is beyond their expectations. On a typical snorkeling trip, visitors see loggerhead turtles, parrot fish, nurse sharks, and stingrays. Scuba diving remains a popular attraction as well.



The Best Time to Visit Belize

First-time visitors to Belize, especially families, are more likely to visit from December to February, as this is a popular period for winter vacations. However, repeat clients and couples are more likely to travel to Belize from March to May. These months are better weather-wise, especially when it comes to snorkeling. During November to February the water can be a little choppy and cold for snorkeling. In April, visitors can also see migratory birds such as warblers, thrushes, and sandpipers.

The holiday island of Caye Caulker



Best Activities for First-Time Travelers

The main activities booked by first-time visitors to Belize are a combination of marine and land-based tours. Top of the list is usually snorkeling and kayaking at either Glover's or Lighthouse Reef. For novice kayakers, hiring an expert tour guide can assist to build the client's confidence before taking to the open waters. Staying close to the reef initially allows beginners to practice in shallow waters with no current, so they become comfortable before tackling more challenging environments.

For land-based activities, Israel's clients like Belize's Mayan temples of Xunantunich or Lamanai. They enjoy climbing the remains at Xunantunich, whose largest structure offers views as far as Guatemala. Clients also cite the close proximity of Xunantunich to the town of San Ignacio as convenient, with San Ignacio then also used as a base for jungle treks and birdwatching.

The Mayan temples of Lamanai and Xunantunich are Belize's most popular land-based attractions. Lamanai, in the northern Orange Walk District, is an off the beaten track Mayan site that can only be accessed via a 26-mile scenic boat ride through the jungle. It is a popular excursion for those looking to escape the crowds. Even on a busy day at Lamanai, visitors are unlikely to see more than twenty tourists. For them, this is the appeal.

Wildlife lovers particularly love the journey to Lamanai. Wild monkeys board the boats to the temple and seek bananas from visitors. Nighttime crocodile safaris are also popular on the New River. Adventurous types of all ages love cave tubing in Belize, aside from elderly participants who are unaware of the amount of walking that is involved. Having noticed a recent rise in adventure tourists, birdwatchers, and conservationists, Israel predicts that new tours and activities will start catering to these markets soon.



Israel Manzanero is a senior guide at [Island Expeditions](#), which operate Belize tours from a marine basecamp on Half-Moon Caye. The article is written by Tanja Warwick in association with [Travel Belize](#).