

Belize Manatee Conservation

Enjoy the white sands, blue waters and relaxed Caribbean atmosphere of Belize while making a valuable contribution to the protection of this rare and elusive species and their under threat habitats.

Nestled in Central America on the Caribbean coast between Mexico and Guatemala, Belize lies at the centre of the Mesoamerican "biodiversity hotspot". Pristine subtropical forests provide a refuge for wildlife and conceal ancient Mayan ruins, whilst the warm clear waters of the Caribbean lap sandy Cayes offering access to the world's second longest barrier reef and a UNESCO World Heritage Site; renowned for its spectacular snorkelling and diving.

Infused throughout is the country's culture influenced by Belize's Afro-Caribbean roots, creating a fabulous laid-back atmosphere.

'No shoes, no shirt, no worries' is the infamous motto for the Cayes off the east coast of Belize. Throughout your volunteer experience you will have the opportunity to discover famous barrier reefs and marvel at an extraordinary array of colourful reef fish, sharks, rays, sea urchins, anemones, octopus, sea turtles and manatees, who feed on deep green sea grass beds, the worlds underwater grasslands. In your free time, you can also explore this exquisite, undisturbed underwater world as you learn to dive off the Cayes of Belize or dive the world renowned Blue Hole.

Your primary focus on this project will be surveying the population, behaviour and habitat of the West-Indian manatee. Manatees in Belize are listed as vulnerable by the IUCN red list and their numbers are declining rapidly. This species is at risk from habitat disturbance and degradation, pollution, climate change and increasing tourism. Whilst recording manatee sightings and behaviours, in relation to human disturbance and various environmental factors, you will explore, map and monitor vast seagrass beds for the benefit of the manatees and other species that rely on these habitats. You will also have the opportunity to survey and monitor coral reef habitats, populations of reef fish, commercially and ecologically important invertebrate species, and may even get the chance to monitor local shark populations.

Your days will be eventful; the work will be challenging, rewarding and fun. You will have the opportunity to make a valuable contribution to the conservation of this rare and elusive species, whose numbers are rapidly declining. Results from this study will be used to apply further protections to the manatee and the seagrass meadows that they rely on, and encourage restoration work within the seagrass meadows, without which, they will continue to decline. This work will also allow for awareness programmes to be created with local stakeholders and businesses, further protecting these vital populations.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- Snorkel in pristine ecosystems
- The chance to survey populations of rare and elusive manatees and their vital sea grass habitats
- Soak up the relaxed Caribbean atmosphere while take part in a long term marine monitoring and conservation project
- Make lifelong friends and return with incredible stories, photos and memories
- Gain PADI dive training and qualifications in your free time (extra cost applies)
- Opportunity to dive in some of the world's best dive sites (e.g. Blue Hole, Turneffe Atoll, Half Moon Caye, Lighthouse Reef, and many more)

Please note: the peak manatee season begins at the end of May and ends in October; sightings outside of this period are expected to be less frequent, but the vital work on the sea grass habitats continues year round

FAST FACTS

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|----------------------|--|
| Location | Belize |
| Activities | <p>Snorkelling regularly (weather permitting)</p> <p>Survey the abundance and behaviour of local manatee populations</p> <p>Explore, map and monitor vast seagrass beds</p> <p>Explore pristine coral reefs and their diverse array of fish and marine invertebrates, whilst assisting with surveying</p> <p>Opportunistic cetacean and shark sightings</p> <p>Work with local Belizean partners and conservation organisations</p> <p>Work with local schools on marine biology topics and beach cleans</p> <p>Contribute to the Cayes Management Plan and the overall Belize National Resource Management Agenda</p> |
| Transport | <p>Airport pickup and transfer to the project site is provided for free if you arrive on the 1st or 3rd Monday of the month.</p> <p>If you want to join the project at any other time, you can book an airport pick up and transfer from Frontier for an additional £120GBP.</p> |
| Accommodation | Beach camp at our research station on Caye Caulker |

WHAT DOES THE PROJECT DO?

Although Belize is distinguished from its neighbours in being the only country in the region with a British colonial heritage, it also has strong ties to Latin America, as well as to the Caribbean. With one foot firmly planted in lush interior forests and another foot in the laidback and colourful Caribbean Sea, Belize's animal and plant life are the stars of the country, thanks to conservation efforts from national and international bodies.

The Belizean government is now working with national management partners and international conservation and aid agencies to protect the county's invaluable biodiversity. As a partner, Frontier work alongside the Belizean Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries and Sustainable Development, with long term aims to protect and conserve key marine and terrestrial hotspots. This is achieved through local conservation awareness, scientific monitoring & research, community support programs and implementation of protected areas co-management plans, and Frontier volunteers are an integral part of this effort.

Record marine biodiversity

To aid decision making and implement protected area co-management plans that are designed to protect the countries important marine life, Frontier partners in Belize require baseline data on marine habitats and associated species, and long-term monitoring programmes to meet both national and international protocols. In order to protect specific species it is necessary to determine current population levels and monitor changes in that population, along with determining the driving

forces behind potential changes.

The West Indian manatee is reliant on marine seagrass habitats along the coast of Belize, however, key areas of this habitat are currently outside of designated marine protected areas. It is hoped that with data collected on the population and behaviour of this species and the health of its habitat, that we can extend protections to safeguard this species and many more who share its underwater world, whilst raising awareness within the local community of their ecology and conservation.

Through snorkel surveys you will assess the abundance and behaviour of the local manatee population whilst you explore, map and monitor vast seagrass beds. You will also have the opportunity to survey and monitor coral reef habitats, populations of reef fish, commercially and ecologically important invertebrate species, and may even get the chance to monitor local shark populations. Frontier uses standardised marine survey methodology, as well as incorporating vital local knowledge. Your results will be used to apply further protections to the manatee and the seagrass meadows that they rely on, and encourage restoration work within the seagrass meadows, without which, they will continue to decline.

Other activities include surveying mangroves, a vital buffer against storm surges caused by cyclones and an important part of the coastal ecosystem, opportunistic sightings of cetaceans, sharks and rays, beach clean ups, forest restoration work and monthly surveys of conch and lobster.

Belizean culture & communities

Working alongside the Belizean people will give you an insight into their colourful and laidback culture. Community work may include environmental education in local schools to explain Frontier's work, and interviewing local communities on their awareness and knowledge of the local marine reserves, particularly with regards to boundaries, zones and rules and the levels of involvement of local stakeholders in decision-making.

WHAT WILL I BE DOING?

Soak up the chilled out, Caribbean atmosphere of Belize whilst taking part in a long term and sustainable marine research and conservation programme. The Frontier Belize programme is run in association with the Belize Fisheries Department. This research and conservation project aims to provide the local communities, stakeholders and government bodies with the baseline biodiversity data they need to increase and implement management plans for the future protection of this pristine marine ecosystem. As many manatee feeding and breeding sites currently lie outside of marine protected areas, Frontier's data collection on the manatee and it's habitat will enable stakeholders and government bodies to make scientifically sound decisions on the conservation of this species and will help raise awareness among the local community on manatee ecology and conservation.

To gather the data needed you will undertake snorkel surveys using underwater line and belt transects, active searches and behavioural methodologies. Your activities will involve locating, mapping and monitoring the health of the extensive sea grass beds. You will survey population abundance and behaviour of the local manatees and will also get the opportunity to study reef fish and invertebrates, and may even get the chance to survey the local shark, ray and turtle populations.

Whilst snorkelling in this Caribbean underwater world, you'll also see an extraordinary array of animals, from colourful reef fish species to nudibranchs, sea cucumbers to cushion stars and spiny urchins to octopuses. By the end of your project you will be knowledgeable on manatee ecology and conservation, capable of identifying a wide range of colourful and patterned reef organisms and have developed your conservation skillset considerably. Although the work is intense and challenging, you'll get immense satisfaction from having made a valuable contribution to the conservation of this marine environment.

Volunteers who join the project for less than 4 weeks may not be able to participate in the full range of project activities and surveys, but will still be able to make a valuable contribution to the work. You will return home with an increased knowledge and awareness of marine ecosystems and their inhabitants, vast numbers of photos, lots of new friends, a wealth of fascinating stories and extraordinary memories, alongside knowing that your work has contributed to the conservation of the West Indian manatee and 1000's more species that call this marine environment their home.

You'll find your team to be a fun, dynamic mix of ages and experiences, with members who all share a passion for travelling in developing countries and conserving nature. The project staff will be a friendly and welcoming group who are highly experienced in their research field and many of whom will have been Frontier volunteers at an earlier stage in their career.

Sample Itinerary*

7:00 a.m. – Breakfast at the volunteer house, prepared by the volunteers!

8:30 a.m. – Volunteers leave camp by boat to either carry out snorkel surveys of manatees and sea grass habitats or undertake skills training (survey and ID techniques). Some training activities will take place on camp.

12:30 p.m. – Volunteers break for a packed lunch (lunch prepared by volunteers when at the project camp)

2:00 p.m. - Volunteer work at the project camp for the afternoon; beach clean-ups, camp duties and maintenance, skillset training and development, surveying sites close to camp and many other activities depending on the project focus at the time.

5:00 p.m. – The working day comes to an end. Volunteers are free to catch up on anything, plan for the next day's work and socialise.

6:00 p.m. – Dinner at the Volunteer house prepared by volunteers!

7:00 p.m. - Socialising... party on a Saturday!

**This itinerary should only be considered as an example of the kind of activities and timescales to expect. Actual itineraries may vary depending on the season and the requirements of the project.*

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I ARRIVE?

Volunteers arriving before 2pm (local time) on the first Monday of the month will be welcomed by a Frontier representative at Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport. From here it's a short minibus or taxi ride from the airport to Belize City where you will then transfer to the project site via water taxi and be introduced to the Frontier-Belize programme.

You will meet the staff, receive some initial briefings, including an introduction to the science programme and techniques used, as well as health and safety lectures, so make sure your medical kit is complete and start reading your safety and medical briefs.

At the end of your stay we will transfer those of you who are on the monthly program back to Belize City from the camp in time for you to head back home or continue on your independent travels. If you are joining for less than 4 weeks you will make your own arrangements to return to Belize City at the end of your stay, from where you can continue your own independent travel or return home.

Independent travellers arriving on dates other than the first Monday of the month can arrange a separate airport collection (extra cost; US\$204GBP) by contacting your volunteer coordinator.

WHERE WILL I BE STAYING?

During the project you'll live in the beach camp alongside other Frontier volunteers and staff. We aim to provide you with a unique and memorable living experience. The Frontier camp was constructed by Frontier volunteers working with local craftsmen, using traditional building techniques and locally sourced environment-friendly, building materials and tents. The camp which is situated in a clearing on the beach has been designed to blend harmoniously with the surrounding landscape. Camp life is very simple, unsophisticated and fun.

You will be staying in tents or locally built huts, your "shower" will be a jug or a bucket of water and you cook over an open campfire: so prepare for the basic, virtually footprint less, unencumbered lifestyle! On occasions you may have to journey further to reach a remote survey site, then you will stay in a "satellite camp"; basically a mosquito net pitched on a distant beach.

WHAT WILL I BE EATING?

Food on camp is simple and nutritious and consists largely of locally sourced fresh vegetables and fruit, rice, beans and noodles, all of which are purchased from nearby communities thereby helping to support the local economy. Luxuries such as chocolate, peanut butter and drinking chocolate are available in Belize City, so make sure you stock up before heading to your field camp or at nearby stalls accessible only by boat on weekends.

Part of your role on camp will be to help with the cooking. Creating spectacular meals over an open campfire or baking bread in the campfire oven will become second nature: so get your cookbooks out now and start thinking up recipes! Also, with luck you'll be invited to local feasts and festivals – a great way to engage with local communities and discover local cuisines and cultures.

COSTS

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|----------------|------------|
| 1 week | US\$ 1,445 |
| 2 weeks | US\$ 1,795 |
| 3 weeks | US\$ 2,145 |
| 4 weeks | US\$ 2,495 |
| 5 weeks | US\$ 2,995 |
| 6 weeks | US\$ 3,395 |
| 7 weeks | US\$ 3,745 |
| 8 weeks | US\$ 4,145 |
| 10 weeks | US\$ 4,895 |
| 20 weeks | US\$ 8,045 |
| Extra Week | US\$ 495 |
| Christmas Week | US\$ 445 |

PADI Open Water and Advanced Open Water training US\$1,232 PADI Advanced Open Water training US\$620 (at least PADI Advanced Open Water training necessary for marine surveying)

DEPARTURE DATES

First and third Monday of every month.

Alternative dates available on request, at an extra cost.

DURATION

You can join this project for a minimum of 1 week

CHRISTMAS OFFER

This project is available for the special price of US\$425 per week over the Christmas period. Placements starting on the 24th or 31st of December 2018 are eligible for this price, subject to availability. Please apply using the orange button below and then tell your volunteer advisor that you wish to take part over Christmas.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

Before you go

- Pre-departure support
- Travel & medical advice & documentation
- Equipment advice
- Discounted medical kit
- Free Frontier t-shirt
- UK residential briefing weekend including food, accommodation and training (extra cost applies)

In-country

- Food
- Accommodation
- Internal ground transfers & in-transit accommodation
- Local orientation
- Project training
- Project equipment & materials
- Dive training PADI Open water US\$620
- Dive training PADI Advanced open water US\$612
- Discounted further dive courses: PADI Emergency First Response (US\$221) and PADI Rescue Diver (US\$595)
- FREE use of Frontier dive kit including Regs, tanks, BCDs, weights, compressor (personal dive kit i.e. wet suit, fins, mask, snorkel etc not included)
- In-country emergency support
- 24-hour international HQ back-up

AIRPORT INFORMATION

Nearest airport(s): Belize City Goldson Intl Apt (BZE)

CONTACT INFORMATION

Call us on 020 7613 2422 (UK) / 1 949 336 8178 (US)

Mail us on info@frontier.ac.uk

Check out our social media here:

Project details were correct at the time this document was generated. Price, dates and other details are subject to change. Please see our website for current details for this project.