

Tips for an Exotic Belize Yacht Charter

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The Caribbean is one of the world's most well known and frequently visited sailing and yachting locations, whether you are participating in one of the many annual races or merely enjoying the winter cruising. It is particularly inviting because of its year round warm climate, crystal blue waters, relaxed environment, plethora of water related activities, and hundreds of beautiful islands. While Belize is actually a Central American country, it shares many of the traits that make the Caribbean a desirable vacation spot. Most noteworthy is the Belize Barrier Reef, the second largest reef in the world. However, Belize is the only Central American country without a Pacific Coast. It has some of the best marine features in the world, but if you are looking for a Pacific cruise, look elsewhere. For those of us that prefer the Atlantic and Caribbean, there is more than enough entertainment off the coast of Belize.

While Belize is considered a tropical climate that is warm year round, it is important to note that it can be prone to periods of bad weather. The rainy season lasts from June to November and hurricanes and floods are frequent natural hazards. There are a few other safety hazards that must be taken into consideration. Travelers must always be wary of traveling near the reef by boat due to the potential dangers of coral and shallow water. It is very important to travel the reef with someone that knows the area well.

The main ports through which travelers enter Belize are Belize City, Cay Caulker, Punta Gorda, and San Pedro on Ambergris Cay. It is advised to enter at ports that have their own facilities to avoid extra costs for officials to reach your boat in addition to customs fees. It is also important to note that, as in all countries, you must follow customs rules stringently. Please contact your charter company or broker for further information on customs laws. There are also many laws and regulations regarding hunting and fishing in Belize.

There are many protected areas and species that you must research before planning a trip to Belize. Yachts are usually chartered from within or near the Caribbean on a weekly or "term" basis, but day or weekend charters are also available. You can charter a yacht using the following crew criteria; "bareboat," "skippered," "captain and cook," or "fully crewed charter." Please be advised that bareboat charters should only be undertaken by experience "hands on" sailors and you may have to prove your qualifications. Some charter companies will still insist that you take a skippered yacht. Some experienced sailors require a skipper if they are unfamiliar with a certain area or if they merely wish to sit back and relax on their journey.

When choosing a yacht, it is obviously important to consider the type of yacht first, then size and crew type, followed by charter style, and equipment. Do you prefer the wide area exploration offered by a sail yacht or the speed of a motor yacht? Do you prefer the space and stability of a Catamaran, or the learning experience and flexibility of a monohull sailing vessel? Are you concerned with the cost or environmental impact of using large amounts of gas?

When considering costs you must weigh the values of the different services offered. The majority of vessels are chartered at a flat rate per day plus added expenses. Some skippers will cost you daily, as will gas, dockage fees, etc. Do you wish to try to bring your own food through customs, or have the charter company arrange meals for you? Are you going during the high season or low season? Will you have to pay airfare or luggage fees? What is the charter company's cancellation policy?

A knowledgeable yacht charter agent will manage most of these travel arrangements and walk you through the decision making process, but being a well informed client will only enhance your ability to articulate your preferences and avoid expensive surprises. When all of these things are considered, great planning will contribute to a wonderful and stress free Belize Yacht Charter.