

## **Belize, a country blessed by nature**

Local people kindly hailed me as I was entering the bus station of Corozal, a small city in Belize located 25 km south of border with Mexico. The simple smiles of the people standing in the station transmitted me a sense of wellbeing and seemed to tell me welcome to the magic land, even though their country was not developed. But the simplicity made them happy, perhaps they achieved a balance on lifestyle. Their eyes seemed to say: *“People living in developed country do not understand us, they think to live in the best world, and that we are desperate, but we enjoy the life and what it offers every day and try to transmit love”*. Step by step and kilometre after kilometre, I had the chance to learn more and more the meaning of those words.

After a short wait, I took the bus to Belize City, sitting beside a young girl who told me about her life and her country. She was very proud to speak about the story and current situation of Belize. She showed me from the window specific features which sum up Belize. *“Those are Factories for producing sugar, and these the lorries which transport the cane for producing the sugar”*. *“Try this typical Belize food, made of cheese”*, she offered me a piece of her food bought before taking the bus. *“I would like that you taste as far as possible our traditional food, I have enough for me”*.

A green landscape accompanied our journey, sometimes it appeared small villages composed of 4, or 5 wooden houses which recalled me the countryside in Estonia, European Union.

As soon as I got off at Orange Walk Town for a short break, local people were selling their agricultural products to passengers without bother anyone and Sandie went to buy a typical food called Tamales, which was served wrapped in a banana leaf. *“Try it”*, I bought it for you, *“it is another traditional Belize food made of masa and meat which differs from that served in Latin American countries.”* I got talking to her until the bus reached Belize City, whose waters of the river and the sea warmly welcome visitors. The low and small houses and buildings made of wood harmoniously fit with the colours of the sea, of the sky, and the landscape around. On both sides of the river traditional and coloured sailing boats stand side by side. While I was walking around the city, I could admire an exposition of artistic works representing various moments of the life, both negative, and positive. This exposition demonstrates the attention of the population for sensitive topics of the life like racism, empty promises.

I finished my visit of Belize City to the departure of speed boats to Caye Calkuler. My time spent in this city by the sea was delighted and I could take advantage of the relaxed atmosphere for walking around the streets by the Belize City Council and Supreme Court of Belize without problem, and no one who could bother me. The wooden buildings of this area well attune and integrate with the surrounding landscape and contribute to create an original atmosphere.

The boat gently left the city along the calm waters of the river, passing by various sailing boats and once reached the open sea a magnificence view of Belize City appeared before me.

After navigating Caribbean waters for one hour and passing by various small islands, I reached Caye Calkuler, a small island without cars where the life seems stepped back. In this *“Go Slow Island”*, as inhabitants used to call it, the kindness of the population and the beautiful and relaxed atmosphere welcome you in a magic place. The island maintains its traditions and beauty, even during feasts where it becomes densely populated and people dance and sing most of the day. Everything here is genuine and natural, there is no rush, stress and islanders invite you to enshroud and enjoy their way of life. If someone stops and talks to you, answer and talk to him/her, nobody will hurt or bother you.

*“I left my job as a manager in the mainland and decided to live and work here as an assistant for people who want to enjoy the sun and swim in these marvellous waters. I know it is a very different job, but here I can really enjoy my life”*. I do not want to spend my life locked up in an office for 8 or 9 hours per day”, told me a local girl as I was talking to her about the life in the island. There are

people like this girl who decide to have this lifestyle. I am sure that if you asked to someone in this island, “*would you like to work and live in one of the developed western countries?*” she would answer you: “*no thank you, I prefer this simple and “slow” life.*”

Caye Calkuler is a place with the different faces, all of them with a common scope and way of life, go slow!

In this island one can enjoy various activities such as boat excursions to the coral reef, to the Blue Hole, as well as three/five-day sailing boat excursion around small islands, or simply enjoy the island and its population. I recommend a sailing boat excursion to the barrier reef in front of San Pedro, about more than hour from Caye Calkuler, where live Nurse Sharks, a quite shy shark specie which swim alongside you without doing anything, some turtles and other small different coloured fishes. Sailing these waters is amazing, no noise of the engine, just the sound of the waves that kindly lapping up on the boat.

The most beautiful corals for me are in Lighthouse Reef, two hours by speed boat from Caye Calkuler, where an incredible marine life, the famous Blue Hole and Half Moon island surprise you with magic moments. Once arrived in the middle of the Blue Hole, I had an incredible sense of stunning beauty and experienced original sensation like never before. Outside the hole one may have a clear overview of this magnificence place and be enchanted by what the nature can do.

The different colours of the calm water accompanied me to the Half Moon Caye, where beautiful palms, white sand, sharks which gently swim closed to the shore dream of an earthly paradise.

In Belize there are different islands, such as Half Moon Caye, where one may sleep in a tent and enjoy, experience the unspoilt nature of these charming landscapes for several days. There are keepers who control the island, the place is accordingly safe, and people may use a kitchen for cooking and a toilet for washing and other services. If you are interested in spending the night there surrounded by a beautiful sea, sail to Half Moon Caye, sleep there in a tent, enjoy the beautiful sea, the unspoilt nature and then come back. There are few people in this island, most of them stay there 1 or 2 hours and come for diving or snorkel around. On the way back to Caye Calkuler the boat stopped before Long Caye in the same Lighthouse Reef atoll, where corals and uncountable coloured fishes welcome you in the water.

Caye Calkuler is a beautiful island which stands out San Pedro for its simplicity, original atmosphere, and unspoilt environment. I come back to Belize City after a short stop of 2 days in San Pedro. The city of San Pedro has crystal clear waters, but full of golf cars which go around the town making a huge noise. This city does not express the soul of Belize and one cannot experience the joy, kindness of the population. I recommend a visit to Secret Beach, about an hour from San Pedro city, if one is looking for relaxation and beautiful landscape.

The bus station in Belize City was quite crowed and people struggled for getting on the bus. Most of the buses are very old, but still working well. The driver and the assistants make all necessary efforts for the people to have a comfortable travel. People on the bus are kind and educated. It is like a big family, where local travellers try to care of one another as far as possible.

Developed countries should donate, at least, one modern bus per year to underdeveloped and developing countries for the population to travel safely around the country.

I left this country and Caye Calkuler plenty of good memories of the wonders seen and the experience done.