

# An Adventure Worth Exploring: Belize

*by Elizabeth Pellerin, '17, Biological Sciences*



As a child growing up I was always fascinated with wildlife and adventure. I would watch the Discovery and National Geographic channels for hours on end. In fact, I still watch those channels today. When I heard about this Global Science Exploration course my attention and excitement immediately flushed throughout my body. I thought how cool is that, to be able to learn about a country and then go explore all of its hidden treasures. I've always wanted to travel and learn about different countries, and this opportunity seemed like the perfect fit for me.

Over spring break, I had the opportunity to study abroad to Belize. Belize is located in Central America and is known for its grand biodiversity of species and ecosystems. Before leaving for Belize we were taught about the biodiversity of birds, ecosystems, culture and agriculture that is present in Belize. Each week we had a new presenter come in and share their personal experiences they have encountered while being in Belize. Hearing their stories made me crave the moment when we finally got to leave home and travel to Belize.

Arriving in Belize was just breathtaking. Every way you turned, you were stunned with such an amazing view of the mountains along with Belize's beautiful landscape of flowers and trees. The weather was beautiful, most of the days the temperature was sunny in the high 80's and there was always a nice soft breeze that blew your way.

During our journey, we explored three regions of Belize: Belmopan, Punta Gorda and Placencia. In Belmopan, we did a lot of bird watching and hiking through the rainforest. We stayed at a hotel called the Sleeping Giant Rainforest Lodge. The reason why it's called sleeping giant is because that mountains appear as if there was a giant peacefully sleeping there.

Punta Gorda was where I did my research for this course. Juan Posada and Anthony Santiesteban were also in my group- we called each other the Punta Gorda trio. Our objective was to learn how to survive in the dense jungles of Belize. The tour guides taught us about the appearances of medicinal plants, plants to be cautious about, how to make shelter/fire and what to eat and drink when surviving in the jungle. My favorite part was definitely drinking from the water vine. It tasted so pure and rich of minerals, I truly felt like I was one with nature. I also did something that I never thought in a million years I would do... I ate a parasite. It took so much courage for me to take that leap into trying something new, but I did it and I'm proud of it. Surprisingly, the parasite tasted minty. I was told that parasites are rich in protein and can act as an insect repellent if you eat a vast amount of them or if you crush them up in your hands and rub it all over your body. So needless to say, that happened in my experience of Belize.



In Placencia, we were surrounded with miles upon miles of beach. I was so happy to walk along the warm sandy beaches and just take in the soft golden horizon. The following day we took a boat to the coral reefs to learn about the diversity of coral and fish that live among this ecosystem. It was a lot of fun snorkeling through the coral, personally for me using the flippers on my feet took some getting used to. It's not as easy as it looks. As we were swimming around we noticed a strange yet familiar figure lurking below by the coral. It was a shark! It literally was ten feet away from us. I never thought I would get so close to an actual shark. I was nervous yet somewhat excited to see one this close. I was sure to be mindful of everything I have learned while watching shark week on the Discovery Channel.





My advice to any student is to take advantage of these amazing opportunities colleges have to offer. This experience has opened my perspective of the world around me. In doing this trip, I learned a lot of myself and I have made a lot for friends in the process. I advise students to go on new adventures and to take risks and have an open mind, because doing so you can find the true you. St. Augustine once said "The world is a book, and those, who do not travel, read only one page."

