



Travel Stories by Amaru & Suzanne



Going Slow in Caye Caulker...

by Amaru & Suzanne, January 2nd 2009

We boarded the taxi boat in San Pedro and around 40min later we arrived at our next destination.... Caye Caulker!

The first thing that struck us about the island was its laidback nature. We thought that San Pedro was nice and relaxed.... Cayes Caulker managed to top it a hundred times over.

To start with, there's only one main street here and it's not paved.... only dirt roads. You don't see as many golf carts or other cars and the island doesn't contain the same type of resorts that San Pedro did (not yet at least).

We had a booking at the Seaside Cabanas but since we arrived on the island earlier than expected we couldn't check in for another 3 hours or so.... So we just adapted to the island and took it slow, had a nice breakfast and just strolled up and down the island. Eventually we came upon what's known as "The Split",



"Go Slow"
The mentality of Caye Caulker



Seaside Cabanas
Our hotel was great!

This is located at the end of the island and it's just what it sounds like, the north and south island are split by a water way. Apparently hurricane Hattie split the island in two in 1961. Today this is the best part of the island if you want to go for a dip in the ocean.

The waters here in Caye Caulker (and San Pedro too for that matter) are beautiful but the beaches do contain quite a bit of seaweed. The area around the Split is clear of weeds and so you always see lots of people in the water because of this.

We actually didn't get into the water right then since we didn't have our swimmers with us, but we sat down at the Lazy Lizard (a perfectly placed beach bar) and enjoyed a nice cold beer while spending some time people watching!

On our way back to the hotel I was looking for a dive shop to book some local reef dives that afternoon and to do the Blue Hole on the following day. Well, no one was going out diving that afternoon but I managed to book myself in the next day with Big Fish Dive Centre for a full day of diving. The package contained three dives and included the Blue Hole, the Half Moon Caye Wall and the Long Caye Aquarium.

Once that was settled we managed to check in to our hotel room which turned out to be quite classy.... We had cable TV, A/C, free WiFi and a fridge, we usually never stay in fancy places like this, we almost felt like royals (oh yeah, and we did have a very nice pool as well).

The rest of the day and the evening we did as little as possible, we relaxed by the pool, we had a few drinks and after dinner we had an early night since I had to get up early for my dives.



Main street in Caye Caulker
Only dirt roads here...



The Split was created when hurricane Hattie divided the island in 1961

The next morning I got up at 5.00am (the things I do for my diving), got dressed and walked very slowly to the dive shop at 5.30am where they provided us zombies with some much needed coffee and some bread for breakfast.

At 6.00am we were on our way out to our first dive, the Blue Hole. This might not be Belize's best dive, but it's definitely one of its most popular ones. The Blue Hole is an amazing sight from above as well from below. It's almost a perfect circle with dark blue water surrounded by lighter shades of blue. The hole is said to be as deep as 140m, as a recreational diver though, we can only dive down to 42m. To get as much time as possible there we had to drop like anchors. It's quite scary as you get deeper and deeper you notice that everything starts to get colder and a lot darker as well.

At that depth we managed to find some awesome stalactites and stalagmites and we even saw a few Caribbean Gray Reef Sharks swimming around us. The only drawback about diving this deep is that after 8min we had to start our ascent back to the surface. While we were at 5m for our safety stop we did see a couple of Eagle Rays swim past us which was a nice bonus.

For our second dive we did Half Moon Caye Wall and this was a VERY good dive! So much to see, beautiful and colourful corals, rays, turtles, eels and much much more... On top of this, the dive site also contained some awesome swimthroughs.

I must say that of all the dives I've done, this one places in my top 5!



Overlooking the island

For lunch we pulled up at Half Moon Caye, an island well known for its bird nestings and a place where you can find the rare red footed booby.... (we all had a good chuckle about going off to find some red bobbies..... boys will be boys!).

Our last dive took place at Long Caye Aquarium and it was also a very nice one, but by the end of the dive all of us were getting a bit tired and cold (even though water temperature was quite warm). All in all it was a great day, sure you have to sit on the boat for 2 hours in the morning and then again in the afternoon to get back to Caye Caulker, but it was all worth it just for the two first dives of the day!

I got back around 5.00pm, had a quick shower and then Suz and I decided to go out for an early dinner since it was New Years Eve.

During dinner Suz noticed that my right eye wasn't blinking like the left one. I then noticed that I actually couldn't blink with it at all.... strange. Later on that evening, right after we counted down the new year, Suz also saw that the right side of my mouth wasn't moving as I was smiling.... ok, now I was getting a bit nervous.

We got back to the hotel and I checked myself out in the mirror, and no... I couldn't blink or smile with the right side of my face.

First I thought that maybe I might have gotten the dreaded "bends" from my diving and actually made a phone call to the Hyperbaric Chamber in San Pedro to consult with them. They asked for the usual symptoms such as joints hurting, dizziness, tunnel vision etc which I wasn't experiencing so I calmed down a bit.



Suz at the Lazy Lizard



Plenty of beautiful small alleys throughout the island



After spending some time online I managed to find some information about a condition called "Bells Palsy" which indicated that a virus had struck my facial nerve and paralysed half of my face.... annoying! But at least I knew what I was dealing with and that the condition isn't that serious...

The next morning I still consulted a doctor and was told that it indeed was "Bells Palsy". He then wrote some prescriptions for me with some eye drops, some antibiotics (dammit, no more beers for me for a while), muscle relaxants and some steroids that I needed to take for the next week and also advised me that it might take a few weeks for the symptoms to disappear. Thinking back, I had in San Pedro started to feel some on and off pain in my right temple... I guess it was just the condition waiting to happen.

Looking through the photos of me diving you can actually see that the right side of my face looks differently to the left one, if you didn't know you were looking for it, you wouldn't see it though.

But, besides from the fact that it's a bit annoying to learn to eat with only the left side of your mouth (think of when you visit the dentist and your mouth ends up numb for an hour or so), that when drinking water most of it lands on the outside and that when speaking it makes me a bit more difficult to understand, I felt perfectly fine and we decided (well, I did) that our plans would continue as planned.

But, because of all of this drama, we didn't quite get around to booking our plane tickets to Guatemala. We were now trying to find some but they were all sold out, the last the last flights sold out 5min before we tried to get them.



We tried to stay an additional night at the hotel and then catch a plane the day after that but they were totally booked out. So we were only left with the option of getting a water taxi to Belize City and then going by bus for around 4-5 hours to Flores in Guatemala. Whilst I booked and paid for the bus tickets, Suz went back to the hotel to fix up our payment there. However, their lines were down, and it would not accept our credit card. No worries, we'll just go to the only ATM on the island..... that's when Suz discovered that her ATM card was missing. She hadn't used it since landing in Belize (at the airport), so she figured she must have accidentally left it in the machine there. Luckily we were able to do some quick online bank transfers, so that our money could now be accessed from a different account.

What a great way to start a new year on....

But, weird-face-condition withstanding, we have to say we still like Caye Caulker, it's a very beautiful and a great place to relax with a lot of friendly people. The only downside would be that Belize in general turned out to be a lot more expensive to what we were expecting.

Then again, we saved for a while so that while we're on our honeymoon we don't have to care about costs.... we just do what we feel like =)





Had to get up at 5.00am
to get ready for my diving



This is to show you what
the Blue Hole actually looks like!



Either my depth gauge is faulty
...or we're really deep!



Diving the Blue Hole
Cold and Dark



Some awesome stalactites
and stalagmites can be found here



Some Eagles Rays
We saw a few of them on our ascent!



Our Divemaster
briefing us info about our dive



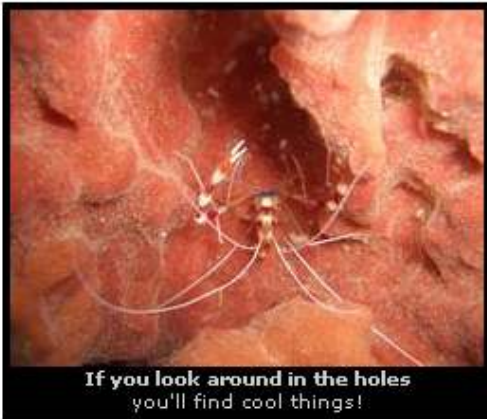
Strapped on
and ready to go...



Happy
as a fish in water!



A green Moray Eel
A BIG one...



If you look around in the holes
you'll find cool things!



Some cool looking
Corals



An action shot
A bit blurry but still beautiful



Half Moon Caye Wall
Contained some awesome swimthroughs



Turtles are always
great to find



A hidden stingray
...no, I didn't get too close to it!



**We went to Half Moon Caye
for lunch**



**A great way to relax
after two dives**



**The island is known for
its bird nestings**



**Here you can find the
rare red footed booby (bird)**



**A Barracuda
...getting hungry again!**



**Spectacular Corals
during our last dive**



**Spectacular Corals
during our last dive**



**Feeding frenzy!
Someone was feeding the fishes...**



Back on Caye Caulker
A nice clear area to swim in



"Happy Hour till Everybody Happy"
As it should be!



I got my fish for dinner at least...
A nice whole snapper



Suz
on our New Years Eve Dinner!

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