

## THE FAMILY COPPOLA HIDEAWAYS

### Central America

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## BLANCANEUX – 2021 ACTIVITIES & ADVENTURES

### ADVENTURES

#### TIKAL

Perhaps the most visually stunning of all Maya sites, Tikal's five monolithic temples pierce the jungle canopy (Temple IV reaching a height of almost 230 feet) and ancient plazas, stelae and ball courts tell of a rich and powerful history when Tikal's population reached almost 100,000. By the beginning of the Classic Period (AD 250) Tikal was competing for regional domination with Uaxactun and Calakmul and later Tikal was briefly dominated by a powerful alliance of Caracol and Calakmul from AD 562 until AD 682. From AD 682 onwards Tikal flourished again under Lord Ah Cacau and continued to dominate the region into the 9th Century. Today the site is justifiably recognized as one of the archeological wonders of the Americas. Its unspoiled jungle setting within the Tikal National Park makes it a paradise for birders, nature lovers and amateur archaeologists. This tour takes an entire day, leaving the Lodge after a quick Continental breakfast and returning around 5 – 6 pm in the evening. On the return trip, you have the chance to do some shopping in the Guatemalan town of Melchor.

Departs: 6 am                      Returns 6:00 pm

Attire: Short/Long pant, t-shirt, bug spray, sunscreen, and tennis/hiking shoes

#### CARACOL

Situated high on the Vaca Plateau deep in the Chiquibul Forest Reserve, Caracol is the most extensive Mayan site in Belize and was only re-discovered as recently as 1936. The site of Caracol covers over 80 square miles with 30,000 structures and at its peak supported a population in excess of 150,000. Situated at 1600 feet above sea level (one of the highest located sites of the southern uplands region) with no natural water body close by it remains a mystery why such a huge population center like Caracol evolved where it is. However, the close proximity to both extremely hard stone and copal, two commodities highly prized by the Maya may help explain this enigma. At the heart of the site lies the massive pyramid of Caana (Sky Palace) which is now almost fully restored and reaches a height of over 135 feet. From the top you can enjoy breath taking panoramic views over the forest clad mountains. The drive to the site in the early morning occasionally allows guests to glimpse tapir, jaguar or ocelot as they break their forest cover to cross the road. The sprawling site contains huge ceiba, mahogany and sapodilla trees and is superb for birding (the rare Keel-billed Motmot is a resident of the site). Wildlife such as howler and spider monkeys, Oscillated Turkey, coatimundi, gibbon and grey fox are often sighted while quietly wandering along the site's causeways or along trails connecting the plaza groups.

Departs: 8.00 am                      Returns: 3.30 pm

Attire: Long pant, t-shirt, bug spray, sunscreen, tennis/hiking shoes

### **CARACOL, RIO FRIO CAVE & RIO ON POOLS**

This tour is an ideal combination of the Mountain Pine Ridge Reserve Tour and the tour of Caracol. After picnic lunch at Caracol, we drive back towards the Lodge, stopping at the Rio Frio Cave, and finishing our tour at the Rio On Pools, just as you are ready for a wonderful dip in the cooling pools of the Rio On.

Departs: 7.00 am      Returns 4.30 pm

Attire: Long pant, t-shirt, bug spray, sunscreen, tennis/hiking shoes and swim wear

### **XUNANTUNICH**

Driving back down the mountain and through the town of San Ignacio, we head to the village of San Jose Succotz, where we take a hand-cranked ferry over the Mopan River to the site of Xunantunich (Maiden of the Rock). Xunantunich flourished during the Classic-period and appears to have survived the Maya 'collapse' to remain an important population centre until around AD 1000. The site has 5 main plazas, although only 3 plazas are evident to visitors today. Dominating the site is El Castillo, rising to over 120 feet. A steep, but short climb to the top is highly recommended. This vantage point provides a breathtaking panoramic view of the surrounding Mopan and Belize River valleys, as well as Guatemala to the west. You will also get a close look at the restored portion of two unique stucco friezes. The visitors centre and small museum are excellent and there are many small restaurants in the area serving authentic local food, or you may choose to bring along a picnic lunch and eat at the site.

Departs: 8:00 am      Returns: 2.00 pm

Attire: Short/Long pant, t-shirt, bug spray, sunscreen, and tennis/hiking shoes

### **XUNANTUNICH COMBINATION TOURS**

*Xunantunich is in the heart of Cayo District close to San Ignacio. There are many different sites of interest close by both natural, and archeological. Here are some suggestions:*

### **XUNANTUNICH, CAHAL PECH & AJAW CHOCOLATE TOUR**

Located on a hill overlooking San Ignacio, Cahal Pech is a medium sized but major Mayan center. Situated on top of an acropolis on the Macal River, the center of Cahal Pech consists of 34 structures in a small area of only 2 acres. A visitors' Center contains artifacts and a reconstructed model of the site. Ajaw Chocolate is a local family owned business which offers a hands-on experience of traditional chocolate making process while learning about its humble origin and the importance to the Maya Heritage.

Departs: 8.00 am      Returns 4:00 pm

### **CAYO DISTRICT SHOPPING TOUR**

Here's a good chance to visit some of the local craft shops in the area. Among the stops is a visit to the Magana's Zactunich Maya Art Gallery & Gift Shop, famous for traditional slate carvings. We will then visit the bustling town of San Ignacio and visit the village shops, enjoying lunch in town. An open-air market takes place each Saturday morning where Mennonites and farmers sell their produce; a good opportunity to purchase local honey, jams and habanero sauces. Before leaving San Ignacio you have the opportunity to visit the Iguana Hatchery or partaking in an actual Marie Sharp Pepper, jams and jellies tasting or even the opportunity to participate in a local rum tasting experience with the famous award winning One Barrel rum of Travelers Limited.

Departs: 8:00 am      Returns: 3:00pm

### **ACTUN TUNICHIL MUKNAL (ATM) CAVE**

Ranked as one of the Top 10 Caves in the world By the National Geographic Magazine, the cave trips starts with an hour and a half drive from Blancaneaux Lodge followed by a 40 minute trek through the Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve to the Cave Entrance. ATM Cave is only recommended for those of an adventurous spirit who have a good level of fitness. The underground stream flows out of the cave entrance and it's necessary to take a short swim into the cave (water depth is about 12 feet). About 3 hours is spent in the cave and it is necessary to squeeze through some tight spaces and climb over rocks to reach to the different levels. The rewards are worth it. Two small carved stelae are located above the stream, one carved in the shape of an obsidian blade and the other a stingray spine. On the next level lies the cave's most famous occupant, the crystal maiden, an ancient victim of ritual sacrifice probably from the Late Classic Period.

Departs: 7:30am Returns: 5:00 pm Duration: 8-9 hours

Attire: Tennis shoe or water shoes, pair of socks, Swim shorts, T-shirt, and a dry change of clothing for the drive back. Swimsuits only are not allowed as it is a sacred cave.

### **CRYSTAL CAVE**

Crystal Cave (also known as Mountain Cow Cave) is located in the St Herman's Blue Hole National Park (about a 2-hr drive from Blancaneaux). When you arrive at the park, you will be given your equipment (helmets and headlights), and after a quick pit stop, you start a 1-hr hike: an easy 15-20 minute walk followed by a vigorous uphill walk. Good walking shoes are a must, and you should be prepared to get muddy and dirty. Although this is a dry cave, it is very dark, humid and muddy inside. At the entrance of the cave there is a steep decline where you will have to balance your way down or glissade on the loose soil for a few minutes. This is followed by some rappelling to get down into the belly of the cave. Passing through a small flat space, you enter the Fertility Chamber, where the guide spends about 10-15 mins explaining its importance. From here, you will be exploring for about 1½ hours, moving uphill on slick rocks, and using a lot of your upper body strength (Be prepared to be a little sore the next day). Inside the cave, there are many stalactites and stalagmites, broken pottery scattered around, bone fragments and even a collapsed skull. You reach a large open area/chamber where you can take a rest and have your snack and water. If you wish to continue further to "Wonderland", you will continue on a 30 minute hike inside where you can see the crystalized formations glittering from your headlamps and formations clustered close together disappearing into the blackness. A reminder that before entering "Wonderland", you will need to remove your shoes and either walk in socks or bare feet. Socks are preferred as the ground is uneven and a bit rough. After making your way back to the large chamber your guide will spend a few minutes with you in silence in total darkness.

#### **Other notes:**

After exiting the cave, guest can change into their clean pair of clothes or head over to the Inland Blue hole for a quick refreshing dip before lunch. Without the swimming you should be back at the property at around 5:00pm or approximately 6pm if swimming included.

This tour can also be done en route to our sister property on the coast, Turtle Inn.

Departure: 7am Return: 5.00 – 6.00pm Drive time: 2 hours each way

Attire: Tees, preferred long cool pants, extra pair of socks, dry clothing for return, insect repellent, light snacks, and water in a back pack.

Level of difficulty: Must be physically fit as this is a strenuous, extreme activity.

### **BARTON CREEK CAVE**

An exciting canoe trip traveling almost two miles into a remote cave once used by the ancient Mayans as a burial site and for ceremonial purposes. The cave is adorned with stalactites and stalagmites. Mayan pottery shards and bones can be observed by the guide's spotlights. En-route to the Cave you will drive through traditional Mennonite village of Upper Barton Creek.

Departs: 8.00 am or 1.00 pm      Duration: 4 hours

Attire: Shorts, T-shirts, Flip flops or water shoe, waters and Cameras

### **BARTON CREEK CAVE TOUR WITH INTERMEDIO ZIPLINE**

For those who wish to continue the day's adventure there's the option of Zip Lining on the drive back to Blancaneaux Lodge. The Intermedio Zip line which is a 45 minute to an hour tour that offers 2,573 feet of line separated in 7 runs and 12 platforms. This tour includes a short 10 minute hike through the forest that includes crossing a hammock bridge and a hydraulic lift to the lines making your way back to where you started

### **CAVES BRANCH NOHUCH CHE'EN CAVE TUBING**

Belize's most popular on-shore activity for cruise ships while visiting the country. In order to miss the crowds for this amazing experience, Blancaneaux Lodge offers an early morning option for all guests who wishes to do this tour as a full day activity. After 2 hours' drive you stop at the Nohuch Che'en Reserve for an hour's float along the Caves Branch River and a gentle 45 minutes jungle walk to reach the starting point for cave tubing. Each participant has a special 'tube' for the float, a headlamp, life vest and 'water shoes.' The float goes through a series of huge inter-connection caves separated by open sections where the river is flanked by high jungle.

*NOTE: This tour is also available on transfers to/ from Blancaneaux to Turtle Inn or to Belize City. We run an 8am transfer from Blancaneaux Lodge to Turtle Inn daily that incorporates the Caves Branch tubing float tour. There is a supplemental charge (paid at the lodge) to cover entrance fees, equipment costs, tax (tube & life jacket). Availability depends on weather conditions and the operation of this option is subject to change without notice*

Departs: 8.00am      Returns: 4.00pm      Duration: 8 hours

### **MACAL RIVER PONTOON EXPEDITION**

An early morning 2-hr drive from Blancaneaux, through San Ignacio & Benque Viejo towns, brings you to Martz Farm where your fun expedition starts. A quick 10-min drive to the river bank and you board the pontoon. The pontoon river expedition takes you first downstream to the Mollejon Dam where your guide shares a short history of the area, the dam and the lake that once was a river. As you head up the Macal River (Lake), inner tubes (attached to the back of the pontoon) are thrown in the river so you can jump in. You can either laze on the pontoon or ride on the river tubes, enjoying the refreshing water and beautiful scenery of the tall dense jungle, tropical birds, baby crocs and the loud howler monkeys. You then visit the first waterfall where you can jump off the rocks or enjoy swimming under the falls. Near the waterfall is a rope swing, where you can take turns swinging into the river. The pontoon docks at a sandy beach for a delicious BBQ lunch. After lunch you visit another waterfall; this time you will disembark the pontoon and start a quick and easy 10 minute hike to a breathtaking waterfall. Swim in the refreshingly cold water to wake up after the lunch siesta. Boarding the pontoon again you float down the lake enjoying the beautiful scenery and wildlife along the river

bank which brings you to the last water fall where you can climb and explore.

Departs: 7.30am Returns: 5.30pm

Attire: Swimsuits, Water Shoes (Can do a short hike in), Change of Clothing, Sunblock and Insect Repellent, Cameras.

## **ACTIVITIES**

### **NATURAL HISTORY ADVENTURES**

*If you have a specific natural history interest, our team of expert guides would be happy to make suggestions for a custom nature trek. Whether it's a quest for a long anticipated entry in your lifelong birding list, or the desire to see Belize's national flower, the Black Orchid in the wild, we can help.*

*Duration of tours and prices will depend on your interest. Check with your concierge to customize tours.*

### **FULL DAY JUNGLE HIKE**

Follow serpentine trails across the pine savannah and through islands of broadleaf forest until the terrain gradually transforms into the steep jungle clad hills of the Elijo Panti National Park. With an expert guide you'll follow fresh jaguar tracks, marvel at delicate orchids and observe charismatic bird species such as the Keel-billed Toucan. Discover medicinal plants used by the ancient Maya thousands of years ago and learn their secrets with the help of your guide. After a very active half day, you take lunch beside a cooling waterfall and be refreshed by its relaxing waters. We finish off easy, meandering along old logging trails in the tropical pine forest while the sun begins to set and the hours are cooler.

Departs: 8.00am

Duration: 5 – 6 hours

Attire: Long pant, t-shirt, bug spray, sunscreen, tennis/hiking shoes and swim wear

Level of Difficulty: Moderate to High

### **HIKE TO BIG ROCK FALLS**

Your self-guided adventure begins alongside the Privassion Creek. Most of the hike follows a gently undulating trail that overlooks the creek and waterfalls; however, three steep climbs remind you that this is a real challenge. Make sure you take enough water along, and kindly advise the Front Desk of your departure. Keep your pace slow and easy and take the time to observe the many birds that call this reserve their home. Admire the abundant brightly colored orchids that adorn the granite rock outcroppings and that thrive in the thin soils of the savannah meadows. Relax at one of the many streams crisscrossing the trail, lie in the shade of an ancient granite outcropping and enjoy the spectacular scenery. A swift descent to the creek side and the thundering sound of pounding water indicates that you have arrived. Silently slipping into the creek you'll be instantly energized by the cool mountain water and invigorating massage provided free of charge by the massive waterfall.

Guided hikes can be arranged with concierge.

Departs: Anytime before 3.00pm Returns: 2.5 hours round trip

Attire: Long pant, t-shirt, bug spray, sunscreen, tennis/hiking shoes and swim wear

### **CHIQUIBUL NIGHT EXPEDITION**

Departing the property before sunset, arriving at the Chiquibul Forest, where you can hike to an amazing birding tower. Here one can enjoy an amazing panoramic view of the thick luscious rainforest. This is the perfect time as it is a relaxing experience to watch the sunset along with different species of birds making their way back to their nests. As darkness

covers the rainforest, the predators start to roam their kingdom in search of prey. As most of Belize's large mammals are nocturnal this is your best chance to actually see them in their natural habitat. Driving from the pine forest to the rainforest at a slow and quiet pace, we stealthily search the forest for gibbon, armadillos, peccaries and other wildlife. Although seldom seen, the elusive jaguar leaves enough tracks behind for us to understand that this is his realm. Keep an open eye for our national animal the Tapir, who forages on trail-side vegetation. After a couple hours silently exploring the jungle, we have a snack by the creek under the forest canopy. On our way back, we keep vigilant for signs of a white tailed deer or the arboreal Mexican porcupine. As we slowly drive back to the lodge, there is time to marvel at the magnificent clarity of the night sky.

Departs: 3.30pm

Duration: 3-4 hours

## **HORSEBACK RIDING**

*Explore the surrounding area on horseback. Our horseback riding tours are ideal for all riders, and even non-riders. We take care to match the rider with the most suitable horse to ensure comfort and safety. We recommend wearing long pants and sturdy shoes for comfort. Riding helmets are available.*

*Choose from two hour to full-day tours, all suitable for beginners and experienced riders.*

- **Sunrise in the Rainforest**

Take your mount as the sun rises over the forest. We ride about 30 minutes to a rainforest. First light is an ideal time to observe a kaleidoscope of colorful birds, under a rainforest canopy of vines, palms and exotic bromeliads. You may also catch sight of a whitetail deer, coatimundi or grey fox. Brilliant butterflies and a chorus of birdsong make this the ideal start to the day.

Departs: Sunrise around 5:30am

Duration: Approx. 2½ hours

- **Big Rock Falls**

A gentle meandering ride through the forest to hidden falls. Take a break from the saddle and swim under a cascading waterfall. Ideal for beginners or those who just want a short time in the saddle.

Departs: Various times upon request

Duration: Approx. 3 hours

- **Full Day Horseback Ride**

Following local trails, the terrain transforms from pine to rainforest. Once we reach the Noj Kaax Meen Elijio Panti National Park we ride under the shady canopy of the rainforest. Your guide will point out the amazing flora and fauna of the forest as we ride to Sapodilla Falls. We'll enjoy a picnic lunch and refreshing swim before riding back to the lodge. Blancaneaux Lodge also offers hiking trails and jungle treks, bird watching tours, complimentary bikes, tours of the Organic Garden and swimming in the pool or in the pristine waters of Privassion Creek. For relaxation the "Hot Pool" eases away any aches and pains from the day's activities

Departs: 8.00 am

Duration: Approx. 5– 6 hours

- **Sunset Horseback Ride**

As the sun starts to dip towards the horizon we ride east into the Noj Kaax Meen Elijio Panti National Park. We'll ride to a vantage point in the moist tropical broadleaf forest, home to jaguar, tapir and ocelot. We'll enjoy the evening chorus of birdsong and as the sun sets over the Maya Mountains we'll ride back to the lodge.

Departs: 3:00pm

Duration: 2.5 hours

### **GUIDED MOUNTAIN BIKING**

There's no better way to explore the diverse eco-systems of the Mountain Pine Ridge Reserve than a bike tour. Guided bike trips will take you on scenic routes and trails around the Reserve. Check with the Concierge to discuss departure times, difficulty or terrain, length of trip. The Concierge will help you match the trip to your ability.

Departs: 8:00 am for half day (1-3 hours) or full day (1-6 hours)

Attire: Long pants, t-shirt, bug spray, sunscreen, and tennis/hiking shoes

### **SUNRISE BIRD WATCHING**

As the sun rises at Blancaneaux, the morning is greeted by the call of Chachalacas as squadrons of Aztec Parakeets fly overhead and across the river. For a few short hours the forest is alive with the sound of exotic birdlife. Take a short walk around the property's gardens and trails, and let your guide point out the well camouflaged birds hiding in the nearby forest. Learn about our migrant species and the many secrets of our feathered friends. With almost 600 species documented in Belize, this walk is an excellent introduction to the birds of the region. The colorful Green Jay, the jester-like Acorn Woodpecker and the Melodious Blackbird are just some of the many species to be seen on property.

Departs: 6.00am or 6:30am Duration: 1 hour (Concierge can arrange for half day or full day birding)

Attire: Long pant, t-shirt, bug spray, sunscreen, and tennis/hiking shoes

Level of Difficulty: Easy