



THE CARIBBEAN CARESS OF ROYAL BELIZE

By David M. Brown

Just beyond Royal Belize is the world's second largest coral reef — a World Heritage Site — and a short boat ride away is the Great Blue Hole, which Jacques-Yves Cousteau called one of the top ten scuba diving sites in the world.

Tonight, the Caribbean sky, which greeted the caravels of Columbus 500 hundred years ago, is tinged in twilight color, and all around you, palm fronds and mangroves stir in soft sea breezes.

Nine secluded miles off the Central American coast, relax on your seven-acre private island under a thatched palapa and enjoy a signature rum cocktail adorned with Belizean fruit, as your private chef prepares a bespoke wine-paired meal.

Dinner starts with Conch Consommé, including shiitake mushrooms and lily flower blossoms, followed by a first course of Crab Gnocchi in a creamy mascarpone cheese sauce, and completed by Split Vietnamese-style Lobster Tail seasoned with lemon grass butter and garlic-toasted sesame seeds, accompanied by sautéed sugar snaps amandine and a red capsicum and chèvre terrine. Dessert and a postprandial are to your taste — or just take in the moon glimmering on the waves.

At Royal Belize, you and your companions are invited to do everything you've always wanted to do in paradise, or nothing. Enjoy privacy, exemplary service, and personalization worthy of royalty (British Honduras became Belize in 1973) — but at prices many commoners can appreciate.

From the island, you can ride a WaveRunner, snorkel, book a sailing trip or just relax on the sand. If you wish to explore mainland Belizean culture, history and beauty and activities, you can kayak, river raft, cave tube, visit jungle and wildlife reserves, hike, go bird-watching, fly-fishing, sailing — even zip lining. And, nearby, the Mayans created their



great cities such as Xunantunich ("Stone Woman"), with the famous "El Castillo" pyramid above the Mopan River.

"As our guest, you are given all the privacy you want but are attended to as the most valued individuals on the planet as soon as you require something. In fact, we see our guests as owners of the island," says Peter Luppi, who serves as the personal concierge and general manager on behalf of the owners, a cosmopolitan couple whose vision of superlative seclusion created the private island resort.

Open since spring 2010, Royal Belize offers three luxurious villa residences: Casa Valentina, on a romantic island-within-an-island; Casa Catalina, featuring an outdoor bedroom and private palapa; and the luxe Villa Alba, with front and rear decks and an expansive living room and, in June, a restyling including a second bedroom. The resort is also adding a plunge pool and pool bar, which will also be completed by June.

Eclectically decorated with European, Asian and local handmade furnishings and artwork, each villa features sea views, air-conditioned bedrooms, king-sized beds, custom-stocked refrigerators, personal stereos with iPod Touches, iPads with video library and games, WiFi and other amenities.

Setting it apart, Royal Belize offers its villas exclusively; even if you occupy just one of the three villas, the others will be vacant during your stay. "Each house has a rate but receives a discount when more than one house is rented," Luppi explains. A minimum three-night stay is required.





Privacy is paramount: the Royal Belize staff of five lives in a completely secluded area of the island, separated by water. Additional staff, including a specially selected chef for each booking, is contracted according to the number of guests.

"We've had guests that required 100-percent privacy, which means that the only time we saw them or they saw us was during meals," says Luppi, an Italian native who has developed properties worldwide and participated in numerous restaurant ventures.

"I have been to some of the top places in the world and I have never received the level of service, loyalty, concern and dedication that we offer to our guests. The only thing that matters here is the guests' satisfaction — not our preconception of what we like to offer," adds Luppi, who came to Belize in 2002 and helped build the resort from a mangrove swamp.

His passion for the restaurant industry ensures meticulous attention to bespoke meals. Take them in the island's Grand Palapa, on the pier, en suite, on the sand — anywhere.

A chef is selected based on guests' culinary preferences, following a preliminary survey. "After each meal, we discuss the following one with the guests," he says. "You want lobster five times a day, each time made in a different way? No problem. We overstock beyond belief, to anticipate any whim and to ensure that we have enough to make favorites as many times as our guests ask for."

The personalization commitment on Royal Belize accepts special requests seriously, however eccentric and complex: A honeymooning couple requested fireworks for their last night. A wildlife photographer wanted to swim with manatees. A wickedly generous mother paying for her son's honeymoon requested a life-size cutout of herself, with a stern look, be placed overlooking the newlyweds' marital bed; and a family of six requested a "survivor experience" on an uninhabited mangrove island for a day's worth of "capture the flag."

One couple was trying to conceive for years, so they scheduled an extended stay to enjoy privacy, relaxation and romance.

"On the day they were departing, the lady embraced me and whispered in my ear, 'I'm pregnant!'" Luppi recalls. "It honestly brought tears to my eyes and filled me with a sense of pride and satisfaction without equal, to know that for the rest of their lives our guests would think of us at Royal Belize when they looked at their child."

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