



San Pedro

[PHOTO BY SARA LUPINI/FLICKR](#)

5 Ways Belize Is the Reset You Need

Still waiting for that “new year, new you” feeling to kick in? Belize might be just the fuel you need.

[SARAH PURKRABEK](#) 1.20.2017

B[elize](#) is a small but endlessly fascinating country, with a combination of cultures, a

huge (and wild) natural landscape, and a laid-back vibe you can't help but fall in love with (it's no wonder the country has such a high number of American expats). No matter what chills you out—unplugging with nature, doing something adventurous, meeting friendly locals in a small town—Belize has the prescription. Here, five ways the country is the reset you need for the new year.

1. It'll force you to slow down.

Belizeans joke that money isn't the only thing Americans have to learn to convert when they visit; they must also grasp the Belizean-American time conversion. The money is easy: One American dollar is equivalent to two Belizean dollars. The time conversation goes the opposite way: When Belizeans say five minutes, they mean five Belizean minutes—that's about 10 American minutes.

That's true on the mainland, especially toward the southern end of the country, but it's even more true on the islands. The town of San Pedro, located on Ambergris Caye off Belize's northeastern coast, is so small that the locals drive golf carts, not cars, and most of the hotels and restaurants on the south end are family-owned and operated. Tour guides may arrive fashionably late, and restaurants may take a bit longer to open than their hours suggest, but what you miss by not getting there early you more than make up for with unrushed meals, extra-long sightseeing excursions, and lingering conversations.

2. You can live in luxury *and* like a local.

For a romantic escape, or just a few quiet nights, you can't do much better than the Placencia Peninsula. Located toward the southern edge of the country, Placencia is also very much in tune with the islands' lifestyle. The peninsula is known for its resorts, which range from backpacker-style hostels to high-end luxury. At the upper end of the spectrum sits [Naïa Resort and Spa](#), a brand-new property with 35 studio, one-, two-, and three-bedroom beach houses. *This* is the place to recharge. You can spend hours wandering the beach or taking a dip in the Caribbean Sea, paddleboarding and kayaking, or sipping coconut water out of a fruit that came straight from one of the trees on-site (ask Stony, one of the watersports operators, to grab his machete and chop one down for you).

It's a short drive from there to Placencia town, a strip of land that leads directly to docks and the ocean beyond. Locals and visitors alike hang at two colorfully done-up bars called [Topsy Tuna](#) and [Barefoot Bar](#), which serve both food and drinks on the cheap right on the water's edge.



Placencia

[PHOTO BY MIKE STENHOUSE/FLICKR](#)

3. You'll eat comfort food—that's also health food.

In Belize, the best things to eat are made fresh in the morning over an open flame, as they were prepared hundreds of years ago. In [San Pedro](#), you can get that kind of meal at [El Fogón](#), a family-run restaurant where the head chef (and daughter of the original founder of the place) begins each day by outdoor slow-cooking the rice, beans, and meats that she'll need for the lunch and dinner rushes. The menu features freshly caught seafood and locally sourced vegetables and grains, so you can go ahead and call tacos (or their fried cousin *salbutes*) a healthy meal.

Even dessert in Belize is farm-to-table. At [Ixcacao Chocolate](#) in [Toledo](#), the owners make chocolate bars from the beans they grow on cacao trees in their backyard. The company's flavored varieties (ginger, coconut, orange) use other plants from the owners' garden. Dark chocolate has been touted lately for its superfood properties—unless you're eating a bar made with tons of artificial ingredients. At Ixcacao, you can help make your own (by hand!), and the ingredients list consists of just two things: cacao beans and sugarcane.

4. You'll get motivated.

Belizeans know a thing or two about the entrepreneurial spirit. From selling handmade art to starting restaurants, hotels, and tour operations, it's sometimes easier to spot someone who's making it on their own than it is to find someone working for the man. Support the little guys by buying locally made crafts and booking tours through small, Belizean-run tour operators (such as [Taste Belize](#) or [Foolish Dreamzzz](#)). Talk to the people running these small businesses, and you just might be motivated to start your own solo side project back home.

5. You'll be inspired.

Belize is a small country, but it feels big because of the low population density: Roughly 380,000 people live on 8,800 square miles (that's about 18 times smaller than the state of California). Of that 8,800 square miles, about 60 percent is rain forest, and about 80 percent of that rain forest is protected, untouched land. When you add in the barrier reef (the second largest in the world after [Australia's](#)) and Belize's famous [Great Blue Hole](#), you're left with thousands of miles of natural wonder, both on land and off. Getting in touch with the Earth—and away from screens—can be deeply therapeutic. Belize's natural landscape is abundant, and the country's willing to lend it to visitors who leave it in the same state they found it.

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