

Key Dates in Development of Tourism in Belize

By Lan Sluder

1839 John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood visit British Honduras on their travels to Maya sites in Mexico and Central America

1936 TACA Airways, Transportes Aéreos Centroamericanos, established in Honduras in 1931 by New Zealander Lowell Yerex, begins air service to Belize City

1937 Maya city of Caracol rediscovered

1948 Vick Barothy opens what was first fishing lodge in British Honduras, a camp on the Belize River near Belize City, now Belize River Lodge

1952 British Colonial Airlines founded, renamed British Honduras Airways in 1956, closed 1961

1953 Fort George Hotel, first major hotel in British Honduras, opens in Belize City with 36 rooms

1958 Belize City home of Bernard and Jean Dinger turned into popular hotel, the Bellevue; later operated by son Roger

1961 Reef Colony Club with a restaurant, pool and eight rooms, on the site of what is now Ramon's Village, the dream of Vernon and Terry Hammon, first resort built on Ambergris Caye, was destroyed by Hurricane Hattie just before it was to open

Early 1960s Dick Moore, an ex-Navy frogman who had previously had dive businesses in Cuba and Mexico, moved to Ambergris Caye and opened what was probably the first dive operation in Belize, using his boat *The Geek*

1962 Doris Leslie opens Seaspray, the first hotel in Placencia; Maya Airways founded -- in 1997 it merged with Island Air to form Maya Island Air

1963-64 Tourism begins on Caye Caulker and Ambergris Caye, with visitors mostly from Belize City, especially Bellevue Hotel, on day trips

1965 Celi McCorkle opens four-room Holiday Hotel in San Pedro; Hideaway Lodge, first hotel on Caye Caulker, also opens about this time

1969 The four-unit Paradise Hotel, with a thatch-roof bar, owned by Jerry McDermott, opens in San Pedro (Phoenix Resort is now on the site of the Paradise Hotel); Ray Auxillou begins running dive trips from Caye Caulker on his boat, the *Atoll Queen*; Capri Hotel, first hotel in Corozal Town, opened by Hans Podzun, who also begins tour boat trips to the Blue Hole and the Barrier Reef

1971 Jacques Cousteau visits Belize and introduces world to the Blue Hole

1973 British Honduras officially renamed Belize

1974 George and Corol Bevier open Rum Point Inn in Placencia; Elvi's opens as take-out burger stand in her home in San Pedro

1970s San Ignacio Resort Hotel, Tony's Inn and Hotel Maya in Corozal Town, Pelican Beach in

Dangriga (1971), Hotel Mopan in Belize City and other early hotels open; Caye Caulker becomes a stop on the "Gringo Trail," along with Isla Mujeres in the Yucatán and Lake Atitlan in Guatemala; Lamonts open dive shop on Glovers Atoll

1975 First dive boats begin operation in San Pedro, including *Isla Mia* and *Reef Roamer*

1977 Belize's first national airline, Belize Airways Ltd., established by Barry Bowen and others

1979 Tropic Air founded in San Pedro by John Grief III with a single airplane

1980 Total tourism revenues in Belize reach near US\$10 million

1981 Belize gains independence from Britain; Chaa Creek Lodge opens in Cayo; International Expeditions begins tours to Belize

1982 First Belize Audubon Society reserve, Half Moon Caye, established; Maya Mountain Lodge near San Ignacio opens

1984 Belize exhibits at the 1984 World's Fair in New Orleans, introducing Belikin to the world; Cockscomb established as a forest reserve

1984-89 United Democratic Party general election win in 1984 results in new attitude to foreign investment in Belize including tourism -- previously the People's United Party under George Price generally did not support tourism development or foreign investment

1985 Belize Tourism Industry Association (BTIA) founded, an expansion of the Caribbean Hotel Association (later the Belize Hotel Association); *Belize Guide* by Paul Glassman published, believed to be first single-country travel guide to Belize

1986 Following reduced yields in fishing and lobstering, Placencia residents look to tourism for income; road from Riversdale to Placencia village constructed; first Belize guide published in Belize, titled *Belize The Grand Tour* by Bob and Lou Nicolait

1987 Hol Chan Marine Reserve near San Pedro established

1988 Barry Bowen's Chan Chich Lodge opens; there are 10 hotels open on the Placencia peninsula

1991 *San Pedro Sun* established, publishes weekly newspaper on Ambergris Caye; the largest hotel in Belize, Ramada Royal Reef (now Princess Hotel) opens, with 120 rooms; 78,000 overnight tourists visit Belize

1992 *Belize First* (initially a newsletter, then a magazine) established

1993 Francis Ford Coppola opens Blancaneaux Lodge to the public

1994 Tour guides first licensed

1996 Belize Tourism Board established; American Airlines begins service to Belize

1997 Inn at Robert's Grove opens in Seine Bight, marking the beginning of a new group of upscale properties on the Placencia peninsula

1998 The Blackstone Report, the first strategic plan for tourism in Belize, published; cruise ship tourists number around 14,000, mostly on small ships; total tourism revenues reach near US\$100 million and 162,000 overnight tourists visit Belize; there are 49 hotels on the Placencia peninsula (44 of them have 10 or fewer rooms), an increase of 39 hotels in 10 years

2000 Belize's first big casino opens at Princess Hotel in Belize City

2001 Tourism Village opens in Belize City and first large cruise ship visits; Hurricane Iris destroys several hotels in Placencia and Monkey River

2003 Cruise tourism jumps from fewer than 50,000 in 2002 to 320,000 in 2003

2002 Overnight tourist arrivals reach 200,000; USAir begins service to Belize, as does Air Jamaica, but Air Jamaica's service lasts only a few months

2004 Cruise tourism to Belize peaks at around 850,000; Delta Airlines begins service to Belize

2007 Overnight tourism arrivals reach 250,000; national hotel occupancy peaks at 44.3%

2008-09 World financial crisis and recession slows tourism to Belize

2010 Catch-and-release sports fishing regulations for bonefish, tarpon and permit implemented; Belize bans bottom trawling to protect fisheries

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