



HOT TROPIC

RAIN FORESTS, BEACHES AND PIRATE-WORTHY RUM—IT'S TIME TO BELIEVE IN BELIZE



• We're thrilled the Mayans were dead wrong about the world ending last year, but there would have been worse places to experience Armageddon than this Central American hedonist retreat. Belize's Pantone-blue seas and sandy beaches are still largely untouched by the rush of plus-size

tourists slowly souring "hip" Costa Rica, but as the cruise-ship industry threatens to muscle further in... tick tock.

Fly into Belize City and hop a puddle jumper to San Ignacio, near the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve—a hangout for jaguars, toucans and howler monkeys. Then drive on dirt "roads" to the Actun Tunichil Muknal Cave, which the Mayans believed was a portal to the under-

world. The Mayans also believed in a spirit called the Melon Lady, who smothered men to death in their sleep—with her breasts.

You're in the jungle, baby, but that doesn't mean roughing it. The thatched-roof cabanas at the just-renovated **Gaia Riverlodge** or the luxe villas at Francis Ford Coppola's **Blancaneaux Lodge** (1) are welcome places to unplug. Be warned: Cell service is

so minimal, the iPhone should just display an icon of a middle finger.

Hit the Caribbean coastline and easygoing Placencia, a hippie fishing village known for deep-sea diving on the largest coral reef in the western hemisphere. It helps that English is the national language. (Belize was a British colony until 1981.) Did we mention Vicodin and Ambien are available at the pharmacy,



1.

usually without a prescription?

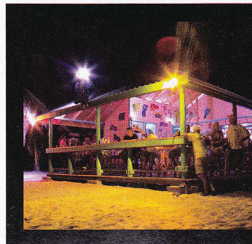
Book a room at the rustic-cool **Turtle Inn** (where Charlie Sheen hid out during his recent meltdown) or at **Chabil Mar** (for AC and flatscreen TVs). Speedboat to Silk Cayes (2), a trio of micro-

islands where your guide will grill fresh snapper while you sip Belikin beer. On your way out, pick up a bottle of Marie Sharp's local hot sauce. The "mild" will raise an eyebrow. The "hot" will burn as beautifully as your tan. —Mickey Rapkin

Francis Ford Coppola's Secret Rum Stash



When Coppola came to Belize in 1981 he fell in love with the local rum. "I bought two barrels of a 20-year-old rum made from molasses and put it in old oak charbonnay barrels," says the director. He aged the rum for another 16 years, and the result is as smooth as a sunset. Ask nicely and the bartender at Coppola's Turtle Inn may just dig up a glass.



GO PUBBING IN PLACENCIA

A LAID-BACK FISHING VILLAGE GOES MENTAL AT NIGHT

RUMFISH Y VINO

→ Order a potent habanero rum fizz and a plate of barracuda tacos at the bar. Repeat.

BAREFOOT BAR

→ At this open-air cantina (left) women dance like jaguars. Locals call all that grinding *punta*.

TIPSY TUNA

→ The endless rum drinks and courtyard drum circle are what boozy beachside nightlife is all about.