

## **Following Information Compliments of Avadon Divers, Placencia Belize**

### **The Blue Hole & Lighthouse Reef**

Trips to this atoll are done only when there are good surface conditions as it is a 3-hour boat ride from Placencia (about the same boat ride time as it is from San Pedro). This atoll is the furthest one from the mainland and also encompasses a national marine park area and World Heritage Site. The Blue Hole is near the center of the atoll and was once a massive dry cave formed during the last ice age when the sea level was much lower. It is over 450 feet deep and about 1000 feet across. Massive stalactites drop from what is left of this giant cave ceiling at about 100 feet. You will find a family of reef sharks that live in the hole, in addition to quite a few large black groupers. Some of the best diving is along the southern end of this distant atoll adjacent to Half Moon Caye and Long Caye. Half Moon Caye sites showcase a steep wall composed of huge blocks of towering coral heads with deep sand channels and swim-throughs between them. This reef structure forms the edge of the wall which tops at about 30 feet and has a large shallow sand bed on the inside. This attracts spotted eagle rays and southern stingrays, as well as numerous hawksbill turtles. A stop at Half Moon Caye for lunch is part of the itinerary where you'll find a bird sanctuary that is home to the red-footed boobie bird that shares their large colony with frigate birds, as well as the oldest lighthouse in Central America. Dive sites on the western side of Long Caye are covered with sponges and soft and hard corals knotted together battling for space on the wall's edge. Rays of all kinds, including mantas, large groupers and sharks frequent this stretch of wall, as well as numerous colorful reef fish of all shapes and sizes. In the spring, you may probably get a glimpse of mating loggerhead turtles cruising the wall's edge.

Boat Departs: 6am / Boat Returns: 6pm

Boat Ride: 3 hours

Dives: 3-Tank

Level: Intermediate & Advanced

Snorkeling: Available

"All dives are subject to weather conditions. In the event a specific dive is not possible for this, or any other unforeseen reason, an adjustment to the dive location will be offered with appropriate rate adjustments or refunds, in the event a dive is not possible at all."

## **Glovers Reef Atoll**

This southern atoll is also a World Heritage Site and protected area, and has dive sites ringing it on all sides. The eastern side that faces the Caribbean Sea offers steep walls. Near the southern end is a double wall system that starts at 45 feet and features abundant gorgonians, sponges and wire corals, with heavy plate corals as you go deeper. Going north to the more eastern side, there are is network of swim-throughs along the wall where various species of snapper and grouper like to shelter. Goliath grouper are often spotted in this area. Reef shark can be seen cruising the edge of the wall together with spotted eagle rays and turtles. The western side of the atoll offers numerous large pinnacles lining the wall that loom up like ancient giants covered in coral and sponge growth. This atoll offers numerous sites that require more than one trip to experience.

Boat Departs: 7am / Boat Returns: 5pm

Boat Ride: 1 hour & 45 mins

Dives: 3-Tank

Level: Novice to Advanced

Snorkeling: Available

## **South Water Caye**

South Water Caye Marine Reserve is to the north. This stretch of the barrier reef has an incredible ridge along the top of the plunging wall, with a huge, deep sand channel running parallel to the ridge. This area is home to numerous spotted eagle rays, large southern sting rays, and rough tail rays. Schools of snapper and spade fish circle the top of the ridge, passing over a colorful perfusion of hard and soft corals, and where you can sometimes see a shimmering veil of silversides moving in unison around protective holes in the reef wall. There are so many sites in this reserve, and along this long stretch of the barrier reef, that it definitely requires more than one visit to understand the scope of the area.

Boat Departs: 7am / Boat Returns: 3:30pm

Boat Ride: 80-mins

Dives: 3-Tank

Level: Novice to Advanced

Snorkeling: Available

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## **Whale Shark**

Directly east of Placencia at Gladden Spit, over 25 species of fish gather to spawn during the full moon periods in the springtime. A large snapper referred to as black or cubera snapper gather to spawn as well. It is the spawn from this particular snapper that the whale sharks come here to feed on. This is the only site in the world where you can witness large schools of courting snapper and whale sharks while diving. These gentle giants swim from the deep blue up over a wall's edge that tops at about 150 feet. Here is where the massive schools of snapper stretch across the top of this deep wall occasionally spiraling up to 80 and 100 feet. This is a blue water dive with the bottom far below you and sometimes not visible at all. Whale sharks can be observed below swimming amongst the schooling snappers, and will come up the water column all the way to the surface sifting the water as they feed on the spawn. Seeing a whale shark on every dive is not a guarantee, so it's advisable to book a couple of days for this dive. One thing is for sure, you'll witness an incredible sight as you may also see schools of other fish like horse eye jacks, crevalle jacks, and mutton snappers also gathering in huge schools to spawn. This is indeed an incredible spawning event! We expect the seasonal visitation of whale sharks during the months of March to June from the full moon to about 10 days following. However, full moon periods during the months of April, May, and June are the best.

Boat Departs: 9am / Boat Returns: 5pm

Boat Ride: 90-mins

Dives: 2-Tank

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Snorkeling: Available

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### **Laughing Bird National Park**

This is a pristine faroe reef with deep channels on either side. Here coral pinnacles rise from the bottom inside the main barrier reef creating a haven for hosts of brilliantly colored Caribbean reef species. Apart from the possibility of observing turtles and rays going by, you might want to look at the macro view. The many colorful anemones and sponges are home to delicate cleaner shrimp and crabs, and at the right time of year, you can find startlingly beautiful bluebell tunicates.

Boat Departs: 7am / Boat Returns: 2pm

Boat Ride: 45-mins

Dives: 2-Tank

Level: Novice to Advanced

Snorkeling: Available

### **Silk Cayes**

Silk Cayes is part of the larger Gladden Spit Marine Reserve and has a healthy stretch of reef wall along the barrier reef directly east of Placencia. Here one can often observe turtles, and both reef and nurse sharks. Large groupers and schools of snapper often cruise the wall together with deep blue colored creole wrasse.

Boat Departs: 7am / Boat Returns: 2pm

Boat Ride: 75-mins

Dives: 2-Tank

Level: Novice to Advanced

Snorkeling: Available

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### **Pompion Caye**

Pompion Caye is to the north of Silk Cayes. While this wall is along the barrier reef, there is no fringe reef near the surface to indicate that barrier. Here you will find dramatic walls littered with sponges and coral life with schools of snapper, large groupers and other game fish like jacks and king fish passing by. There's always a chance to see turtles, and nurse sharks are often observed resting in the sand channels between the coral heads on top of the wall.

Boat Departs: 7am / Boat Returns: 2pm

Boat Ride: 70-mins

Dives: 2-Tank

Level: Novice to Advanced

Snorkeling: Available

### **Ranguana Caye**

Ranguana Caye is to the south of Silk Cayes. This wall consists of tongue and groove formations on top of the wall. The relief of this wall the sponge and coral life taking advantage of the bottom formations makes the view in this area particularly interesting. Green and spotted moray eels find this excellent for shelter under the coral heads. Large schools of bar jack can be observed dashing by on their way to the next meal. One should always keep a keen eye out in the blue of this wall area as you could observe large eagle rays and other pelagic like mantas going by at any time. Turtles can often be observed feeding on the sponges here accompanied by french and gray angels taking advantage of a free meal.

Boat Departs: 7am / Boat Returns: 2pm

Boat Ride: 70-mins

Dives: 2-Tank

Level: Novice to Advanced

Snorkeling: Available

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## **Shark Hole**

What was once a dry cave is now an opening in the coral reef about 30 feet below the surface. The entrance of this cave is about 25 feet wide. Upon entering, you will notice a pile of sand at the bottom and stalactites hanging from the cave ceiling. The residents of the cave give it the name. On occasion, you can find bull, lemon and reef sharks circling together with permit and southern sting rays. However, cobia and nurse sharks are more commonly spotted here. There is even a resident batfish on the shallow reef next to the cave entrance. But this customer is hard to spot. This dive is done together with two other dives at South Water Caye.

Boat Departs: 7am / Boat Returns: 2pm

Boat Ride: 1 hour & 45 mins

Dives: 1-Tank (+ 2-tank at South Water Caye)

Level: Intermediate & Advanced

Snorkeling: None

## **Turneffe Islands Atoll**

Trips to Turneffe also, are only when there are good surface conditions as it is a 2.5 hour journey. This atoll is ringed with numerous mangrove islands surrounding a large shallow lagoon. Some of the best diving here is found at the southern end close to, and including, the famous Elbow. Because of the converging currents, big schools of horse eye and crevalle jacks are found here. Sometimes king fish and tuna will also show up. Eagle rays frequent the area and mantas have been sighted. Because of all this action, spotting reef or hammerhead sharks is a distinct possibility. Turneffe Atoll is the only place in the world where you can observe the rare white-spotted toad fish to add to your collection of sightings or photographs.

Boat Departs: 6am / Boat Returns: 5pm

Boat Ride: 2 hour & 30 mins

Dives: 3-Tank

Level: Novice to Advanced

Snorkeling: Not available

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