

SPORT DIVER

11
TOP BACK-
INFLATE
BCs
pg 36

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GETAWAYS

Five Fantastic **ADVENTURE** and **TRAVEL** Around the Diving World

Indulg





Island ences

Enchanted escapes for divers
with immoderation in mind

BY ANN LOUISE TURK

In my dream, I am surrounded by sleeping people who answer to my every desire. I want for nothing. If I desire a cool drink, a frozen concoction of tropical fruit arrives within minutes. If I want to dive, a boat is waiting to whisk me off to the nearby reef. And when I return, my mansion is waiting with bagmen able to abolish any vestiges of stress that may be hanging on to a revitalized "me." Then it dreams on me that I am, amazingly, wide awake.

Ultra-exotica and luxuries that far surpass the occasional treat we allow ourselves — that's what we're talking about here. These are escapes that will take your breath away, where the diving is stellar and the people, places and amenities catapult you to a level of indulgence that induces euphoria. Scattered around the world, such enclaves are often visited by the "rich and famous," but these exclusive resorts roll out the red carpet for all guests, regardless of their currency or lack thereof.

Barrier Reef Bliss

CAYO ESPANOLA, BELIZE

Maybe it was the isolation or the tropical breezes, but upon my first glimpse of this private-island retreat, I knew that I was going to have a hard time leaving Cayo Espanola. The whole staff lined the dock to welcome me, including a yellow Labrador retriever named Suki.

The short flight via Cayo Cuzco transferred me to the vast shallows of the mainland and the beginning of the world's second

Melissa's Massage

Book a post-dive massage in the privacy of your own seaside villa, and wind down in style in private-island style.

- 1 Hal Chan Marine Reserve
- 2 Hal Chan Cuf
- 3 Blue Hole
- 4 Shark Ray Alley

largest barrier reef. From the air, stunning underwater coral ridges spilled into the depths. Rays and sharks were clearly visible as they cruised the shallow-protected waters of Hal Chan Marine Reserve. My appetite for diving was definitely whetted.

German Alonilla, one of Cayo

ADVA ENCOUNTERS Get up close with swarms of nurse sharks and stingrays in the shallows of Shark Ray Alley.

DAVE PERIN



PHOTO: LARRY BROWN

BELLSHALL IN BELIZE Barrier reef diving is just a short boat trip away from this private-island retreat.

Esposito's dive masters, met me at the tiny Ambergris airport, and he whisked me off to a nearby dock for the quick seven-minute trip by boat to Cayo Esposito. German was one of two dive masters who handled all the diving and snorkeling for Cayo Esposito guests, with total flexibility as to when and where to go depending on guests' preferences. When I was there, I had the boat and dive masters all to myself. We took our time and cruised the reef, diving when we wanted and snorkeling at our whim. A dive at Hal Chan Channel brought us frons and omies with a squadron of eagle rays that tagged along for most of the dive, disappearing over the reef only to swoop back down on us in an ongoing game of hide-and-seek. Huge green morays hid out under ledges and in deep crevices as schools of jacks and snappers paraded along the rigging reef profile, pausing only to let us pass in our own parade route down the reef.

We dropped our dive gear and grabbed masks and snorkels for a swim to Shark Ray Alley, where a large number of stingrays, nurse sharks and other reef fish congregated. I found myself in the midst of dozens of beautiful sharks and rays, free diving with them side by side and even during a cruise or two along the way.

My wandering hours at Cayo Esposito were wonderfully indulgent. My private villa, Casa Morada, was a haven of tranquility and privacy. I truly felt as if I were the only guest on this block of an island. While the other four villas have private pools, Casa Morada has an outdoor spa overlooking a private beach. Each villa also has a private dock, where sun worshippers like me could relax with a good book or follow the daily routine of the marine life

in the crystal-clear waters, observing juvenile barracudas, crabs, tiny rays and countless other shallow-water inhabitants.

Eddie, my houseman, delivered anything I desired upon request via a two-way radio provided for the duration of my stay, and Lily the lab popped by several times a day for a scratch and a pat, when accompanied by Darcy, one of the chefs, to take my dinner order. Mouthwatering meals included "woodco- and fire-crusted fillet of local hogfish towering on scallops- and saffron-crusted potato with braised leek and crop onion." These were prepared by the chefs and selected from a menu created especially for me based on a ques-

tionnaire I filled in prior to my arrival. At the end of the day I got the best massage I'd ever had, enhanced by one of Belize's indigenous *chocolatestones*, giving the experience an even more relaxed and pampering effect.

If there was ever a trip that ended too soon, it was this one. My departure coincided with those of several other guests, who all agreed that leaving the island was the only disappointing experience of their stay. But the wind-off was softened by final farewells from the whole staff, including Lily, and a thoughtful box of goodies from the chef for the trip home.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Cayo Esposito, Belize
868-666-4382
www.aprivalisbelize.com