

Caribbean Community and Events Galore!

Dear Friends of Grand Baymen:

This month's newsletter focuses mainly on the local community, and recent and upcoming events around Ambergris Caye. April is a month packed with activities and social events that take place around San Pedro Town.

But, let's start by addressing a common question that visitors often ask us...

“Do you have any regrets about moving to Belize?” Without hesitation, Mike and I honestly answer, “No, we have no regrets.” Visitors often find it baffling that we could be as happy, or even happier, in little San Pedro Town than we were in the San Francisco Bay Area.



Initially, we invested in property on Ambergris Caye because of our love for the Caribbean Sea and the laid back tropical lifestyle. Every day we're still thrilled to be surrounded by so much beauty, color, and nature.

But, there's another attractive aspect of daily life on Ambergris Caye that kept drawing us back to this low-key Caribbean retreat. It's the people and the strong sense of community here. I'd never experienced anything like it before. In a big metropolitan area, like the San Francisco Bay Area, one can easily feel lost in a sea of bodies. It's difficult to get to know many neighbors.

On my very first return trip to Ambergris Caye, I was constantly greeted by people who remembered me from the prior year! This occurred on the beach and around town. It was a revelation for me. I seemed to have more friends in San Pedro than in California!

Whether or not they know you, people in San Pedro Town smile and wave at you. And, people help people here, as a matter of course.



Volunteering is very common in San Pedro. Almost everyone gives back to the community in some way. There's always some kind of fundraiser about to occur. Sometimes it's for the Saga Society (Humane Society), Holy Cross School, or Green Reef. But, often the goal is to raise money to help a family or friend in need. This has really touched me to see neighbors helping neighbors daily.

This is why we describe Grand Baymen Belize as a "Caribbean Community". The owners/investors who spend time here become our neighbors. We expect to see them regularly - at the pool, on the beach, or in town. Grand Baymen is a community within a community, especially because we are walking distance from town. It's easy to mingle...

It's also very comforting, at this time of economic and political upheaval, to live in a place where everyone knows and will help you. We all look out for one another...

As always, we hope you'll come and visit us for a Chill Weekend, or at any other time, you feel the desire to experience our Isla Bonita. Be sure to drop by and say hi.

Sincerely,

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May Newsletter Topics

April is a month of many community celebrations in San Pedro. I'd like to share a few of our April community activities that occurred, as well as a few that are coming up soon.

- Ambergris Caye wins another top 10 ranking as a great place to retire!
- Easter is a very special holiday in San Pedro Town. We'll share a few of the events.
- Review of the successful Reef/Lagoon Kayak Eco-Challenge.
- Tacogirl and Tacoboy - Bloggers who illustrate the San Pedro lifestyle.
- April and May Chill Updates.
- Parachuting Event.
- Tres Pescado Fishing Tournament.

Islands Magazine Votes Ambergris Caye a Top 10 Retirement Island - Again!

The Editors of ISLANDS Magazine have again selected Ambergris Caye as one of the **2010 BEST ISLANDS TO LIVE/RETIRE ON!** They will highlight the top ten islands and their rankings in their special annual issue, published in July/August. It's always a best seller.

Ambergris Caye's ranking isn't just a fluke. In 2009, Islands Magazine ranked Ambergris Caye the BEST Island to Live/Retire On. We couldn't agree more! Consistency is the key.



Easter in San Pedro – Kids, Kites and Easter Eggs Underwater...

Belize is a festive country that loves to celebrate holidays, events and parties. Easter is indeed the most important and favorite holiday in Belize. It is a holiday of religious significance for most Belizeans. A high percentage of San Pedranos are Hispanic. Mainly Catholics, they adhere to the rituals of Good Friday and Easter. No one works on Good Friday. And Easter is a day when people spend time with their family and friends.

On Sunday morning, the majority of families attend church. But, come Easter afternoon everyone is out and about. The beach and town are buzzing with activity. There are activities for all, but especially the children. One of the fun activities geared towards the kids is Moose's Kite competition, held at the Exotic Caye Beach Resort, the Grand Baymen Belize beach resort.

Each of the kids who competed was required to design and make their own kite. There were a variety of colors, designs and approaches. Creativity was the name of the game. For instance, many of the kites had many parts that included garbage bags strands and streamers!



The Easter weather and breeze were perfect for kite flying. It was great fun to watch the kids work with their kites. We adults sat on the beach at Crazy Canucks/Exotic Caye Beach Resort, enjoying both the streaming kites and our Easter cocktails. Capturing pictures of multiple kites midstream was indeed a bit of a challenge...





Another new Easter event this year was the underwater Easter egg hunt. Of course, snorkels and diving were involved. The kids, and the adults, had so much fun that this will certainly become another repeat event next year.



The Lagoon-Reef Kayak Eco-Challenge – Protecting Our Reefs and Lagoons

Last month we briefly summarized the grueling Lagoon-Reef Eco Challenge. This is such a fun, lively community event, that it deserves a detailed report this month. The Eco-Challenge is representative of the type of larger community activities that bring residents together in San Pedro Town.

The Eco-Challenge is held each year, in April, to raise awareness that it is critical to protect Belize's offshore reefs and lagoon areas. This event was the brainchild of Elito Arceo, a San Pedrano businessman and environmental activist. Elito owns and operates Seaduced, a very successful San Pedro water sports and tour company.

This year was very special, with 35 teams competing during the sixth year of the race. It was an "all amateurs" race this time. The competition kicked off at 6 AM on Saturday, April 24.

Contestants covered a total distance of 44 miles. Two days were required to complete the challenge. There was a camping stop on Saturday night.



It was indeed a very physically challenging event. But, the competitors also had the opportunity to kayak through beautiful lagoons and remote eco-sensitive areas, such as the Bacalar Chico World Heritage Site.

On Sunday, Mike and I reached the Town Square in time for lunch. The top three paddlers didn't reach the Town Square until after 12:30 PM. The energy and enthusiasm of the crowd was palpable. It seemed that the entire town was waiting on the beach... People waved and cheered, anxiously waiting for their favorite team to cross the finish line.

Boats and water toys crowded the shallow offshore waters, close to the beach shore. Everyone was jostling for the best vantage point in the water. Viewers attempted to stay cool while watching the kayakers paddle through the finish line, and then collapse.



The local beach cantinas were overflowing with locals, expats and visitors. We all enjoyed our delicious lunches and tropical drinks while taking in the show. It was the perfect vantage point to watch the teams drag in, one by one, elated but spent.

Many teams did not survive. The trip on Saturday was grueling. Kayakers paddled against the strong offshore Caribbean winds for over 22 miles.

On Sunday, I was there, able to capture the contestant's relief as they struggled across the finish line. People lined the shores waving, hooting and calling to their friends. The atmosphere was festive and fun. Next year, I plan to volunteer and join a support boat team.

In the end, the Reef Radio's Ranza Boys took the top prize. But there were prizes for all. Good humor prevailed as the following awards were presented:

- Grumpiest team
- Dog Tired Award
- Most Creative Team
- Most Enthusiastic
- Team that got lost
- Team that got smoked
- Oldest Participants.

During the day, there were many activities and games for the kids. They could go seashell hunting, compete in the sand castle building contests, participate in tube racing, or have their face painted.





How Blogging in Belize Led One Couple to Success in San Pedro

This month I would like to introduce you to the couple who started Ambergris Caye's best blog. They have only lived in San Pedro since 2006. But they're well known and recognizable everywhere around town... Their blog, tacogirl.com realistically depicts what it's like to live on Ambergris Caye on a day-to-day basis.

Here in San Pedro Town, Laurie Norton and Paul Jewitt are affectionately known as tacogirl and tacoboy. They're easy going Canadians – low key and modest. They've lived in Belize only four years. Yet, they've become the on-line voice of the Isla Bonita.



Laurie and Paul are part of an emerging trend. Move over Baby Boomers! An increasing number of adventurous 30-40 year olds are making their mark on the local San Pedro Town scene. They come with a bit of savings and a pocket full of dreams. Determined to live on Ambergris Caye, they start a business so they can stick around.

Laurie and Paul had vacationed in places such as the Virgin Islands, Hawaii, Mexico, Puerto Rico and Florida. Each time they returned to Toronto, they were more determined to escape the winters. Laurie kept pushing Paul to make a move to Ambergris Caye - sooner rather than later.

A series of “going nowhere” retail jobs made it easy for Laurie to leave Canada. Paul had worked for high-powered companies like Edward Jones and Mosaic, in advertising and business development. Along the way, he picked up web design. Then he became an independent contractor. So, he felt he’d be able to make a living anywhere.

They finally made the move in January of 2006. Destination – Belize. First stop – San Pedro Town, Ambergris Caye. When they arrived in town, they immediately fell in love with the Isla Bonita and the people. Why San Pedro? Of all the places they had visited Laurie notes, “It’s the quirkiest, funniest, friendliest place.”

The first year in Belize they tightened their belts and became volunteers. “We recommend that everyone volunteer when they move their residencies. It’s a great way to meet people and quickly fit into the community.” Through their volunteering, they easily met new friends. Doors began to open.

In 2007, Paul helped Laurie start a blog about living on Ambergris Caye. Initially, she used it to keep in touch with friends and family. She tried to show them a slice of her new life on this quirky Caribbean island.

Laurie has always focused on giving her readers a fun, colorful, depiction of everyday life on Ambergris Caye. “Little did I realize that due to the Belize message boards, and people’s love for Ambergris Caye, my blog would take off like a rocket and turn into a full time job.”

tacogirl.com is a daily Belize Blog. It’s geared towards expats and travelers. Over the past three years, it’s gained a worldwide following. Readers tune in to get their daily fix of life on Ambergris Caye. It features a mix of island life, travel tips, local news, restaurant and resort reviews.

These days the blog site gets over 300 visitors per day. In 2009, Laurie traveled to San Francisco to accept a Lonely Planet Travel Blogger Award. After only two years, the tacogirl.com blog won their popular vote for the Best Image Blog. It will soon be featured in “Great Destinations Guidebook”.

But what about Paul? He started two more web related businesses. AmbergrisDaily.com is the local news blog he started in October. Recently, he started AmbergrisVacations.com.

Is the Taco Twosome still happy living on Ambergris Caye? “We celebrated our four year anniversary this year and still love every minute of being here. While it has not always been easy, we have no regrets. Making this move was the best thing we ever did.”

If you would like to get a feel for the events and festivities that occur on Ambergris Caye, visit www.tacogirl.com.

April and May Chill Weekends

The Grand Baymen Chill Weekend held on April 23-25 was another success. A group of 20 or so visitors joined us for a weekend of beachfront get togethers, delicious meals, shared camaraderie, informative lectures, tours, and lively music. Attendees came from both coasts, including Vermont and California. There were even a few Irishmen and one Russian present. It was a fun, lively group, so there was no lack of conversation.



The next Chill Weekend is being held on May 28-30th, the Memorial Day Weekend. If you are interested, you can sign up now by clicking on the link below. The cost for the weekend is only

\$299/first person and \$100/second person. This includes two nights at Exotic Caye Beach Resort, five meals, a local tour, and a variety of very helpful presentations about living/retiring in Belize.



[«« Chill Weekend Sign Up - Click here »»](#)

You can now find a list of the planned Chill Weekends on the Exotic Caye Beach Resort website, at www.belizeisfun.com. There is a tab for the Chill Weekends. And, of course, you can use the link above to go directly to the sign up page.

Boogie in Belize Makes the Cover of Parachutist Magazine

The Annual Boogie in Belize Skydiving Event made the cover article for the May 2010 edition of Parachutist Magazine.

The magazine is the official United States Parachute Association publication, which goes out worldwide to over 40,000 members. There is a nice article in the issue entitled ‘Unbelizeable!’

At February’s end, jumpers from around the world escaped winter and gathered at one of the most beautiful tropical boogie locations, the country of Belize, for 10 days of warm weather and skydiving fun.

Congratulations to Rich Grimm and the entire Tsunami Skydivers Team.

Source: *AmbergrisDaily.com* – April 29, 2010 Post



2nd Annual Tres Pescados Slam Tournament – August 12, 13 and 14

Belize has long been known by serious anglers around the world as an outstanding place for sport fishing. The 2nd Annual Tres Pescados Slam Tournament will be held August 12, 13 and 14. This new, but highly visible fly-fishing competition is hitting the mainstream. Already, more teams are signed up than competed last year. If anyone is interested or wants more information, contact the Tournament coordinator, Jim Oliver at 011-501-668-6690 (if calling from the USA). Of course, you can also stop by the Tres Pescados Fly Shop when you visit us at Grand Baymen Belize.

Source: [Ambergris Caye Chamber of Commerce](#)