



Discovering Our Planet Together



Conserving Sharks in Belize

Where Commercial Fishing and Sharks Converge, Help Shape a Sustainable Future for Both



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Just off the coast of Belize, the world's second-largest offshore barrier reef shelters the shoreline, creating wide, shallow stretches of turquoise water over seagrass flats and coral patches. These connected habitats support one of the Caribbean's most productive fisheries, including a healthy shark population. As apex predators, sharks help keep these systems in balance. They're also at risk. A long-standing coastal fishery sustains local communities, but it also puts pressure on shark populations. How these waters are fished and managed will determine whether sharks and fishing communities can continue side by side. For more than a decade, researchers have worked alongside fishers to track shark populations, movement and fishing pressure, defining what it will take to sustain them. Sharks are typically studied where they are protected. Here, the research happens where they are caught, offering rare insight into complex, real-world situations.

Trip Highlights

Head out in small boats to set and haul longlines, then measure, tag and release wild sharks while tracking where they move and how their numbers change over time.

Join local commercial fishers who are also part of the research team on the water, learning how real-world expertise guides data-gathering methods.

Swim in shallow coastal seas, snorkel along the barrier reef with rays, reef fish and sharks, the explore a protected rainforest reserve, watching for howler monkeys, parrots and motmots.



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Itinerary At A Glance

- Day 1**
Belize City, Belize / Placencia
- Day 2**
Placencia / Cockscomb Basin
Wildlife Sanctuary–Private
Rainforest Hike
- Day 3**
Placencia – Reef Exploration
- Days 4 - 6**
Placencia – Shark Conservation &
Coastal Fieldwork
- Day 7**
Placencia / Departure

Conserving Sharks in Belize Itinerary

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Day 1: Belize City, Belize / Placencia

Meet this morning in our hotel for a group breakfast before departing with our Field Guide for the airport for a flight to Placencia, a coastal town set on a narrow peninsula between the Caribbean Sea and a sheltered lagoon in southern Belize. Fishing still defines daily life here—boats head out each morning to the reef and nearby fishing grounds, while small cafes and shops line the village’s single main street. Upon arrival, we’ll transfer to our hotel. After settling in, gather this evening for a welcome dinner and an introduction to the week ahead—how sharks use these waters, how fishing pressure shapes their populations and how this research works with local fishers to reduce catch while building the data used to manage Belize’s shark fisheries.





Day 2: Placencia / Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary–Private Rainforest Hike

Leave the coast and head inland into the Maya Mountains, where Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary protects nearly 150 square miles of tropical forest, rivers and steep ridgelines. Established in 1986 as the world's first jaguar reserve, it remains a vital stronghold for the species. The idea is simple but powerful: protect a top predator, and you protect the ecosystem around it. This model has helped shape modern shark conservation, where these animals are often called the “jaguars of the sea.”

Walk beneath a dense forest canopy alive with sound and motion. Howler monkeys call overhead. Toucans and motmots flash through the branches. Leafcutter ants move in steady lines across the trail. Streams run clear over rock and roots. Jaguars are rarely seen, but they are here; camera traps continue to capture their movement through the basin. An afternoon hike leads to a waterfall deep in the forest, where a shaded pool offers time to swim or rest before returning to the coast.

Back offshore, the Belize Barrier Reef is home to lemon sharks, nurse sharks, tiger sharks and Caribbean reef sharks. As top predators, they help keep the reef in balance. Like jaguars on land, their presence signals a healthy system. In Belize, scientists, fishers and fisheries managers work together to study shark populations inside and outside protected areas. Long-term surveys, combined with generations of local knowledge, help guide sustainable management and keep shark populations strong.

Day 3: Placencia – Reef Exploration

Just offshore, Belize's barrier reef stretches more than 180 miles, forming one of the largest reef systems in the world. It is part of a connected coastal network, linked to seagrass beds and mangrove lagoons that serve as nursery habitat for juvenile fish and sharks and support the fisheries that sustain life along the coast. Explore it today to familiarize ourselves with our rich research site.

In the water, coral formations are alive with movement. Parrotfish graze along the reef while angelfish and wrasse slip through the structure. Schools of snapper shift and tighten together. Rays lift quietly from the sand, and along channels and drop-offs, nurse sharks and reef sharks are sometimes seen.

Later, time with local fishers offers a closer look at how their livelihoods are tied to these waters. Snapper, grouper and lobster are caught using handlines and traps, with fishing shaped by seasonal cycles and a steady path from boat to market. This is where the research comes into focus. Fishers and scientists now work side by side to monitor shark populations, using the same knowledge and techniques once used to catch them. That experience now helps generate data that informs how these waters are managed.



Days 4 - 6: Placencia – Shark Conservation & Coastal Fieldwork

Belize's coastal fisheries support shark species that move between reef, seagrass and nearshore waters—areas where fishing pressure has long been highest. These are the same grounds where longlines have been used for decades, and where this work tracks how shark populations are changing over time.

Work alongside scientists and local fishers leading this monitoring effort. By combining standardized surveys with local knowledge, the team is building a clear picture of shark abundance, distribution and movement in Belize's coastal waters. Your participation in the research provides the vital third strand, incorporating western science, local and Indigenous knowledge and your participation into a more holistic, complementary system. Encounters may include blacktip, nurse and lemon sharks, among other coastal species. Some nights are active; others require patience.

Each afternoon, prepare gear and head out by small boat to set longlines in targeted areas. Lines are hauled after dark, following the same timing used in the fishery. Conditions vary—some evenings are calm, others shaped by wind and current. As sharks are brought alongside the boat, assist with measuring, tagging and recording each individual before release. Learn how repeated sampling builds the data used to assess populations and inform management.

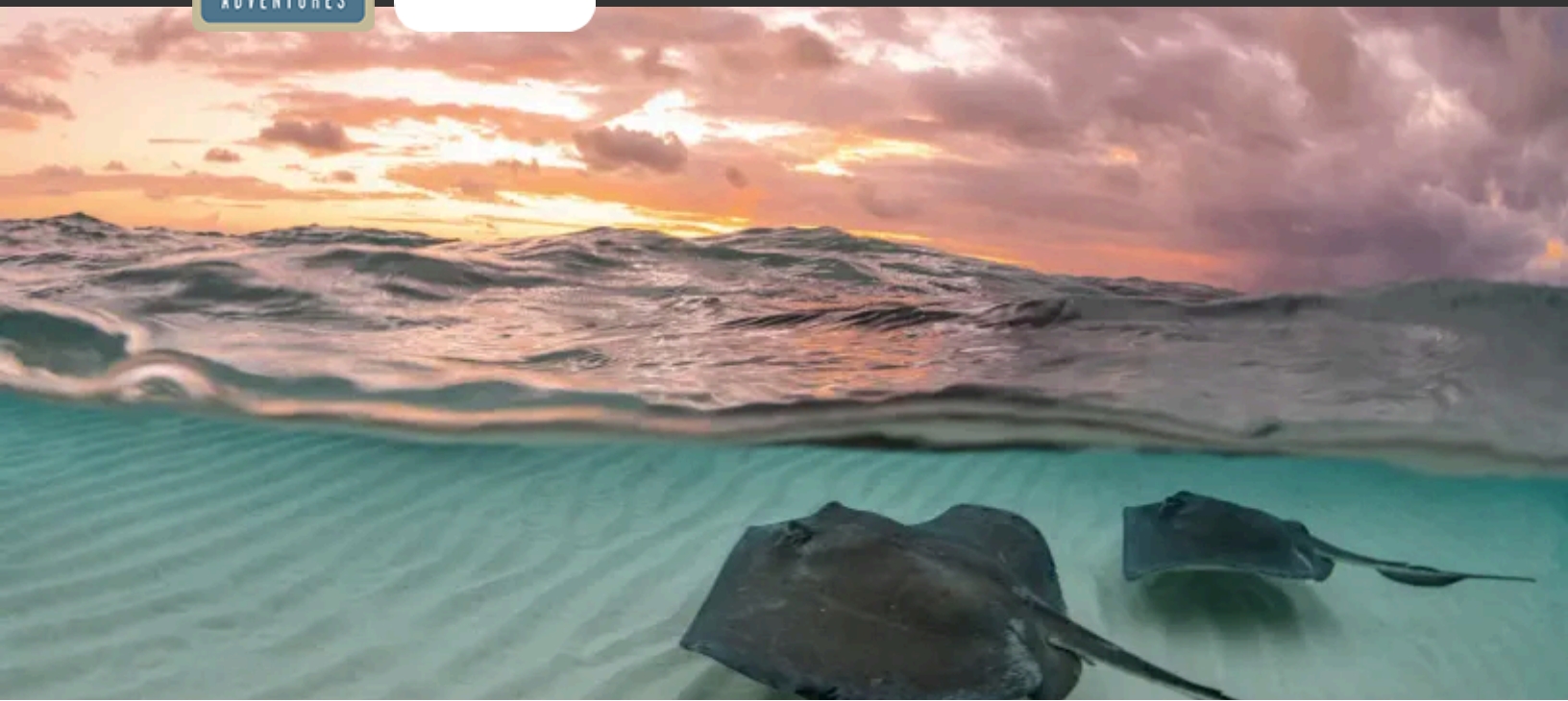
This work is built in collaboration with local fishers, who apply their generational knowledge to locate sharks and carry out fieldwork—using that effort to collect data for fisheries management rather than catch. Time off the water may include reviewing data or preparing for the next outing.

Day 7: Placencia / Departure

This morning, transfer to Belize City for your onward flight home, leaving with a deeper understanding of how shark conservation takes shape here and a renewed appreciation for the research helping sustain Belize's coastal fisheries.



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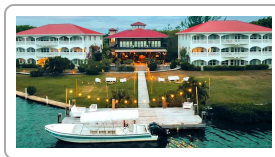
Accommodation Details:

Umaya Resort

For detailed descriptions, visit nathab.com/earthwatch-expeditions/belize-shark-conservation-research-trip/accommodations

Conserving Sharks in Belize Accommodations

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Umaya Resort

Set between the Caribbean Sea and a mangrove-lined lagoon, this beachfront resort offers full-suite accommodations, waterfront dining and a poolside beach bar on Belize's laid-back Placencia Peninsula.



- 1 Take Part in Hands-On Shark Research**

Spend multiple days on the water deploying longlines, then return after dark to haul them in. Work alongside scientists as sharks are brought to the boat for measuring, tagging and data collection before being released.
- 2 Snorkel Along Belize's Barrier Reef**

Enter clear reef waters to swim above coral, rays and schools of fish in the same habitats that support sharks and coastal fisheries.
- 3 Discover a Rainforest Jaguar Reserve**

Travel inland to Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary to hike forest trails and see how protecting apex predators on land informs conservation at sea.
- 4 Spend Full Days on the Water Along the Coast**

Move between research sites by boat, spending hours on the water as conditions shift and the work unfolds across Belize's coastal seascape.
- 5 Join Working Local Fishers Supporting the Research**

See how local fishers read the water, choose sites and interpret conditions, adding depth and precision to the data being collected.
- 6 Work Alongside a Leading Shark Scientist and Research Team**

Join a global leader in shark ecology and supporting field team, many of whom are native to the research area, as data is collected and interpreted in the same waters he has studied for more than a decade.
- 7 Understand the People and Ideas Behind the Research**

Spend time with fishing communities and move between coast and forest to see conservation is put into practice.
- 8 Learn From an Expert Field Guide**

Your Field Guide ensures each day runs smoothly, coordinating logistics and providing personalized support throughout the trip.



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Travel With an Intentionally Small Group

Because we intentionally limit our group size, each participant is guaranteed quality time in the field, meaningful interactions with the scientific research team and an active role in daily research activities.

10

Explore with Purpose

Take part in fieldwork that supports ongoing conservation research, contributing to the protection of sharks and the marine ecosystems they depend on.



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**Dates & Pricing
Summary:**

Prices:
From \$

Group Size:
Limited to
Travelers

Conserving Sharks in Belize Dates, Pricing & Info

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Pricing

See <https://nathab.com/earthwatch-expeditions/belize-shark-conservation-research-trip/dates-fees> for the latest pricing details.

Included

Trip price includes: accommodations, services of Nat Hab's professional Expedition Leader(s), local guides and research staff, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on the final day, some alcoholic beverages, some gratuities, airport transfers on Day 1 and final day, all activities and entrance fees, all taxes, permits, and service fees.

Not Included

Travel to and from the start and end point of your trip, alcoholic beverages, some gratuities, passport and visa fees (if any), optional activities, items of a personal nature (phone calls, laundry, etc.), airline baggage fees, airport and departure taxes (if any), required medical evacuation insurance, optional travel protection insurance.

Mandatory Insurance

Since the areas we travel to are remote and field-based, we require that all guests have, at minimum, medical evacuation insurance for this program. This is for the safety of all guests.

We require that your chosen independent insurance plan includes a **minimum of \$250,000** in medical evacuation coverage.

To protect your investment and provide peace of mind while you travel, we also strongly recommend purchasing comprehensive travel insurance.

Getting There & Getting Home

This trip begins and ends in **Placencia, Belize (PLJ)**. Guests must arrive in Placencia by **3:00 p.m. on Day 1** to meet the group. A member of the research team will meet you at the airport and transfer you to your accommodations.

Departures should be scheduled **no earlier than 10:00 a.m. on the final day** from Placencia.

International flights departing Belize City should be scheduled after **12:00 noon** to allow sufficient connection time.



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