



## TURNEFFE FLATS - ATOLL ADVENTURE OVERVIEW



Our **Atoll Adventure Package** is tailored for those interested in experiencing the wonderful and varied marine ecosystem of Turneffe Atoll. With so much to do, it may take you more than one visit to see everything!

The package features guided activities each day, with our 25-foot boat Abel at your disposal. This is a **very flexible** program and can be tailored to fit the particular interests of each group.

Our Atoll Adventure guides are informative and fun! They know the flora and fauna of Turneffe intimately and are extremely adept at finding interesting things to see. All of our guides are excellent snorkelers and our guests feel comfortable exploring the underwater wonders at Turneffe - even novice snorkelers. And our guides are well-versed in Mayan and Belizean history, which adds to your overall experience.

**About Turneffe Atoll:** Turneffe Atoll is one of only a few coral atolls in the Caribbean. Two others, Lighthouse Atoll and Glover's Atoll, are located in Belize and the fourth is in southern Mexico. These coral atolls were formed through years of coral buildup rather than by volcanic activity – the more common way of atoll formation. The entire atoll is surrounded by a fringe coral reef with depths inside the reef varying from less than a foot to 30 feet. Ocean depths around the atoll are known to reach 3,000 feet.

Approximately 30 miles long and 10 miles across, Turneffe has evolved as a globally significant coastal marine ecosystem. This involves several intimately interrelated habitats: the coral reef, the back reef flats, the sea grass beds, the mangroves and the littoral forest. During your visit, you can learn how these varied habitats are both interrelated and interdependent. You will learn what is required to sustain healthy coral reefs, the functions of the back reef flats, the importance of healthy sea grass beds, and the reasons why mangroves are vital to the entire ecosystem.

In the end, we hope you will agree that the unique environment of Turneffe Atoll warrants continued protection from the threats such as over-fishing and improper development which have decimated much of the coastal ecology elsewhere.

There are several [Atoll Adventure Tours](#) you may choose during your stay at Turneffe Flats:

**[Snorkeling Tours:](#)** You will have the opportunity to experience world-class snorkeling around Turneffe Atoll. Our Atoll Adventure guides know all of the best spots and you will enjoy a variety of different sites depending upon the weather, wind direction and your wishes. You can plan to see a wide variety of tropical reef fishes, rays, sea turtles and lobsters. While snorkeling, you will always be accompanied by our Atoll Adventure guide, who is a master at helping even novice snorkelers feel comfortable in the water. He will make sure that your equipment fits comfortably and will teach you the best snorkeling techniques. Your guide knows all of the interesting marine creatures and will ensure that your snorkeling is fun and educational.

**[Manatee & Dolphin Tour:](#)** Take a boat around the atoll in search of bottlenose and possibly spotted dolphins. Pods of dolphins cruise the shallow water using their sonar system to hunt for fish and crustaceans buried in the sand. They are sometimes attracted by the sound of the engine and will suddenly pop up alongside the boat to have a look at you.

Turneffe is an important location for West Indian Manatees, which grow to 1,300 pounds and trundle along the sea grass beds browsing on sea grasses. Their only living relative is the elephant and they still have toenails on their front flippers even though their back end has evolved into a powerful spatulate tail. These shy, gentle creatures can be seen in many of the creeks around the atoll.

**[Flats Walking Tour:](#)** Just inside the fringe reef, along the seaward side of the atoll, are miles of shallow, gin-clear flats. This is the area where fly fishers search for bonefish and permit, and the flats are alive with sea creatures of all sorts. With a discerning eye and the aid of your guide, you will likely see schools of bonefish, permit, trunk (box) fish, barracuda, small rays, snappers and even small sharks. In the surf, you can sometimes see large parrotfish or triggerfish with their backs half out of the water. The flats are covered with turtle grass, a key habitat for many species of juvenile fish, and the flats protect the coral reef by acting as a sediment filter.

**[Turneffe Atoll Birding Tour:](#)** Approximately 60 species of birds have been identified at Turneffe Atoll. The following are commonly seen: snowy egret, little blue heron, great blue heron, tricolor heron, yellow-crowned night heron, clapper rail, mangrove swallow, brown pelican, magnificent frigate bird, double-crested cormorant, osprey, mangrove warbler, great tailed grackle, golden fronted woodpecker, tropical mockingbird, cinnamon hummingbird, great breasted mango, white crowned pigeon and royal tern.

Seen on occasion are: the belted kingfisher, white-eyed vireo, northern water thrush, barn swallow, peregrine falcon, merlin, common yellowthroat, bay breasted warbler, red-eyed vireo, palm warbler, Cape May warbler, eastern wood pewee, summer tanager, brown booby, Yucatan vireo, hooded oriole, American redstart, least tern and roseate tern.

**[Sea Shell and Starfish Tour:](#)** At several sandy areas around the atoll, you can snorkel above huge cushion sea stars, varying in color from pale yellow to burgundy. There are opportunities to walk the shores of the many small cayes on the atoll where you can see a variety of shells that wash up with each tide. In addition, you may see exoskeletons of long spine sea urchins and intact West Indian sea eggs.

**[The Maya and Turneffe:](#)** Your chief Atoll Adventure guide, Abel Coe, is a Kekchi Maya who grew up in a Mayan village in Southern Belize. Abel will explain the history of the Maya in Belize as well as the traditions and beliefs of the Mayan culture. His wealth of knowledge and ability to share it is something special. Several Mayan fishing villages have been identified on Turneffe Atoll dating back to 400 A.D. Turneffe was clearly part of the intricate Mayan trade routes and artifacts from Turneffe indicate that they traded goods with peoples as far away as Guatemala.

Belize is thought to have been at the center of the Mayan civilization, which was at its peak from 900 B.C. to 900 A.D. Today, the Maya make up approximately 11 percent of Belize's population with several villages still speaking Maya as their first language. Guests will learn more about the three Maya groups inhabiting Belize – the Yuctec, the Mopan and the Kekchi Maya. If you are lucky, you may also run across a Mayan artifact or two.

**Sea Kayaking:** Before or after your guided activities, you can take one of our sit-on-top sea kayaks out for a better look at the surroundings and enjoy the marine life close at hand. While getting some exercise, you can explore the creeks that wind among the mangrove islands, and see a wealth of marine life that inhabits the flats including boxfish, stingrays and bonefish. You can take your snorkel gear along and take a dip when you want to cool off or take a closer look underwater!

**Mainland Tours:** If you wish to do an optional mainland tour, you will first go to Belize City by boat on our supply day (usually Wednesday), where you'll be met by one of the best tour guides in Belize. You can visit a Mayan ruin, the Belize Zoo, or the rain forest. The mainland tour is an additional expense, which can be paid directly to the tour operator. Cost depends upon the tour chosen, ranging from \$55-\$75/person.

**Crocodile Tour:** Turneffe Atoll is one of the largest remaining nesting areas in the Caribbean for the docile and threatened American crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*). Join our Atoll Adventure guide for a leisurely boat ride around the mangrove islands for the opportunity to see these crocodiles in their natural habitat. You are likely to see crocs sunning themselves or swimming in isolated lagoons. You may even see crocodile nests and possibly baby crocodiles. Unlike the Australian and African Crocodiles, the American Crocodile mostly eats fish and is very timid. When approached while sunning on the shore, they scurry for the safety of the water and submerge. Your Atoll Adventure guide will teach you about these fascinating creatures and help you spot as many as possible.

**Lighthouse Atoll – Snorkeling & Birding Tour:** Conditions allowing, you will have an opportunity to spend the day at the southern end of the Lighthouse Atoll. Your first stop will be The Great Blue Hole (\$40 per person entrance fee not included). This amazing structure was formed millions of years ago when the roof of an underground cave collapsed. Today the cave is filled with seawater and forms a circular hole 1,000 feet in diameter and 480 feet deep.

Next you will visit Half Moon Caye. This small caye was established as a Crown Reserve in 1928 and became the first marine reserve in Belize. Here a colony of red-footed boobies nest in the tops of the zircote trees. Almost all of these 4,000 birds display the rare white color phase. The magnificent frigate bird with its 7-foot wingspan also shares this rookery. Since they cannot land on water, frigate birds mostly feed by harassing the boobies until they drop their catch. Some 98 other species of birds have been documented on the caye including ospreys, great-tailed grackles, cinnamon hummingbirds and white-crowned pigeons.

After a picnic lunch under the shade of the palm trees, we'll set off for Long Caye to snorkel The Aquarium where you can watch from above as divers feed thousands of Bermuda chub, sergeant majors and yellowtail snappers with leftover bread. If we're lucky, a large pod of common dolphins or spinner dolphins will escort us part of the way back to Turneffe Flats.

*Note: Lighthouse Atoll is primarily a scuba diving attraction and if no divers are at the resort during your week, the boat will not be going there.*

**Mangrove Snorkeling:** Mangroves are the backbone of Turneffe, as well as all coastal marine habitat in the region. They provide essential nursery habitat for a diverse community of fish and are an essential component of the entire ecosystem. In addition, they provide a protective barrier against storms and help sustain the coral reef. Take a peek into this fascinating world by snorkeling among the juvenile snappers, grunts, lobsters, nurse sharks and turtles.

**Belizean Cooking Class:** Spend part of a day in the kitchen with one of our cooks where you'll learn how to prepare empanadas, tamales or garnaches the Belizean way. This is more than a cooking class; it is a culture class and you'll be sure to go home with great recipes and fond memories.

**Discover Scuba Diving Course:** Have you ever wondered about scuba diving? During your stay, you may want to spend a few half-days learning about and experiencing the excitement of scuba diving. Our dive instructors offer this introductory course, which consists of basic scuba instruction followed by two shallow dives. There is an additional charge for this course of \$185 + tax, which includes all necessary equipment and instruction.

### **Turneffe Flats**

**Lodging:** Our accommodations include eight large seaside cabanas, two spacious three-bedroom villas, and one two-bedroom villa. Our seaside cabanas have a panoramic view of the Caribbean and Turneffe Atoll reef. The Reef Villa and Pelican Villa are also located right on the beach and have wonderful views of the reef in both directions. The Garden Villa is set back from the beach with a panoramic view of our lush grounds as well as the Caribbean. All rooms are air-conditioned, and most are furnished with two beds. All rooms have private bathrooms.

**Dining:** Three delicious meals daily feature a mixture of Belizean and International cuisine including seafood, beef, chicken and pork dishes. Served family-style in the main lodge, our meals offer options for different palates and always include fresh fruits, freshly-baked breads and pastries. A comfortable lounge area and well-stocked bar in the main lodge provide a focal point for evening gatherings.

**Other Activities:** Sightseeing, superb snorkeling and fly fishing are other reasons people visit Turneffe Flats. Fishing (all catch and release) is mostly done on the flats, and anglers are rarely seen by divers. We also offer combination Scuba Diving and Fishing Packages for people who want to enjoy both activities.

**Getting to Turneffe Flats:** Commercial flights arrive in Belize City. You will be met by our representative and transported to the Radisson Marina where you will board our boat for a beautiful 90-minute ride to Turneffe Flats.

### **DON'T FORGET TO BRING:**

- Mask, fins and snorkel (limited number & sizes available for rent)
- Wetsuit (these are not available for rent at the lodge but we can make arrangements for you)
- Polarized sunglasses
- Sun hat
- Lightweight long-sleeve shirt and long pants for sun protection and repelling insects
- Sun mask or "buff"
- Water bottle
- Sunscreen (reef-friendly and mineral-based) and insect repellent
- Rain jacket
- Camera
- Binoculars
- First aid medications (including a cortisone cream for sunburn and insect bites)
- Prescription medications





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