



Girl Scouts in Belize

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Girl Scouts love to work on community service projects and travel. A recent trip was an opportunity to do both. Twenty girls and 15 adults traveled to the Central American country of Belize. Five troops participated over eight exciting days, traveling from Belize City, to the jungles of San Ignacio, to the oceanic beaches of Placencia.

The goal was to inspire our Girl Scouts through global travel, they might learn the value of giving to others. This culturally immersive experience helped the girls' gain leadership skills. They worked on a local service project with The Girl Guides Association of Belize, an organization similar to Girl Scouts.

We started off the first day at 4:00 am at the airport, and arrived in Belize City around noon. The best part of the day (and the best part of the trip) was meeting the Girl Guides of Belize. They warmly welcomed us with a homemade lunch of chicken, coleslaw, rice and beans, and bread pudding. We soon learned the difference between rice and beans and beans and rice – the former is cooked together, while the latter is cooked separately. This was an important distinction we had to pay attention to when ordering food later on the trip.

After sharing lunch with the Girl Guides, we got to work. We began painting chairs and tables for the preschool run by the Girl Guides, while engaging in more conversation with the Girl Guides. We got to learn about their culture, and we hope that they will get to come to Washington, D.C., to learn about ours!

The next day we traveled to duPlooy's Jungle Lodge. For the next couple of days out of the lodge, we visited the Belize Zoo, and Xunatunich Mayan Site (an ancient archeological site), and then went zip-lining and cave tubing.

Another one of our service activities was Pack for a Purpose! Pack for a Purpose is a project where a small amount of space in each Girl Scout's luggage was used to pack supplies needed by community projects in Belize. We donated school supplies for the upcoming school year to the Belize Zoo and the Belize Ocean Club.

On Day Five, we visited St. Herman's Blue Hole National Park on the way to Belize Ocean Club. Belize Ocean Club is on the Placencia Peninsula in southeastern Belize. On one side of the peninsula is the ocean, and on the other is the lagoon. The lagoon is home to various wildlife species, including crocodiles, which we learned about from a presentation by the Crocodile Research Coalition (CRC). The CRC is a Belize-based nonprofit, established in 2016. Dr. Marisa Tellez, co-founder (and former Girl Scout!) gave a captivating presentation highlighting why crocodile conservation and preservation is important. The CRC engages with, not only the crocodiles in Central America, but also the people who call Central America their home. They work hard to educate local communities because the citizens are the key to conservation.

Day Six was the long-awaited snorkeling outing! After a 30-minute boat ride, we arrived at Laughing Bird Caye National Park for snorkeling. Many of us were beginners and enjoyed this new experience. We even saw a stingray swimming right under us. The coral reef we swam over was being restored by Fragments of Hope, a community-based organization located on the Placencia Peninsula. They work on restoring of the Belize Barrier Reef System and advocating for the sustainable management of associated habitats. After learning about barrier reef restoration and seeing the progress ourselves, we ate lunch grilled right on the island, and got to sunbathe, swim, and clean up the beach before going snorkeling again.

We spent our final day visiting the town of Placencia, and doing activities like swimming and kayaking at the Belize Ocean Club. Later that day, we wished Girl Scout Ambassador Stephanie Crawford a Happy 18th Birthday, and headed off to pack and sleep before our 5:00 am departure.

We want to extend our gratitude to the church for all of your support for this trip. It was an unforgettable experience as we got to learn about Belizean culture and share some of our culture with the Girl Guides, visit cultural sites, try traditional Belizean food, and learn from all of the people we met.