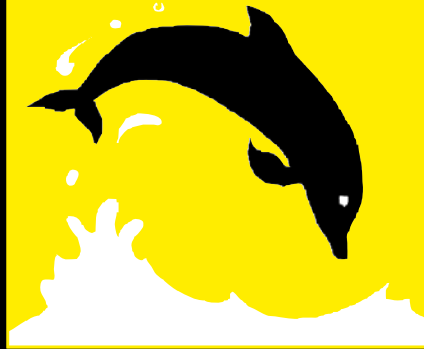


THE SAN PEDRO SUN VISITOR GUIDE



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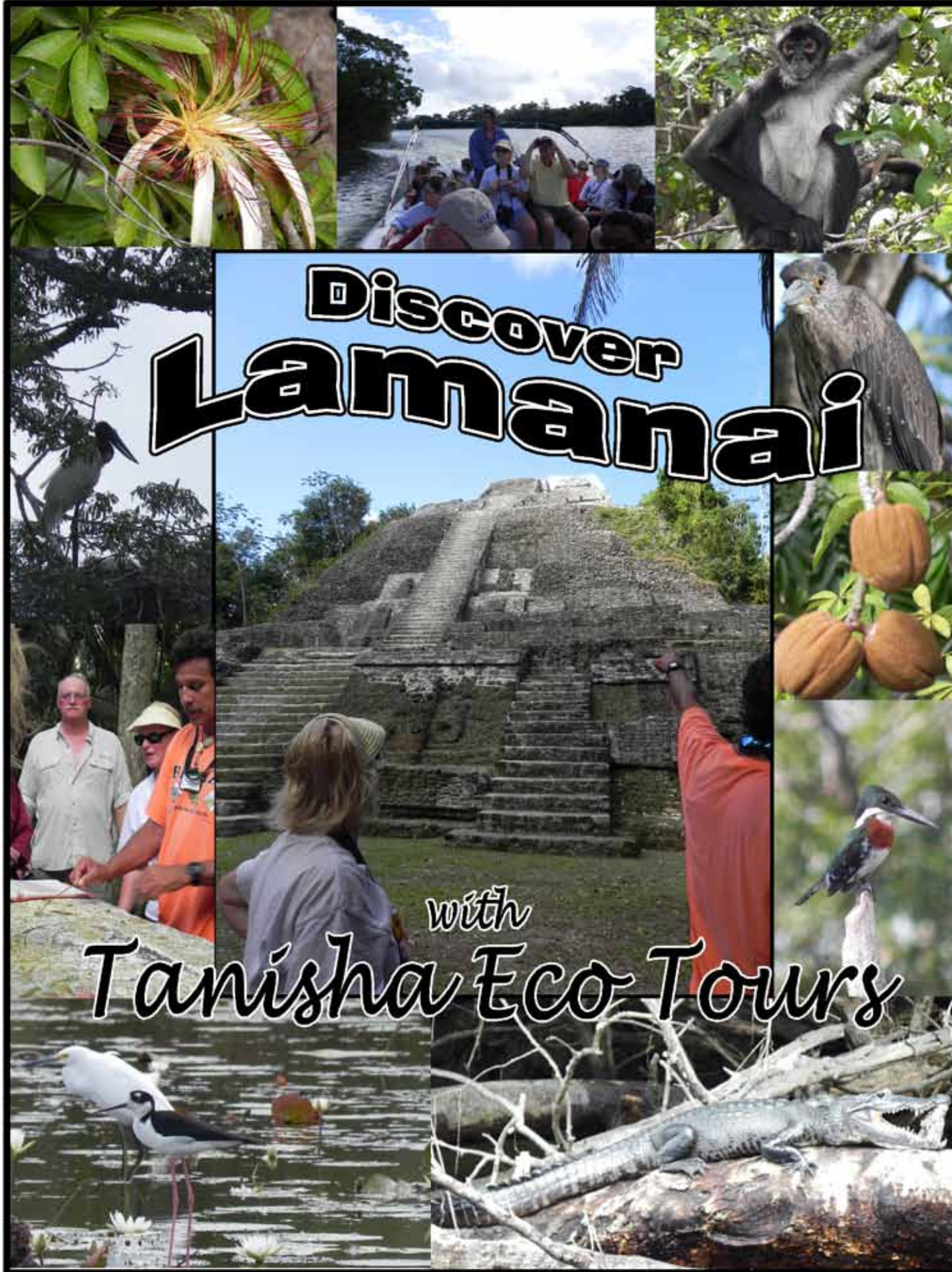
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#08



February 24, 2011

FREE

Ambergris Caye, Belize
Central America



It has been a couple years since I had the treat of traveling to the Lamanai Ruins in the Orange Walk District of northern Belize. Although I have explored the area many times I always anticipate the trip with excitement. Each journey promises new and different experiences that are guaranteed to delight my “inner explorer” and I could easily make a monthly pilgrimage to this Mayan site if time and finances allowed. Just getting there is half the fun!

We leave from San Pedro at 7AM; the early day is greeted with a spectacular sunrise while we wait for our boat from Tanisha Eco Tours to pick us up. When our vessel arrives we are welcomed by tour company owner and guide extraordinaire Daniel Nuñez and his two assistants. In all, our group totals 27, and although some of us are still bleary-eyed there is no doubt we are ready for a day of exploration. Before making way to the mainland Daniel gives us a little introduction on where we will be traveling and what we hope to see along the way. Once we have been properly briefed he puts the boat into full throttle and off we go, skimming the Caribbean waters headed on our exotic expedition.

After passing a chain of cayes with colorful names like Cangrejo (Crab) Caye, Caye Caulker, Caye Chapel, Long Caye, Coffee Caye and even Chicken Head Caye, we come out into the open waters off the mainland coast. Along the way we stop to admire Bottlenose dolphins gracefully cresting the water surface and shy manatees that only choose to show us their nose. As we enter the Belize River, we are surrounded by Red Mangrove and find orange and green iguanas sunning in the treetops. Daniel slows the boat to an easy cruise and a light breakfast

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Lamanai Continued from Page 1



Black-collared Hawk



Spider Monkey



Visitors birdwatch along the way to Lamanai

journey showcases a variety of birds including Boat-billed Herons, Black-necked Stilts, Snowy Egrets, Green Kingfishers, Northern Jacana, Purple Gallinule and Green Herons to name a few. Another highlight is an up-front and personal meeting with a pair of Spider monkeys and spotting several freshwater Morelet's

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of fresh baked banana bread and juices are passed around. Shortly afterwards our boat docks and we board a van where we travel on the Northern Highway to Orange Walk. Through open savannahs to pine tree barrens, the landscape of Belize unfolds before us. Along the way we stop to admire a pair of stately Jabiru Storks tending to their huge nest. The Jabiru Stork is a rare bird that is endangered throughout its range. One of the largest birds in the New World, the Jabiru stands five feet tall and has a wingspan of eight feet. Its heavy black bill is about a foot long and is perfectly designed to catch fish, frogs and snakes. Recent studies have confirmed that Belize has the healthiest breeding population of Jabirus for all of Central America, and we consider it a special treat to see these majestic birds.

Next stop is at Toll Bridge where we load onto another boat and head out on the New River. The 26 mile

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Lamanai

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crocodiles basking on the riverbanks. As we approach our destination, we spot the crest of the High Temple of Lamanai crowning the tree tops while the ancient ruins remain hidden, cradled within the confines of lush jungle on the bank of the New River Lagoon.

Of course the first matter of business when disembarking is restroom breaks and lunch, as we need to fuel up for our walking tour of the ruins. Under a covered eating area the Tanisha team puts out an impressive spread of classic Belizean rice and beans with stewed chicken, coleslaw, potato salad and fried plantains, yummy! With full tummies we are ready to take on the jungle, and we gather around Daniel as he begins the tour.

Lamanai, pronounced Lama'an Ai, means "submerged crocodile" in Yucatec Maya and was once a considerably sized city of the Maya civilization. The site's name is pre-Columbian, recorded by early Spanish missionaries, and documented over a millennium earlier in Maya inscriptions as Lam'an'ain. It is clear that Daniel is proud of his Belizean heritage and his passion for the ruins and the surrounding flora and fauna is infectious. Not only does he have an extensive knowledge of Mayan history, he is well versed in the natural world as well. His quick eye spots birds and animals we are oblivious to and just minutes into our walk he finds a Black-headed Trogon in a tree above us and a cute pair of Mottled Owls looking down at us with wide, blinking eyes.

Eight major plazas make up the core of Lamanai and as we tour the compound we learn about the Mask Temple, which has just undergone restoration. The magic of the area is accentuated with the growl of Howler monkeys deep in the tangled forest and we are transported back to a time when the Mayan kingdom ruled the area. Throughout the tour we discover the amazing history behind this archeological treasure and not only are we mesmerized by Mayan mystique but in awe of the jungle that embraces it. When we reach the High Temple the tempta-

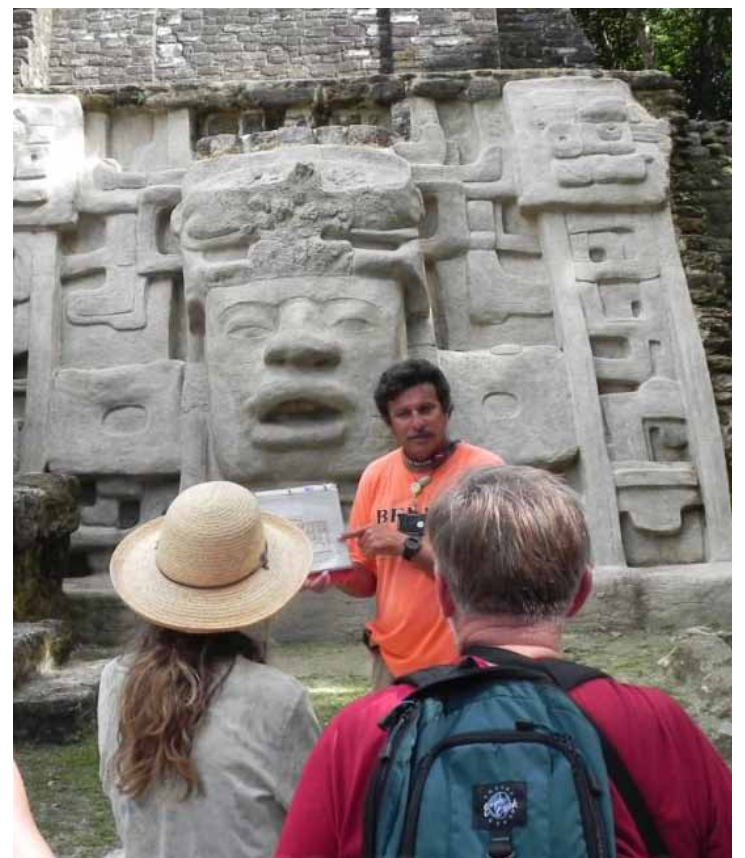
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Mottled Owls



Howler Monkey



Knowledgeable guide Daniel Nuñez is a pioneer in the Lamanai tour, and he is full of information, making the tour a must-do when in Belize.



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Lamanai Continued from Page 4



Purple Gallinule



Northern Jacana



The Mask Temple

tion to see the view from the top overcomes the hesitation to climb the hundreds of steep stairs and although we are hot, sweaty and winded when we finally accomplish our ascent the breathtaking panoramic view of the jungle and snaking river below is one we will remember forever. After we descend from the temple we visit the Ball Court where we learn about the ancient game they played. We spend a

couple hours exploring and learning about the magnificent Maya and before concluding our tour we get a chance to shop for souvenirs at a few gift shops near the on-site Museum which hosts a complete history of Lamanai along with excavated artifacts.

Once back on the boat the Tanisha team breaks out cool and refreshing Rum Punch and cold beers for our

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Lamanai

Continued from Page 5

journey back, and we are all happy campers as we take in the river views along the way. Bird enthusiasts are delighted when we spot a Black-collard hawk who poses for the cameras and Daniel points our various water channels that were constructed centuries ago as irrigation systems by the Maya Indians.

It is sunset by the time we reach San Pedro, and all though we are weary from a long day we are enthused about the adventure. A trip like this can be a once in a life time experience, and Tanisha Tours has the expertise to make that memory one you will cherish for years. If you just take one mainland trip while visiting La Isla Bonita, let Lamanai enchant you with one of the best Belizean adventures in the county.

For more information about Tanisha Eco Tours you can visit them at the Hurricane Ceviche Bar on the beach or call 226-2314. Their email address is: tanishatours@btl.net or visit them online at <http://www.tanishatours.com>.

By: Tamara Sniffin



Boat-billed Heron



Cute children showing their brightest smiles properly greet guests upon arrival!



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