

What can you tell me about Hol Chan Marine Reserve?

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Off the southern tip of Ambergris Caye is Belize's oldest marine reserve, the Hol Chan Marine Reserve. Hol Chan is Mayan for "little channel." The entire reserve focuses on a cut through the reef (called a quebrada) which is little more than 25 yards (23 m) wide and 30 feet (9 m) deep about 4 miles southeast of San Pedro.

The reserve was formed primarily as a community-based initiative due to concern over the high level of uncontrolled, often destructive fishing and diving activities in the area. Reserve status was also called for by international organizations such as the New York Zoological Society (NYZS) and Peace Corps, due to the unique formation of the channel, the abundant fishery resources (including conch and lobster) and the feasibility of including an interlinked system of coral reef, seagrass and mangrove habitats in this area.

The entire reserve covers approximately three square miles (7.8 sq km) and is divided into four zones:

Zone A - The Reef

Zone B - The Seagrass Beds

Zone C - The Mangroves

Zone D - Shark Ray Alley

All four zones are clearly marked on the surface by buoys. Zone A through C each represents one of the major marine habitat types in Belize. Zone D was recently added as a location where nurse sharks and southern sting rays congregate.

Realizing the importance of the coral reef community off Ambergris Caye, Belize, the Government of Belize established the Hol Chan Marine Reserve on May 2, 1987. Shark Ray Alley was officially declared Zone "D" of the Hol Chan Marine Reserve on August 31st, 1999.

Due to its protected status, what was once a depleted fishing area has now been allowed to re-generate, providing an unparalleled diving/snorkeling experience for visitors and an important refuge for marine life along the northern section of the Belize Barrier Reef.

Click here (<https://ambergriscaye.com/holchan>) for more information.

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