

Roatan is well-known for incredible beaches



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Roatan Reconnect

SAM ION



Wendy and I are sisters of the heart. We've worked together, travelled together, owned a business together, and of course, we like to laugh together. Between the two of us we have cats, dogs, grown up kids, husbands and careers. We live busy lives, two hours apart, so we make do with phone calls, email, Facebook, and by getting together once a year or so, on a vacation just for us.

This year, as usual, we sat on the phone looking over the holiday brochures to decide where to go. This time it was Roatan, Honduras.

Roatan is one of the Bay Islands, 56 Km from the Atlantic Honduras coastline in Central America. Shaped like a string bean, it is 50 km long yet always under 8 km wide.

Off the beaten tourist path, it was a refuge long ago of pirates and adventurers who were mostly English and Spanish. The island has been a disputed trophy, which is why English is widely spoken, as well as Spanish, and in some cases the native language, Garifuna.

This history is why there is a lovely combination of British and Afro-Caribbean architecture. The majority of the islanders are of Afro-Caribbean descent and make a living from fishing. Many live in the sheltered New Orleans-style port town of Coxen Hole on the south side, in picture pretty clapboard houses often set on piles directly over the water.

It's a flip-flops and fins kind of holiday, so Wendy left her cocktail dresses and evening shoes at home and packed her flippers and mask instead.

Once we got there, it was easy to see why the divers have long kept it a secret: the island offers some of the last unspoiled Caribbean. Our chosen accommodation was the Fantasy Island Beach Resort situated on a 21-acre private island accessed by a quaint bridge. We were looking for quiet, sun, and gorgeous water and beach. We found it.

Roatan is part of the most bio diverse barrier reef in the world and has fabulous scuba diving. Importantly for us non-divers, this also meant fabulous snorkeling, and calm crystal clear waters where we played in the turquoise sea.

The tranquility, natural beauty and location were wonderful. It's rare today to find a place so laid-back, just like being at the cottage without having to cook meals and change sheets. We were just steps from the ocean, and when we weren't in it, we could sit on our deck with a glass in our hands and look at it. In the morning all the divers left and the resort was empty. If there were 20 people on the beach for the rest of the day, we considered it crowded.

A curious capuchin monkey



We took one of the included kayaks out on the sheltered waters, and still catching up, talked while we explored the shoreline with its little coves, mangroves and pristine beaches.

Another great thing about our Roatan experience was the wildlife all around our resort. Peacocks let us hand feed them, and we loved interacting with a family of three monkeys, with the baby on the mom's back the whole time.

We had our laptops and used the Wi-Fi in the lobby to check on family and business. By the time we finished moaning about what was happening at home "you won't believe it, he couldn't find the vacuum!" - it was time for a drink and a swim.

As time flew by we had to make choices. We passed on checking out the local wildlife in the bars and clubs of West End, the party hardy area with plenty of discos, restaurants and bars. We used the divers as mentors and went to bed early.

I did shop for the unique black, taupe, and brown Honduran pottery to add to my collection - but we were careful to visit the cute little shops in Coxen Hole on the day when there wasn't a cruise ship in port, (when prices inevitably go up).

We had a wonderful time and for the first time ever, we're planning on going back to the same destination. We can hardly wait till next year.

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The reef is magnificent. You can start from a gazebo on the shore and swim across a short channel to a reef. It goes on for many kilometers and you can spend hours snorkeling.

We snorkeled often because it was so easy. Not to mention we saw every type of fish among good healthy corals, including spotted mantas, moray eels...fish you could scarcely imagine. Even a sea turtle, now unfortunately increasingly rare.

For a small fee, you can also go out with the dive boats if there is room, and snorkel right from the boat. The water is clear and you can see the reef easily.

The hotel's dive operation has at least four boats, the one we were on is quite new and the crew was great. Other divers on the boat raved about the quality of the dive operation and the great value of the dive packages on Roatan compared to other destinations in the Caribbean.

Guests are tired at night and often in bed by nine. There is very little entertainment but there is little need for it and the beach bonfires were party enough...besides we always had talking to do.

A typical Roatan house on stilts

