



THE NATURALIST

Set off on Adventure

There is nothing like exploring the world, hands-on. And doing it with good friends only makes the experience better. On an Earth Explore Adventure you learn about your planet, its cultures, and how it all works together. We go to the most spectacular places on Planet Earth to explore the diversity of environments that makes our world so special.

Our partners are true experts, and the activities and learning adventures they provide are *available only to Earth Explore participants. That means on our adventures you can walk jungle trails and climb temples in Belize, hike into a volcano and meet elders in Hawaii, explore the ruins of Pompeii and the art of Michelangelo in Italy, view wild grizzlies and walk on a glacier in Alaska, measure geysers and dig for dinosaurs in Wyoming, and kayak*



with sea otters and cruise with whales in Monterey. And that's just for starters. Designed to our specifications, for our participants only, each activity is sure to excite and inspire our students. And that's really what Earth Explore is all about. To learn more, go online to earthexplore.com.

Grab some credit!

How about earning some academic credit on your Earth Explore program? Scores of students do it each year and it's a great way to get even more out of your experience. Earth Explore works with Araura College's Pacific Studies Outreach Center to make high school-equivalent credit available to every student who wants to earn it. Check out the article inside this newsletter for more detailed information.

Leaders-A Great Resource

In order to have a successful, rewarding program, you need to have the best adult leadership available. That's where our Educator/Leaders come in. Each Earth Explore Leader is a unique person. He or she must be an active classroom educator who is recommended to us by a parent. All of our Leaders are great with kids and enjoy sharing time with them. They are also adept at providing the proper supervision and guidance through the trip.

Here is what Leaders Amber Reue and Michele Pecori had to say about their experiences:

"Thank you so much for the wonderful opportunity that Earth Explore gave me. It was truly a trip of a lifetime! Everything was well planned out and very smooth. I was very impressed with each aspect of the trip; from the food to the lodging to the activities. Way to go!"
Amber Reue, TX Leader

"I had a great time. I feel as though each of the children learned and grew enormously on this trip, which was wonderful to see. I loved watching the students and the leaders absorb and master so much information at each location. We had amazing discussions."
Michele Pecori, VA Leader

Belize Adventure Timeline

What happens when?

July-December

During this part of the year, Earth Explore accepts registrations from teachers and students, and the majority of groups form. Many of our Adventure destinations will reach capacity during this period. Students receive quarterly copies of the program newsletter, *the Naturalist*, as well as a study guide called the *Adventure Guide*. For many groups the initial Preparation Session may take place during this period.

January-April

In the early part of this period additional teacher registrations may be accepted, depending upon available space in our Adventures. The final groups will form early in this period. All students take part in program Preparation Sessions during this period, during which the spring edition of the program newsletter, *the Naturalist*, is received. Health Forms are sent to all enrolled students, completed and returned to group leaders.

May-July

During this period students receive their program caps, credentials, T-shirts, and other travel-related materials. In May, a detailed day-to-day itinerary is mailed to each family, which lists all accommodations, activities and daily scheduling. Final groupings take place, and air tickets are forwarded to leaders in late May or early June. Final Preparation Sessions for most groups occur at this time as well. Groups depart on their programs generally between June 10th and July 15th.

Climb a Mayan Temple

There are few more awesome experiences than emerging from the jungle to encounter a Mayan Temple, frozen in time. At Xunantunich and other sites, excavation continues as archaeologists work to unlock the mysteries of the Mayan culture. At around 130 feet, the towering pyramid of El Castillo is among the most magnificent Mayan structures in Belize, and the view from the top is breathtaking. Xunantunich was a major ceremonial site before falling into ruin more than 1000 years ago. Here we probe the mysteries of the Mayan culture, and with expert guides, examine the magnificent structures left behind. Scientists know the unearthed city contains temples and other important sites, but the mystery of why classical Mayan culture collapsed remains a mystery.



Parents' Perspective

"The program exceeded my son's expectations. The first night home he wished he was still with his Earth Explore delegation. He really missed all the activities."

"My son saw and did so many different types of experiences. It exceeded our expectations. The program was well laid out."

"I feel that my daughter grew educationally, socially and in problem-solving. She shares many thoughts, things she learned, experiences that indicate her growth."

"His level of independence grew tremendously. He also learned some valuable money skills and travel skills. Our son had a wonderful time. We would recommend the program."

"She had to learn to take care of herself without relying on us and know the importance of responsibility. She expected to have fun and learn something at the same time and had a wonderful time."

"I think this program is wonderful. It helps them to begin to focus on the future and what's available to them."

"His confidence has increased and he seems more considerate of other's feelings. He was very pleased with the program."

Academic Credit

As part of their participation in the Earth Explore learning experience, every accepted student has the opportunity to earn high school credit for their work. In a program funded by Earth Explore, one Carnegie credit (the equivalent of a semester-long high school course), as well as up to 90 service learning hours, are awarded to students who successfully complete their research and journal assignments. Entitled *Exploring Earth Ecosystems*, the curriculum has been specially designed by the Pacific Studies Outreach Center to enhance and complement the hands-on learning available on the program. Complete information on the credit option is sent to each Earth Explore Student Naturalist upon acceptance into the program.



Belize's Tobacco Caye a natural paradise

One of the major attractions of Belize are the pristine offshore coral reefs that form a barrier to the open ocean. Sheltering a staggering variety of tropical fish species, the reefs are a showcase of marine ecosystems. We make our home at Tobacco Caye for two days of amazing snorkeling and kayaking among the rich coral reefs and vibrant marine life. In addition to butterfly fish, parrotfish and other colorful species, we may see moray eels, sea turtles, the friendly nurse shark. Located 12 miles offshore from Dangriga, the string of coral cayes that includes Tobacco Caye are dotted with coconut palms and white sand beaches.

Because the Tobacco Reef is so unspoiled, scientists have flocked here



Leader reflections

As educators, each Earth Explore Leader brings something special to the program, and hopefully takes something special away as well. Leaders Alina Henninger of Dumfries, Virginia and Marie Gehrig of Beach Park, Illinois, sent these impressions:

"This program encompasses all things that I would wish or hope for any child. Each of us came to Earth Explore a bit timid and anxious, but soon found ourselves a part of a family away from home. We depended upon one another, shared knowledge and experiences with each other, and grew together during our adventures. The students really seemed to build their confidence, independence and knowledge base." Alina Henninger

"I wanted to personally thank Earth Explore for selecting me to chaperone the June trip. I can't describe what a wonderful experience I had. The students were great and the leaders were wonderful. It was an experience I will never forget. This trip was the perfect example of what hands-on learning can do for students. The knowledge I saw these students acquire was amazing." Marie Gehrig



from around the world to study coral reef ecosystems, and monitor their health. One of the cayes is home to the Smithsonian Institution's Marine Lab. Another houses the International Zoological Expeditions study center. Marine biologists use this site to monitor water temperatures and other factors that effect coral growth and fish populations. With global warming affecting coral reefs all over the world, this work is an important window into the health of the world's coral reef systems.

We spend relaxing time at the reef, snorkeling from the shore to discover an undersea paradise of ocean life unlike any in the world.



Fundraising...Just do it!

Mrs. Esther Cooper's daughter Gabrielle participated in the Rockies Adventure program from New Jersey: *"I called for the fundraising packet, and ended up learning so much more than I could have ever dreamed. On March 1st, I started our first fundraiser. I set up a candle sale, a sub and pizza sale, and a bowlathon. Gabrielle and I made up information packets from your web-site, explaining about your organization and the trip itself...we included a letter about Gabrielle and her desire to be able to attend this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. By the end of March, I was able to pay over half the tuition. I breathed, slept and ate fundraising. It was during this time that I started to realize that I was learning a lesson about life, and people and caring. My daughter and my son were learning that anything in this world is possible if you really want it and are willing to work to get it. The outpouring of generosity and offers for help just amazed me. There are no words to express my gratitude for the incredible gift this adventure has given my child. Thank you all at Earth Explore for the lessons and confidence I have gained from this. Now when I'm asked if I think I can do it, my answer will be, of course I can!"*

Cockscomb Basin Sanctuary--Home to the Jaguar

As the world's first and only jaguar sanctuary, Cockscomb Basin is a spectacular environment of deep and pristine tropical forest protecting a staggering variety of rare plants and animals. Its isolation is one of the things that helped to protect the Basin. Hemmed in on all sides by ridges and mountains, Cockscomb Basin is home to four other species of wild cat besides the Jaguar: the puma, ocelot, margay, and small jaguarundi. Overhead are the jungle's largest birds of prey, the solitary and white hawk eagles, part of a bird population of over 300 species including the spectacular scarlet macaw, the keel-billed toucan and others. The jungle here was selectively logged, and the resulting thick canopy creates a perfect home for a rich variety of species.

The Belize Audubon Society manages the Sanctuary which was finally set up to prohibit hunting of the jaguar in the 80s, and expanded a few years later. Here we will explore jungle trails into the heart of the rainforest, gaze upward at noisy and colorful tropical birds, and know that in the forest nearby, the nocturnal jaguar and other cats have found a safe home.

The Howler Monkey--Just call me Baboon

Swinging through the trees, their unmistakable call can be heard throughout the tropical jungles of Belize. The Howler is aptly named for its loud calls from treetops. However, in Belize, the black howler monkey is known to natives by a different



name, the baboon. Deforestation and declining populations throughout Central American have spurred efforts to protect the species in Belize. Our students will enjoy hearing the howler's call as we hike jungle trails in search of this entertaining primate.



Belize Zoo--A taste of the Tropical Jungle

World famous for its educational programs and preservation efforts, the Belize Zoo is a must for visitors



to the country, and a great resource for Earth Explore groups. The zoo is home to more than 60 native Belizean species, allowing visitors to discover them in natural settings. The truth is that even the most intrepid explorer would be hard-pressed to see a fraction of these animals in the wild. Many are nocturnal, and the thick jungle vines and dense forest canopy limit viewing. At this facility, the animals protected in enclosures that closely approximate their natural habitats. A man-made oasis of ponds, rainforest and flower gardens, the 30 acre zoo is committed to both protection and education.



Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Preserve Waterfalls and Rivers

In the heart of tropical Belize, the pine forested Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Preserve is a wonderland of waterfalls, rivers, caves and Mayan history. Unusual in the tropics, the pine forested slopes were the result of the higher elevation of the area, and the nutrient poor granite that underlies the area. Here we explore the Big Rock Falls for swimming, and take tubes down a tropical river. This area is rich in Mayan history. In caves in this area, Mayan's conducted rituals of prayer and sacrifice. Archaeologists are actively at work interpreting the artifacts left behind.

Near Xunantunich we cool off with a refreshing tubing trip down a tropical river. Exotic bird species are often visible along the river, and rope swings provide a thrilling ride for those brave enough to give them a try.

Weather in Belize

Subtropical year round

As you might expect, in order to be home to tropical rainforest jungles and exotic coral reefs, Belize is relatively warm year round. June through January is considered the wet season, when tradewinds from the Caribbean bring in downpours at times. Temperatures during the day are generally in the high 80s to the mid 90s, and we always bring along portable raingear for outdoor activities. In the higher elevation areas like the Mountain Pine Ridge, cooler temperatures prevail. Rainfall is greatest in the south, where up to 200 inches a year can fall, creating perfect conditions for great jungle forests like that at Cockscomb.

Leader profiles

What does it take to be an Earth

Explore Leader? We rely on energetic, enthusiastic teachers to lead local Preparation Sessions, and help guide students on their summer learning adventure. Some of our great Leaders in recent years were Linda Dailey of Kintnersville, Pennsylvania, Sharon Steckel of Evanston, Illinois, Jon Vondrasek of Livonia, Michigan and Doug Johnson of Seattle, Washington. Let's briefly meet them all!

Linda Dailey attended a fall meeting in Doylestown, Pennsylvania along with her daughter Joelynn. Both of them participated in the program. Linda's enthusiasm and upbeat personality immediately identified her as a teacher who cares, and makes a difference. Here's what she had to say about her Earth Explore experience:

"This was an excellently organized program. I am amazed at the things I learned and what I can share with my students. Everywhere we went we met awesome people who interacted with our students in such a positive manner ...asking questions, challenging them, and making each experience a memorable one."

Sharon Steckel came to Earth Explore as the result of a parent recommendation at a meeting in the greater Chicago area. Her experience working with her school's Outdoor Education program and five years leading day

and overnight trips in challenging terrain in Maine caught our attention. She describes her Earth Explore experience:

"Our program was exciting, well-organized, fun, educational and involving. My most rewarding experience was watching the students get excited about a new discovery. They became totally involved in the program."

Sharon says that while students grew educationally and emotionally during their program, most of the Leaders did as well. *"Yes, I grew as a result of my participation...I have a deeper appreciation of our history (and) our earth's history."*

Jon Vondrasek from Livonia, Michigan has over 8 years experience at the middle school level, teaching students in an experimental, get your hands dirty style of teaching. His love of nature and the outdoors along with his positive outlook guaranteed his placement with Earth Explore. Here are Jon's impressions of his



Earth Explore experience:

"We had a tremendous time playing and learning together. We developed a closeness as a group - sharing new experiences. I have grown in my appreciation of the West and have gained confidence as a Leader. It kept me on my toes! It is an unforgettable and not-to-be-missed opportunity."



Travel Managers

Keeping things organized

Our on-site Travel Managers play a key role at Earth Explore. They are staff members or teachers appointed by the National Office who travel with each group to handle all logistical details during the program, leaving Leaders free to devote their time and energy to the students.

That means carrying a cell phone, coordinating check-in at the hotels and program venues, and keeping the group on the tight schedule provided by the National Office.

One of our recent Travel Managers was Neva Im. According to a fellow Leader, "Neva was wonderful in every way. She jumped right in and helped out in any way she could. She made suggestions about what to do based upon her experience. The kids loved her and so did we!"

The Garifuna

Window on a unique culture

Belize today is populated by people who bring a rich diversity of traditions. Among the most fascinating are the Garifuna, a culture that blends the traditions of Africa and the Caribbean. Settled some 200 years ago, the city of Dangriga harkens back to an earlier time, with houses of weathered wooden planks, and traditional markets and bazaars selling fruits and vegetables, clothing and arts and crafts. In Dangriga we will meet the Garifuna people, and explore their music, arts and crafts, and unique cultural traditions that are passed on from one generation to the next. Because preserving their culture is so important to most Garifuna, spending time in Dangriga allows cultural immersion and a chance to experience in depth, at least for a brief time, another culture. A truly unforgettable experience for Earth Explore students.



Caracol--The greatest Mayan site yet found?

Weather conditions permitting, our groups will visit spectacular Caracol, which was only discovered in 1937, hidden by thick jungle. The site abounds in large and imposing ceremonial structures, and archaeologists believe its importance in Classic Mayan times was unequalled. Excavation is ongoing at Caracol, and the vast site will likely produce many important finds in the future. With tombs, temples and residential areas, the city may have supported the largest population of any Mayan site. The complex has been named a National Monument Reserve, not only due to its archaeological importance, but also to preserve pristine rainforest that shelters large jungle trees, parrots, toucans, and howler monkeys.

