

# STUDY MATERIALS FOR Roatan, Honduras

Welcome to Roatan where we will snorkel, shop, zipline, and see local wildlife!

## History and Culture

Roatan has endured centuries of shuffling under British, American, and Spanish influence. Add the island's indigenous tribes and afro-carib settlers, and it's no wonder Roatan's people are some of the most diverse in Central America.

Roatan is a true melting pot. Its 50,000 people are a mix of Spanish, British, Paya Indian and African, the result of a colorful history that includes conquistadors, pirates and slave traders.

Long before Christopher Columbus landed on the Bay Islands in 1502, Paya Indians called Roatan their home. While not much is known about the very first inhabitants of the island, it is believed people roamed this paradise as early as 600 AD. Today, "Yaba-dind-dings" (Paya artifacts) are still found including pottery, shell ornaments, conch trumpets and clay figures.



Yo Ho, Yo Ho a PIRATES life for me!



Roatan has a rich history of pirating on the island. The island became a hideout for French, English and Dutch pirates who would intercept and conquer Spanish cargo vessels en route to Europe loaded with gold and other treasures. It is estimated by the mid 17th century there were approximately 5,000 pirates living on Roatan and the Bay Islands. Some of the names you may recognize: Henry Morgan, Blackbeard, John Coxen, and Van Horn once ruled these shores and waters.

By the late 1700s, the Spanish had either killed most of the pirates or sold them as slaves, taking control of the community of Port Royal, Roatan's oldest European settlement.

British ruled the Bay Islands area from the late 1700s until 1859 at which time it was returned to the Spanish and became part of Honduras.



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Roatan is in the Caribbean Sea and is 48 miles long and five miles across at its widest.  
Why is Roatan considered an island?

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Roatan is part of Honduras's Bay Islands. Roatan is surrounded by the second largest reef system in the world (what is it called?) and this will make for AWESOME snorkeling. The average temperature is 80 degrees Fahrenheit.

## Geography



# Roatan

## Wildlife

The basilisk lizard is also known as the Jesus Lizard, because it can RUN ON WATER!

These lizards have special toes on their rear feet that spread out in the water to increase the surface area of their foot when contacting the water. They have to run fast and slap their feet hard on the water. This will keep them above the water by creating tiny air pockets. Eventually gravity will win and they will drop into the water, but they are strong swimmers!



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On Roatan they are called:  
The Monkey Lala!

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Roatan is part of Honduras, which is a majority Spanish speaking nation. However, the primary language in Roatan is English. This is reflected in the business names and the names of the locals and you will find that English is the number one language to use.

## Languages and Currency

US Dollars are widely accepted on the island, however, the local currency is the Honduran Lempira.

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One US dollar is about 24 lempiras!

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## Fun Fact:

Did you know that some palm trees can grow fruit like coconuts and palms? A coconut is not a “nut” at all! It is a drupe, a fruit with a fleshy layer.

Palm trees are tropical and can only survive in warm weather.

# Honduras

# STUDY MATERIALS FOR

# Belize City, Belize

Welcome to Belize where we will float in caves, snorkel, eat local cuisine, and shop.

## History and Culture

The people of Belize are diverse, with half being Caribbean and half Spanish, including the cultures of Kriols, Garifunas, and Mayans.

There is a lot of Mayan history in Belize. The Maya are the indigenous people of Mexico and Central America and have continuously inhabited modern-day Yucatan, Quintana Roo, Campeche, Tabasco, and Chiapas, Mexico. And southward through Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and Honduras. The Maya built the great cities of Chichen Itza, Bonampak, Uxmal, and Altun Ha.



Belize is the second smallest country in Central America. Belize has a unique combination of ecosystems. The Belize Barrier Reef is off the coast of Belize and connected to the second largest barrier reef in the world. The land consists of tropical jungles, mountains, swamps, and Mayan archeological sites.

## Geography

Belize is located between Guatemala and Mexico and bordered by the Caribbean Sea on the east.

We will be visiting the Crystal Caves. These caves have beautiful stalactites, stalagmites, flowstones, and rock columns. We will also see some interesting cultural remains.

Stalactites and stalagmites are types of mineral deposits found in caves. Stalactites hang downwards from the ceiling of caves. Stalagmites rise upwards from the floor of a cave.

## Ancient Mayan Culture

The ancient Maya considered the cave a sacred passageway to the underworld known as the Xibalba (Shee-bal-ba).

The name Xibalba translates as 'Place of Fright.'

The Maya were expected to undergo trials in Xibalba. If they could use their skills and intelligence, they had a chance to outwit the demons and tests awaiting them there.

In Mayan belief, one did not die and go to a 'heaven' or a 'hell' but embarked on a journey toward Tamoanchan. This journey began in the frightening underworld of Xibalba where the Xibalbans who lived there were more apt to trick and destroy a soul than help one.

The goal was to navigate through Xibalba and ascend through the nine levels of the underworld.

## Languages and Currency

Belize's currency is the Belizean dollar. One US dollar is about two Belizean Dollars. English is Belize's official language and spoken by virtually everyone.



# STUDY MATERIALS FOR Cozumel, Mexico

Welcome to Cozumel where we will visit ancient ruins, swim in the ocean, and see local wildlife!

## History and Culture

San Gervasio is the largest Mayan Ruins site on Cozumel; they are not as popular as Chichén Itzá (in Cancun), but still pretty impressive and significant. It was a holy site dedicated to Ixchel, the goddess of fertility. Mayan women would pilgrimage here from all over the country to pray at the temples of San Gervasio and pray tribute to the goddess.

In fact, Cozumel was to the Maya what Mecca is to the Muslims or Rome to the Catholics.

San Gervasio is located on Cozumel, about 11 miles from downtown San Miguel and the Punta Langosta cruise pier. Located in the Mayan jungle rain forest, it is very humid.

## Wildlife



Iguanas are very common in Cozumel and can become quite large. (People like to eat them too!) They communicate to other iguanas by bobbing their heads up and down. They could be saying "hello" or trying to find a girlfriend.



Cozumel is an island in the Caribbean Sea off the eastern coast of Mexico. The island is only about 30 miles long and 10 miles wide.

## Geography

An island is land that is surrounded by water and smaller than a continent. What continent do you live on?

## Languages and Currency

Cozumel is part of Mexico, so the Mexican peso is the official currency. Spanish is the official language, but many people speak English as well.



## Fun Fact:

Off the southwestern coast of Cozumel lies the second-longest coral reef system called the Mesoamerican Reef. It is about 175 miles from the Gulf of Mexico to the coast of Honduras. Do you know what the longest coral reef system is called and where is it located?

# STUDY MATERIALS FOR Houston, Texas

Welcome to Texas where we will visit the NASA Space Center, aquarium.

## History and Culture

San Antonio was founded in 1718 by Spanish mission San Antonio was founded in 1718 by Spanish missionaries. They were the first European settlers in Texas.

Texas was sparsely populated because it was isolated from other Spanish colonies, and hostile natives lived in the area.

After the Revolutionary War and the War of Mexican Independence, the newly established Mexican government began to allow settlers from the U.S. Americans began to claim land in Texas, leading to a population explosion of U.S. citizens.

The increase of Americans living in Texas caused friction with the government in Mexico City. After several smaller insurrections, the Texas Revolution broke out, and the state became an independent nation in 1835. However, the newly formed Texas Republic could not defend itself from Mexican troops and eventually negotiated with the U.S. to join the union in 1845.

The city of Houston is the fourth most populous city in the United States. Houston is named after General Sam Houston. He was the president of the Republic of Texas. Texas was a sovereign state (they governed themselves) before joining the United States.

*Everything is bigger in Texas!*

*Texas is the second largest state in the U.S. Do you know the first? It is also the second most populous state (do you know what the most populous state is?) and has the largest domed state capitol. Plus, they have big cowboy hats!*

Downtown Houston is only 50 feet above sea level and has four major bayous (minor rivers that are usually slow-moving and marshy passing through the city).

Many fantastic creatures live in the bayous: alligators, coral snakes, beavers, catfish, migratory birds, and wild boars, just to name a few!

The climate is humid subtropical, and it can get sweltering here in the summer.

## Geography and Wildlife



## NASA Space Center Houston

This center has really cool exhibits that show the inside of a rocket, the space station, the mission control centers, astronaut training centers, and life-size space shuttles!

The Johnson Space Center campus is next to the museum. This is where astronauts train for their missions. It is also where the NASA control center is located, coordinating and monitoring Space Shuttle missions.

Do you know who the first American astronaut was? Who was the first astronaut to walk on the moon?