

# The Humans of Belize

Last semester, Vanier offered 'The Tropics: Opportunities and Challenges', a complementary course to Belize. Despite the beautiful views, inspiring culture and refreshing climate, we found that it was the local people that really made our trip special. So, we thought we would share some of their stories with you;



"I was born in Belize from parents who immigrated here from Honduras. Ever since I started working in the jungle, I fell I love with my job and the environment around me. I love this country and all its natural ecosystems, which is why I do not like the fact that people from other countries come poach the natural resources it contains. I know the jungle very well and I'm able to survive comfortably in it. For now, I work for T.R.E.E.S. as a tour guide where my knowledge about the jungle's ecosystems is backed up by years of experience. I have encountered many animals around, once even coming face to face with a jaguar! I love my job and country but I'm ready to see what other challenges are offered elsewhere as well."

(Willberto, T.R.E.E.S., Belize)



"I came from El Salvador after fleeing the war and found a home in Belize where I could work with my husband on my farm. Life is peaceful on my land where I grow ginger, cacao, coconuts, sugarcane, starfruit, oranges and much more! The climate in Belize is perfect to grow our products more efficiently. We sell our products and are happy when visitors come to see our way of working. However, some people from other territories come and steal the ginger we have in the hills sometimes. Sadly, there is no real way of stopping them with the dense forest protecting them."

(Ana, T.R.E.E.S., Belize)



"I live with my family on Billy Hawk Caye, a beautiful island located on the Belizean barrier reef. This is the third generation of my family that has lived here and one day, I plan on passing it down to whichever of my children wants it! I am Garifuna, a descendant of a mix between West African, Central African, Caribbean, European and Arawak people. Not only am I a fisherman, but I also, along with the help of his family, invite tourists to the island who wish to experience the Garifuna culture and do activities such as snorkeling, kayaking, and learning about animal species. Living on the island has been tough. It is sometimes difficult due to the fact that big companies overfish to make money, while islanders need the ocean to feed themselves."

(Alex (center), Billy Hawk Caye, Belize)



"After the war in El Salvador broke out, my brother told me of this place called Belize and how it was the best country to find refuge and to work. Now, I have been working in my farm for more than 20 years and for the last three I've done it alone. I'm grateful for the fact that this country was stable enough for me to make a living and to raise my kids. I've been growing many different things around my farm over the year such as oranges, pineapples, red and white peppers, bananas and ginger. Of course, I had to adjust to how the climate in Belize works, where the rainy season lasts 10 months and the dry season two. Today, I feel happy living in my farm and I wouldn't change this anytime soon!"

(René, Hummingbird Highway, Belize)



"As a teenager I decided I needed to salvage the rich medicinal knowledge from my community. You see, Mayans practice the oral tradition, therefore not much is written down. I had a vision, I was going to document as much as I could so we could keep this valuable bank of remedies alive forever. I was so lucky as my uncle was the renowned Eligio Panti. So, I went to see him and told him of my plans. He agreed to teach me, telling me to meet him every afternoon. He thought I would give up sooner or later but I never did. I went to his house every day accompanying him on all his visits, writing down every detail, until I got married and moved. Today, I have successfully published a compilation of the basic herbal remedies found here in Belize as well as a medicinal cookbook. I continue sharing the Mayan culture here at the Maya Centre, inviting guest to stay and experience the Mayan way."

(Aurora, Maya Center, Belize)



"I absolutely adore my job, I get to travel around and show tourists the wonders of our beautiful country. People come from all over and have so many stories to share, they are all so different, so inspiring. They teach me aspects of their culture that I would have never discovered and not only that but I get to explore parts of Belize I would have otherwise missed, learning so much along the way. Some of the activities I usually host include: waterfall hikes, historic site visits and even river tubing which is always a lot of fun! I am overjoyed that ecotourism is a growing economy here in Belize. I think that this is one of the best ways to create a responsible income for the people of our country plus it creates amazing jobs like mine, being a tour guide!"

(Chelsie, Belize District, Belize)