

A Day on the Life of a Dr. Clare Watkinson, Expedition Medic/ volunteer, Belize

0530: Wake up to the sound of Samos (the boat captain) and his radio, roll out of bed and get kitted up for the first dive of the day.

0600: Dive 1, science monitoring dive. As part staff, part volunteer I join in with the fish and coral monitoring program; a bit of a learning curve to get all the species committed to memory! Start the day with a fish belt transect; firstly laying the 30 m transect tape, and noting down all the fish along it. Then buddy Roger, a volunteer, while he completes his transect. Then get all the kit back on the boat, and head back for a well-deserved breakfast.

0800: Breakfast of beans and tortillas, expertly prepared by Desi the on-site chef. Time after breakfast to review any poorly healing wounds from Bacalar Chico Dive Camp and try and think of new ways of covering them up underwater (to date nothing has managed to last a whole dive...).

0900: Boat Marshall, Dive 2. Every dive there is someone on the boat with Samos to watch the Surface Marker Buoys and be in communication with the Shore Marshall on base, should any emergency arise. Good chance for a chat with Samos, chance to wheedle some random information from him or simply learn random facts about Belize/Sarteneja.

1100: Dive 3. Back in the water for another monitoring dive. This time coral bleaching and disease: identifying, measuring and looking at the health of 25 different corals along a transect in buddy pairs. Easily complicated by swimming backwards into fire coral. Awesome end to the dive when we saw loads of big Ocean Triggerfish on the safety stop.

1300: Lunch.

1400: Rescue diver course. Search and rescue skills in the mangroves, followed by lifts and different ways to exit the water with a casualty back at base. Our pet Lion (who is easily freaked out by people emerging from the water) went bonkers and tried to jump on and eat any casualty that was placed (never dropped) on the ground.

1700: Time to chill out in the hammock and read.

1800: Chance to have another look at some freshly showered wounds, review any ears or sinuses, and compare insect bites.

1830: Staff meeting. Plan for the following day, and discuss any problems/progress from the day.

1900: My turn to present Weh di gwan? (the plan for the next day) to the volunteers, explaining what dives will go out, and any other scheduled activities. Also the opportunity to amaze with my lack of artistic talent, demonstrated on the schedule board.

1930: Dinner. 'Chicken in Sauce', one of Desi's best dishes, with possibly the least imaginative name. Tomato and coriander sauce with veg and chicken, stewed. Very good.

2030: Quick game of cards. Dish out the antihistamines, so everyone can try for an itch free sleep.

2100: Bed.