

Rush University Belize Immersion Experience

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Rush University Belize Immersion Experience, RUBIE, is a seven-day multidisciplinary team service project. Our team of Rush University faculty, staff, and students partnered with Hand-In-Hand Ministries and local volunteers to build a house for a family in need. This year's house recipient was an individual who is HIV positive and a long-time member of the community. Two sons would be living in the house as well, one serving as a caretaker and one as a dependent. Through determination and teamwork, we helped create a home for this family in need.

Building For Change

Since its initiation in 2002, Building for Change has provided homes to over 250 families. To qualify for a house, a family must first provide proof of land ownership (or a lease from the government). The materials for the house and labor are then paid for by the trip volunteers who also are also responsible for building the house under the guidance of Hand and Hand staff. The wooden house is 16x16 feet and takes an average of 3-4 days to build. Our house was # 276 and took 2.5 days to finish. The families who receive a house must participate in building the house and attend empowerment lectures to learn the skills needed to break the cycle of poverty and achieve sustainability.

Belize City, Belize

While many only think of Belize as a tropical oasis where they can relax in the sun, like most countries it also contains areas of severe poverty. The house we built in Belize City was located in one such neighborhood. While we never felt unsafe, we did not work past 4 pm and always stayed with the group to ensure team safety.



HIV

Belize has a small population but the prevalence of HIV is the highest in Central America and the third highest in the Caribbean. In fact, AIDS is the leading cause of death for residents between the ages of 15 to 49. The HIV epidemic affects both rural and urban populations throughout Belize, specifically the Garifuna people (an indigenous population) in the southern part of the country. We had the opportunity to hear from staff at a local HIV pediatric clinic on how they seek to provide and improve care to minors in the face of significant cultural stigma and discrimination. The recipient of this year's home has been greatly affected by HIV, particularly the stigma that can accompany the diagnosis. This new home made a significant impact on the house recipient as it offered a safe, clean environment while also serving as a symbol of hope for his recovery.



Team RUBIE celebrating the completion of the home after handing over the keys to the family.

Mercy Outpatient Health Clinic

The Mercy Outpatient Health Clinic is located in Belize City and serves the geriatric population. While working at the clinic, we had the opportunity to speak with the physician on site, tour the clinic, and take vitals on a portion of the patients. The nutrition student provided patients with individualized counseling on the MyPlate eating method, carbohydrate moderation for patients with diabetes, and low sodium education for patients with hypertension.



Altun Ha Mayan Temple

As a part of our immersion experience in Belize we toured the Mayan temple Altun Ha. We learned about the cultural significance of this religious site and the shaman who resided here. Additionally, we learned about the Jade Head, which was discovered in a tomb at Altun Ha in 1968. This ancient relic from the Mayan culture weighs 9.75 pounds and is a representation of the Mayan sun god Kinich Ahau. The jade head is the single largest carved jade object yet discovered in the Maya area. The jade head is considered to be one of the most valuable icons to the Belizean people today and has an estimated value of \$3-5 million US.



Caye Caulker

Belize is home to several cayes, or islands, right off of its coast. These cayes sprawl around the world's largest living barrier reef. When visiting a caye you will see mangroves, beaches, snorkelers, and an array of water activities. Caye Caulker is the small village caye that we had the pleasure of visiting and experiencing Caribbean culture at on our last day in Belize.

