

APRIL 2018

SPECIAL FEATURE: T+L'S GLOBAL SHOPPING GUIDE

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

Swing into Spring

THE BEST PLACES TO GO
THIS SEASON



+

A PERFECT
WEEKEND IN

BERMUDA

THE COOLEST
CITY IN

GERMANY

THE WILD
WONDERS OF

ECUADOR

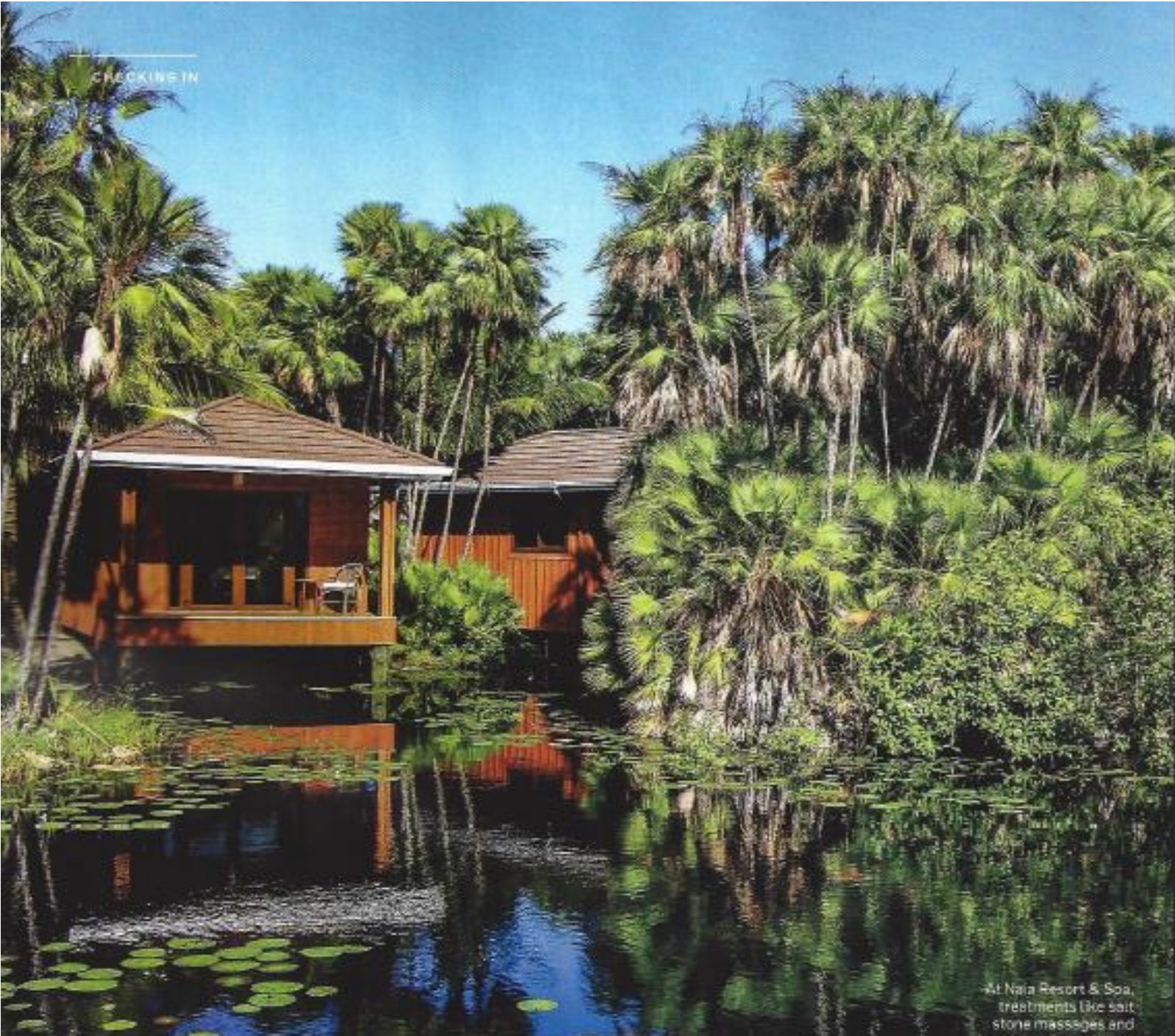
A FAMILY
TRIP TO

MONTANA

Photo: *theHampton
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Beach Club*
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At Naia Resort & Spa, treatments like salt stone massages and coconut scrubs are delivered in five overwater suites on a secluded lagoon.

Belize, Three Ways

The Central American country has always offered plenty of activities, and now, **Erin Riley** discovers, there are even more luxe resorts to match its pristine beaches and rain forest.

BELIZE HAS long been big with adventure travelers, who come to dive the world's second-longest barrier-reef system, hike through Mayan ruins, and see wildlife in the jungles of the interior. The only catch: upscale hotels were always in short supply.

That's changing. Last December, I visited three sophisticated new properties—Coral Caye, Naia Resort & Spa, and Mahogany Bay—that offer wellness experiences, chic suites, and premium privacy. More are coming within

the year, including the Samuel Amoia–designed Itz'ana Resort & Residences in the bohemian beach village of Placencia and Leonardo DiCaprio's eco-friendly private-island resort, Blackadore Caye.

Despite all the development, Belize still feels earthy and untouched. The beaches on its more than 200 cays are uncrowded, and the people, whose heritages include mestizo, Mayan, Creole, and Garifuna, are warm. Choose among the new hotels for the Belize experience that best suits you.



CHECKING IN

Private island

After falling in love with Belize in the 1980s, Francis Ford Coppola opened the Blancaneaux Lodge in the jungles of the Cayo District and the Turtle Inn along the shores near Placencia. The latest addition to his portfolio, **Coral Caye** (thefamilycoppolahideaways.com; cottages from \$1,435), sits on a two-acre, palm-crowned atoll just 25 minutes by boat from Turtle Inn. It's perfect for a couple or small family because you can take over the whole place.

Until recently, Coppola kept Coral Caye for his own use, and it's easy to see why. The communal main house,

with its conch-shell-lined walls and sand floors, is an ideal refuge from the sun. My butler, Rudy, delivered strong mojitos (and stories about the Coppolas) at the bar, while on the adjacent thatched-roof dining patio, my personal chef, Edwin, served grilled seafood plates.

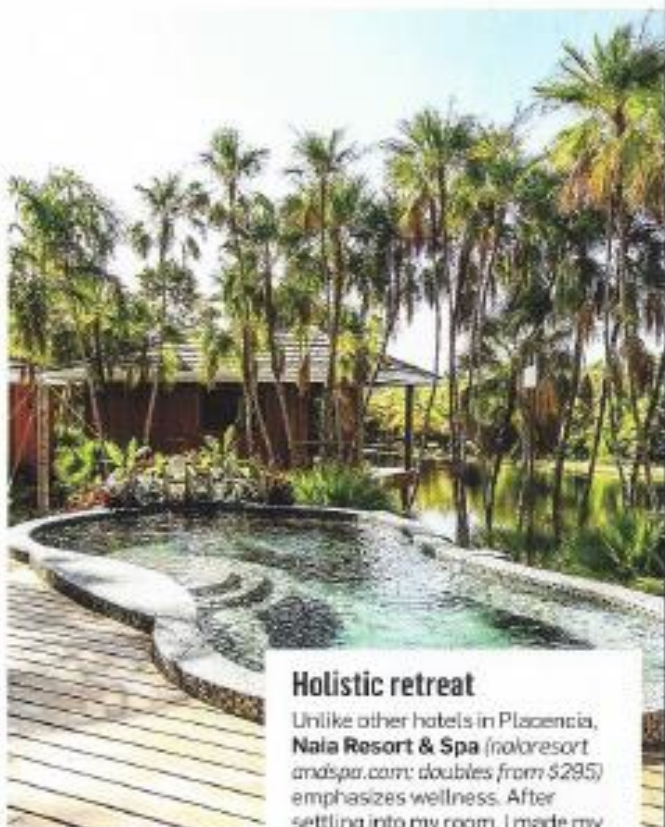
At night, I retreated to Coral Cottage, one of the two rustic-luxe bungalows where guests sleep. What it lacked in air-conditioning, it made up for in beautiful breeze. Whether I was snorkeling or just lounging on one of the island's many hammocks, I found that Coral Caye maximized the simple pleasures of being by the sea.



Tropical village

Set on Belize's largest island, Ambergris Cay, this sprawling, 60-acre property feels like a world unto itself. Part resort, part small town, **Mahogany Bay Resort & Beach Club** (curiocollection3.hilton.com; doubles from \$369) has 205 cottages and villas dotted along streets separated by canals. In the town center, you'll find a yoga studio, an artisanal chocolate shop, and a coffee and rum bar. The Great House, with its grand lobby, old-world bar, and two restaurants, feels like a scene-y country club. The accommodations range from small studios to sprawling two-bedroom cottages, but all have 14-foot ceilings, island-style décor, and rich Belizean woods.

When I wanted to experience a little nightlife, the beach bars and lively restaurants of



Holistic retreat

Unlike other hotels in Placencia, **Naiia Resort & Spa** (naiiaresortandspa.com; doubles from \$295) emphasizes wellness. After settling into my room, I made my way through mangroves and across bridges to reach the spa, a six-acre complex with a yoga studio, a café, and five treatment rooms set over a lily-covered lagoon. Treatments incorporate native ingredients, like the golden-clay detox and the Mayan cacao-and-spice wrap.

The soothing atmosphere extends to Naiia's 35 beach houses and villas, many of which come with ocean views. All have warm wood paneling and oversize rattan furniture. At 1981, the on-site restaurant, I tried local dishes like conch carpaccio and seafood-topped *dukuru*, a Mayan tamale. Each combined healthfulness and flavor in a way that left me eager to return for my next meal.

San Pedro were just a 10-minute golf-cart drive away—though I was always grateful to come home to the peace and quiet of the resort. A short boat trip got me to other activities. I took a tour of the Hol Chan Marine Reserve, famous for its stingrays and nurse sharks. Mahogany's private beach club also has lovely overwater cabanas, perfect for whiling away an afternoon (or two).