



The Weekender  
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# Relaxation and exhilaration in Roatan

by **Shellene McConnell**

Special to The Weekender

**“Y**ou’re going where?  
Where is that any-  
way?”

I must have heard this a dozen times before I packed my bags to head off on my solo journey. I have to admit, six months ago I too had never heard of Roatan. But, after coming across it on the Internet, and doing some further research, my curiosity got the better of me, and I had to see for myself if the azure waters and lush, green foliage was for real, or just the clever work of PhotoShop.

I was tired of all the typical all-inclusive resorts, with hundreds of rooms, and impersonal service. I wanted serenity and adventure, with the amenities of an all-inclusive resort. Did a place like that actually exist?

Roatan is the largest of the eight islands that make up Honduras Bay Islands. It is located 35 miles off the north coast of mainland Honduras and rests upon an extensive fringing reef system on the Caribbean Sea. At 40 miles in length, and less than four miles in width, Roatan would be the

idyllic place for a single gal like myself to spend a week filled with equal parts relaxation and exhilaration.

As I made the short shuttle bus journey from the airport, I lifted my shades, and drank in my new surroundings. Here I was on an island which just five short years before, was paid an unwelcome visit by the tropical storm, Hurricane Mitch. I saw no signs of devastation. Instead, I was welcomed by a bounty of palm trees,

white sand beaches, and the aroma of tropical flowers. Granted, the roads were a little primitive, but somehow anything else would have seemed out of place. At one point, the bus stopped, as a small turtle made its way across the road, perhaps an indication of the

pace at which I would be spending my next eight days.

I settled in for my adventure at Anthony’s Key Resort, an all-inclusive diving resort perched on the edge of the world’s second largest barrier reef.

## The Adventure Begins

With so many activities to take in, I began with a morning snorkel tour. The boat made its way to a reef, just minutes off

the coast of Roatan. I donned my mask, fins and snorkel, as my body and the Caribbean Sea met for the very first time. Within seconds, I was sharing the water with colorful parrotfish, angelfish, and as our guide Kenley pointed out, an enormous tiger slug.

My next feat was horseback riding along the sugar-white beach. Having not been on a horse for over a decade, our guide, Pedro, made me feel instantly at ease. As we trotted along the shoreline, we passed children playing soccer (or football, as they called it) on their lunch break. The happy, easy-going attitude of the locals was infectious.

Next, I was off on a canopy tour. I really had no idea what this would entail, until I found a harness being strapped around my rear and my waist, and was led to a platform high up in the jungle. I was handed some leather gloves for “brakes,” and before I knew it, I was hooked up to a cable about 80 feet above the ground, and found myself zipping along at lightening speed. Suddenly, I was eight-years-old again — free, without a care in the world. There were 11 stops in all, as we made our way down the jungle, and onto Tabyana Beach. I was disappointed when the rush was over, but was quick to head back to the resort and share my experience with my new friends.

## Taking the Plunge

While staying at the resort, I met a number of fellow guests. The first question they’d ask was “Where ya from?” and the second

### HOW TO GO

Sol Air offers direct flights from Miami to Roatan from \$299 U.S. return ([www.solair.net](http://www.solair.net)).

Continental Airlines offer flights from many North American cities to Miami. ([www.continental.com](http://www.continental.com)).

Reduced fares can be found through Expedia’s website ([www.expedia.com](http://www.expedia.com)).

The following websites offer information on Roatan and Honduras:

[www.roatanonline.com](http://www.roatanonline.com)

[www.honduras.com](http://www.honduras.com)

For accommodation and services offered by Anthony’s Key Resort, visit [www.anthonyskey.com](http://www.anthonyskey.com)

was, "Are you diving?"

I found that most guests were on Roatan for that very reason — diving, and more diving. As for me, the thought of strapping 30 excess pounds to my back and submerging myself into foreign waters was terrifying, to say the least. But, as I saw a tiny 12-year old girl begin her descent without any fear, I knew I had to do it. After a classroom session, and safety drills, it was time to take the plunge. In no time at all, the breathing apparatus and I became one, and I found myself in awe of the sights before me — groupers, enormous crabs, sea-horses, and what seemed like miles of brain coral. Amazing.

## Dolphin Encounter

One of the highlights was the opportunity to interact with the dolphins at the Roatan Institute for Marine Sciences, located at Anthony's Key Resort. This center brings in trainers from all over the world to research dolphins in their natural habitat. I hooked up with a trainer from Sweden who took me in the water to spend a close encounter with one of the dolphins. I was amazed at how



Courtesy Anthony's Key Resort

**Divers find all kinds of interesting things** on the third largest coral reef of the world in Honduras on the Caribbean Sea.

human these beautiful creatures were. They genuinely seemed excited to "show off," and were quick to offer "hugs and kisses" when instructed. I donned my snorkel gear and plunged into the waters to join them in their home. They were not shy to brush up against me and invited me to stroke them as they went by. Their smooth skin reminded me of a banana peel, not slimy as

I expected. After a game of fetch with kelp (yes, they fetch), it was time to say farewell.

So, did I find my paradise? Absolutely. And just as I read on sign there "Leave nothing but bubbles — take nothing but memories."

And, oh, what memories. *W*  
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