

The Room Report



KA'ANA BOUTIQUE RESORT

Mile 69fb Benque Viejo Road, San Ignacio, Belize 877-522-6221, kaanabelize.com

Rates: Balam rooms with one queen bed are \$250 per night and slightly bigger casitas with two queens or a California king are \$350 per night. For peak holiday season mid-December through Jan. 2, tack on an additional \$100 per night.

Stay here if you: appreciate luxury accommodations, thoughtful amenities, a sustainable ethos and gourmet, organic cuisine in the middle of the tropical forest.

It's close to: hiking, biking, kayaking, horseback riding and other "eco-tourism" opportunities in Belize's Cayo District. The hotel is a 20-minute drive to the ancient Mayan site Xunantunich, a stone's throw from the Guatemalan border.

The rooms are: contemporary, airy and stylish. Brightly painted, evocative, Maya-inspired artwork provides color against the stark-white walls (and white bedding and drapes). Each of the 15 rooms or casitas has its own private terrace or balcony, plasma flat-screen television, espresso maker, iPod docking station, ceiling fan and air conditioning, as well as coveted in-room wireless Internet. Shampoo and conditioner are stored in reusable, wooden bottles, and hand soap is locally made. Evening turndown service features a sweet treat left in your room's mini-bar (lest the delicious dark chocolate melt in tropical temperatures) and a personal note from an amiable staffer.

They put all of the money into: creating a luxury retreat from the moment Ka'ana opened in 2007, with modern, hacienda-style buildings set among indigenous trees and plants (helpfully labeled for foreign guests) and along romantic, winding walkways. The lovely landscaped grounds — and infinity pool and candle-lit spa — are enough to give Ka'ana top marks for its soothing atmosphere, but it's the resort's nod to local culture and heritage that

makes it extra special. For example, the main restaurant, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner, offers a to-die-for gourmet menu accented with favorite Belizean dishes and vegetables and herbs from the on-site organic garden. The upbeat bar serves cocktails with a Belizean twist, such as the Sweetcorn Colada accompanied by a cinnamon stick. Morning coffee is ground and roasted outdoors, in traditional Mayan fashion, and guests' welcome orientation takes place in the impressive wine cellar, during which they are introduced to Nance, a liquor made from a local berry of the same name.

The bottom line: Ka'ana means "heavenly place" in the Maya language, and no doubt this boutique resort lives up to its name. If you're not keen on returning to rustic, thatched-hut accommodations after a day of adventuring in the nearby rivers, waterfalls, mountains and caves, spend the extra dough to enjoy the pampering service and upscale accommodations at Ka'ana Boutique Resort. *Kara Williams*

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Doug Lansky is the author of "Signspotting" (Lonely Planet Publications).

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