

THE YEAR OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY (With My Dad)

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

By Scott Anderson

ADVENTURE

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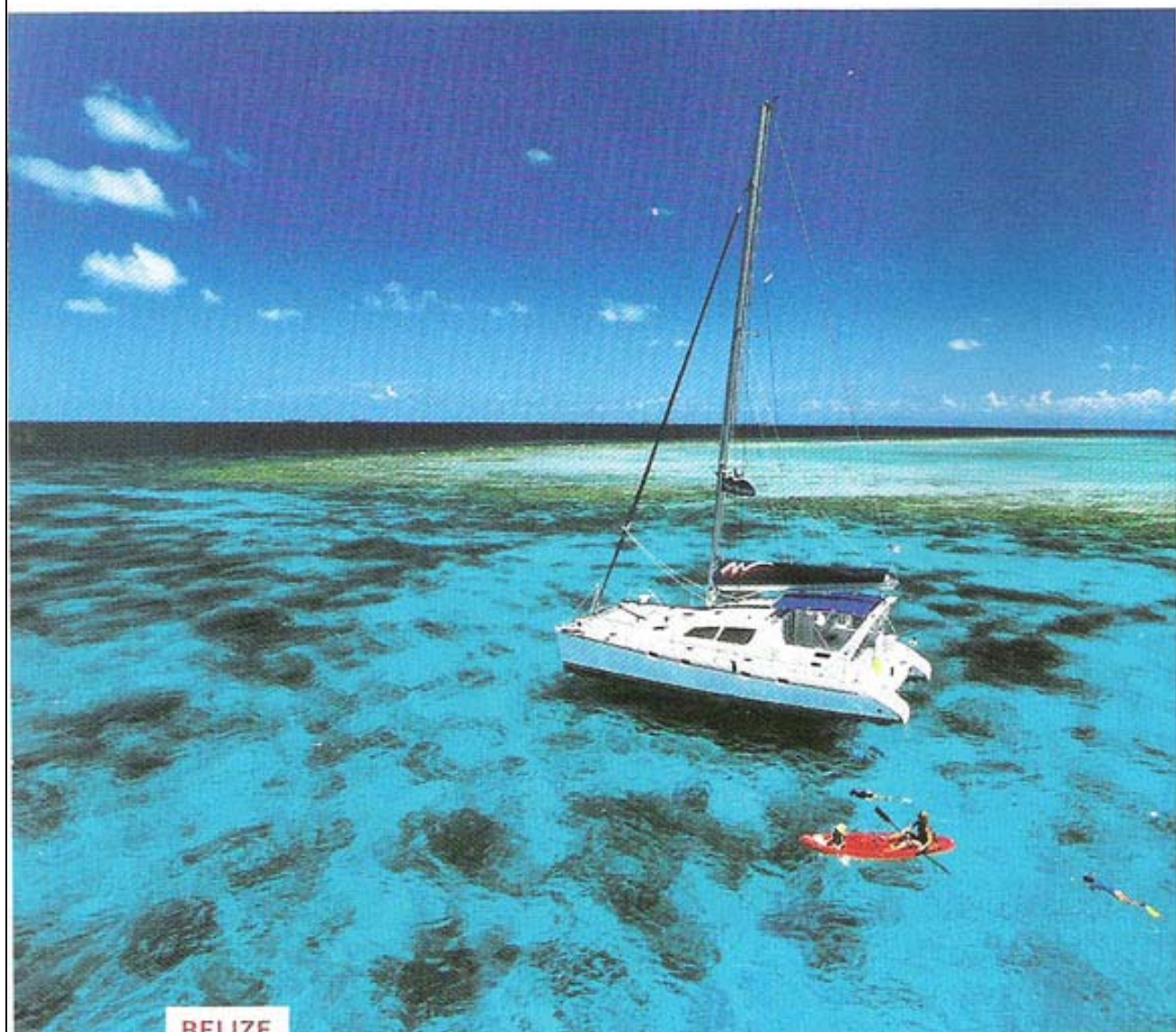
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BELIZE

The Last Refuge

How to find your own personal paradise—and 3,000-square-foot villa—on Belize's liveliest island BY COSTAS CHRIST

■ FROM RAIN-FORESTED MOUNTAINS to the Western Hemisphere's longest barrier reef system, tiny Belize is crammed with a planet's worth of tropical wonders. And Azul Resort (\$2,395 a night for four, including meals and drinks; www.azulbelize.com) on Ambergris Cay makes a prime launchpad for exploring them.

Opened in 2005 by Silicon Valley executive Vivian Yu and her husband, Jeff Spiegel, a former indie record label manager, the beachfront retreat puts guests within a ten-minute kayak paddle of the famed barrier reef. Each of Azul's two private villas—yes, there are only two—comes with wireless Internet (personal laptops are available), Bose home-theater systems, and rooftop Jacuzzis.

MUST-DOs: Take a 30-minute bird's-eye tour of the barrier reef with Astrum Helicopters (\$250 per person; www.astrumhelicopters.com) to spot sharks, rays, and manatees.

Or venture farther afield on another Azul-organized excursion, from caving mainland Belize's limestone kingdoms with Caves Branch (\$85 a day per person; www.cavesbranch.com) to diving with whale sharks with Sea Horse Dive Shop (\$150 per person; www.belizescuba.com).

BLUE HEAVEN: Cruising Belize's barrier reef (above). Below: Azul's 1,400-square-foot infinity pool

