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March 23, 2009

24 Hours of Sunlight: Full Recovery Achieved

Setting into a bed of down-y goodness at southeastern Belize's [Machaca Hill Lodge](#) and contemplating tomorrow's potential encounter with whale sharks, I think I'm finally recovered from skiing 34,500 feet uphill at the [24 Hours of Sunlight](#) randonee ski race in early February.

Exercise-induced gastritis? Gone (and I'm still down six pounds ... perfect for the upcoming road cycling season). Crampy calves and quads? Also (mostly) gone. Dry-skin splits on multiple fingers? They lingered, but Belize's humidity finally healed them up.

And the timing for this full recovery couldn't be better because down here in Belize, I've got things to do. There are those whale sharks to meet 80 feet beneath the surface of the Gulf of Honduras near the world's second largest barrier reef. There's also hiking, mountain biking, and river kayaking. And more specific to Belize there's chocolate making (perhaps those six pounds won't stay gone) and Mayan-ruin excavating (March thru June a University of New Mexico team working on a recently discovered ruin welcomes guest diggers for the day or for several weeks).

At Machaca, they allow – hope for, even – guests to indulge both their inner Indiana Jones and Willy Wonka and then they throw in dashes of Primal Quest and pampering. (The latter happens at Belize's newest spa, Jabulani, which just so happens to be no more than a few steps and perhaps a howler monkey or toucan away from all of Machaca's cabanas.)

Each of Machaca's 12 cabanas, as well as its dining room, an outdoor reception area where tea is served every afternoon at 4 (go for the lime cake or shrimp wontons), a swimming pool, fire pit, and now, Jabulani, are tucked into the rainforest canopy 300 feet above the valley floor (to the north) and the Rio Grande River (immediately south).



But I shouldn't be so flippant about my recovery. After all, pushing your body for 24 hours without rest is serious business. Recovery didn't just happen overnight. It required a very special night: one spent in a villa on a private island.

This private island – and islet really -- was [Cayo Espanto](#). Cayo is less than a mile off the west coast of Ambergris Caye, Belize's largest caye. (A side note for fans of random trivia: Ambergris Caye's main city, San Pedro, is the San Pedro that inspired Madonna's *La Isla Bonita*.)

But at Cayo, unlike at Machaca, where I'm still really enjoying my bed's down-y goodness, my full recovery wasn't so important.

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cookies before David's feet hit it.

When ordering an afternoon snack to help me mend after a morning of reading on a chaise lounge, I showed as much restraint as one could be expected to when on a private island. I selected only cookies from the dozen or so items on the tea menu.

I wonder if Sean Connery opts for the cookies or the crab cakes when he vacations here? I bet Harrison Ford is a cheese quesadilla kind-of guy.

But I digress. Back to my recovery. Did I mention the cookies were *too hot to eat* when David set them down on a table he moved to within arm's reach of the hammock? And that, even after polishing off each and every crumb of *four* cookies, three hours later I still managed to have room for a four-course dinner?

Evidently, I've already started the caloric loading for next year's [24 Hours of Sunlight race](#). I won't start the training right away though.



24 hours of pain deserves two days of total pampering, right?

At Cayo Espanto, David, the world's most excellent Houseman (not that I have many housemen to compare him to) brought me absolutely everything I needed. As well as many things I didn't.

The pier connecting my 1,100-square foot villa and its outdoor shower to land was 150 feet long. I could smell the

Actually, now that I'm here at Machaca, in the country's still-waiting-to-be-discovered southernmost district, Toledo, maybe I will. But it will be *cross* training. The 11,000-acre private reserve Machaca is tucked in to and the surrounding area offer plenty of opportunities for activity and adventure -- remember



that hiking, biking, and archeological digging I already mentioned? There's all of that ... and fishing, caving, tubing, and cannonballing into pools at the bases of waterfalls. I find myself not minding at all that the nearest ski resort is thousands of miles away.

So the physical recovery is done. The mental scar from the 30,000-40,000 vertical feet a week I was skiing as part of my training will take longer to

heal. While it does though, I'll stay the course, thinking ahead to the 5th annual 24 Hours of Sunlight ... and continue my caloric loading. Machaca's Chef Ken Gundu promised that dessert would be a chocolate-y wondrous-ness made from the cacao beans I helped peel, sift, and grind at a farm down the road (all surprisingly aerobic activities that all my ski training did nothing to prepare me for).

-- [Dina Mishev](#)

Do you have favorite ways or places to recover from races? We'd love to hear how you do it.

For more quick, tropical getaways, check out our picks for [Caribbean Island Escapes](#).

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