What is the immigration policy in Belize?

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The Ministry of National Security and Immigration has given careful consideration to the existing laws governing immigration and nationality. It is felt that there is an urgent need to further strengthen the Immigration Act to deter the incidence of illegal entry into Belize. There is also a need to modify the immigration rules relating to the fees charged for nationality and residence permits.

The Ministry is guided by the government's vision as expressed by the Manifesto, Set Belize Free â€œfor a state with secure borders respected by its neighbours, where all citizens are assured that their lives and property are safe and their human rights respected, where laws and institutions are honouredâ€¦â€•

The new immigration and nationality policy is designed to achieve four objectives: protect Belizean workers, control and manage our borders, apprehend and deport those who willfully violate our laws, and improve the services of the Immigration and Nationality Department.

The Ministry further appeals to those who work, visit or live in Belize to respect and comply with our laws, and calls on those establishments that currently hire foreign nationals to identify and train Belizean wokers.

The Ministry of National Security and Immigration intends to introduce and implement the following new measures starting Friday, February 5th, 1999.

1. AMENDMENT OF THE IMMIGRATION ACT
Legislation has been introduced in the House of Representatives to require employers who employ illegal immigrants to pay the costs of repatriation of such persons, in addition to other penalties already prescribed by law. Similarly, public carriers that bring illegal immigrants to Belize may be liable to a fine up to $5,000.00, and in addition, shall be required to pay the costs of repatriation of such persons.

2. PERMANENT RESIDENCE FEES
All applicants for permanent residence, except nationals of the People's Republic of China, will be charged the following flat fees which will be non-refundable:-

1. Central Americans (Salvadorans
Nicaraguans, Hondurans) - ----------$ 525.00
(Guatemalans, Mexicans) - ----------$ 250.00
2. Caricom Nationals ----------$ 600.00
3. Other Commonwealth Nationals ----------$1,000.00
4. All Other Nationals ----------$1,250.00
5. Permanent Residence Card ----------$ 125.00
6. Permanent Residence Replacement Card ------$ 50.00

Nationals of the Peoples' Republic of China will be charged a non-refundable fee of $3,000.00.

The Permanent Residence fees specified above will be in lieu of deposits currently being charged.

3. BORDER PERMIT FEE
There shall be a flat fee of $20.00 per annum for a border permit.

4. WORK PERMIT FEES

a) Professional and Technical workers---------- a fixed fee of $1,500.00per annum.

(b) General Workers (except seasonal agricultural workers)----a fixed fee of $200.00 per annum.

(c) Seasonal agricultural workers ---------- $50.00 per crop.

(d) Entertainers performing in Groups of two or more but up to one week.---- $500.00 for any period less than six persons.

In groups of six persons or more----------$750.00 for any period up to one week.

(e) Entertainers performing alone----------$300.00 for any period up to one week.

(f) Religious, educational and voluntary workers----------a fixed fee of $50.00 per annum.

5. CATEGORIES OF WORK PERMITS
Work permits will generally not be issued for waitresses, vendors, domestics and farm hands save in exceptional circumstances.

6. STUDENT'S AND DEPENDENT'S PERMITS
There will be no fee for a student's visa provided a letter of admission from an accredited institution is produced.

The fee for a Dependent's permit will be $75.00 per annum.

7. VISITOR'S AND TOURIST'S VISA

Up to 6 months ----------$25.00 per month.
After 6 month's stay ----------$50.00 per month.

A work permit will not be issued to a visitor or tourist who resides in Belize for a period of less than six months.

8. APPLICATIONS TO BE MADE IN PERSON
Applications to the Immigration and Nationality Department shall be made in person if the applicant is in Belize. Likewise applicants themselves, upon proof of identity, must personally claim approved documents.

9. TIME FOR PROCESSING APPLICATIONS
All applications to the Immigration and Nationality Service shall, as far as practicable, be processed and completed within a period of four (4) weeks. Incomplete applications will not be accepted.

10. NATIONALITY FEES
The new fees will be as follows:-

Registration as a citizen of Belize ---------- -$300.00
under section 10 and section 11
of the Belizean Nationality Act.

Inclusion of the name of a minor ---------- $100.00
per child child under section 12. ---------- (No change)

Certificate of Citizenship in case of doubt under section 6.----------$100.00

Resumption of citizenship by ----------$100.00
descent under section 8 ----------(No change)

11. OTHER MATTERS AFFECTING NATIONALITY:-

(a) REFUGEES
The applications of refugees and other displaced persons for nationality will be considered in accordance with the Refugees Act and the U.N. Convention on the Status of Refugees. Refugees will not be treated less favourably than other applicants for the granting of nationality.

(b) SECTION 29 (3) OF THE CONSTITUTION

In considering applications for nationality, regard will be had to section 29 (3) of the Constitution which states that â€œno person shall be entitled under the provisions of this Chapter to be a citizen of Belize or be granted citizenship of Belize if such person shows any allegiance to or is a citizen of a country which does not recognize the Independence, sovereignty or territorial integrity of Belize. Provided that the Minister may, in his discretion, grant Belizean Citizenship to persons falling under this subsection who would otherwise be entitled to such citizenship under the provision of sections 23 and 25 of the Constitution.â€•

(c) BASIC KNOWLEDGE OF BELIZE CONSTITUTION
All applicants for Belizean nationality will be expected to have or acquire a basic knowledge of the Belize Constitution and the system of government in Belize, starting August 1999.

(d) PENDING APPLICATIONS
In an effort to clear the backlog of pending applications for nationality and permanent residence, applicants are invited to visit the Immigration and Nationality Department and to inquire personally on the status of their application. To assist the Department to locate the relevant files, applicants should take the necessary receipts and any other identifying number given to them by the Department.

(e) NEW OATH OF ALLEGIANCE
All persons who are granted Belizean Nationality will be required to subscribe to a new Oath of Allegiance as set out below.

(f) OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

I, _____do swear that I will bear true faith and allegiance to Belize and will uphold the Constitution and the Law of Belize and that I will faithfully and conscientiously contribute to the development of Belize and discharge my duties and responsibilities as a Belizean citizen.

I will further respect the history and culture of Belize and refrain from any anti-social or criminal activities and devote myself to the service and well-being of the Belizean people. I pledge that I will do everything in my power to promote and strengthen democracy and the rule of law in Belize and will do everything to promote the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Belize. So Help Me God.

MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY
AND IMMIGRATION
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Belize's new "retiree law" makes this country's program the best in the world

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"Now any qualified individual can live and work tax-free in Belize-not just retired people"

On September 15, 1999 Belize's new retiree legislation became law-meaning that Belize now offers what we believe to be the most attractive incentive program anywhere for foreign retirees. If you're looking for tax-free living, put Belize at the top of your list.
The law aims to encourage and promote the inflow of foreign capital into Belize by offering certain tax exemptions and incentives to qualified Retired Persons. It's a win-win situation for you and for the Belize government. Similar to Costa Rica's now-defunct pensionado program, the new Belize law targets North American and UK nationals who would spend part or all of the year in Belize, maintain a residence there, and bring their hard-earned dollars to spend locally.

Unlike other immigration programs, this one falls squarely under the authority of the Ministry of Tourism. which is working in conjunction with the Belize Tourist Board to make the program simple and user- friendly.

Duty-free imports
To entice you to come to Belize. the law allows you as a -"Qualified Retired Person" (QRP) a one-time allowance to import, your car and personal and household effects duty-free. (Thereafter. you may import another vehicle duty-free into Belize every five years. as long as your previous vehicle is sold, re-exported, or disposed of in an approved manner.) The program also allows you to import light aircraft, boats and other modes of transportation without duty, according to Mr. Anthony Mahler, senior product development officer with the Belize Tourist Board, the quasi-governmental agency administering the program.

As for household effects, there are no specifications or limitations as to what constitutes such personal property. Only in cases of abuse, such as when an individual tries to import six refrigerators or 10 air conditioners, would the exempt status be denied. according to Mahler.

No local taxes
The new law also exempts completely the QRP from the Income and Business Tax Act and from "the payment of all taxes and levies on all income or receipts that accrue to him from a source outside of Belize ... whether such income is earned or passive income and whether or not such income is remitted to him in Belize." Essentially, that means that you'll be accorded the same tax-free status granted to International Business Companies (IBCs) and trusts.

While you cannot be gainfully employed under the new law, some room has been left for QRP's to start or operate existing businesses under this status. Much like an offshore entity, a QRP cannot do business in the local economy with Belize nationals on a tax-free basis. But you could direct foreign-business activities and operations from within Belize and still maintain your tax-free status.

You don't have to be a "retiree" to benefit
Given the evolution in the world economy toward e-commerce, "virtual" businesses, and the use of the Internet, it is conceivable that almost any business could operate as a Belizean MC. And now any qualifying individual can live and work on a tax-free basis in Belize. So it is fair to say that the law is not only for retired people but also for any other qualified individual wishing to lead a "tax-free" life.

If you're a QRP interested simply in managing your simply in managing your own financial affairs, the law is ideal- because neither active nor passive income is subject to taxation under this law. If your assets and ongoing business activities are placed under a proper trust/corporate structure it may also be possible to eliminate or greatly reduce your U-S. taxes when you live the requisite number of days outside of the United States.

The number of days spent outside the United Stares and the number of days spent inside Belize are nor related, so Belizean QRP status may also be of interest to perpetual travelers and others who spend the year in several locations and who may only infrequently visit Belize.

Possibly the most attractive feature of the new law is the low financial threshold that you must meet to qualify. In many other countries, you have to make a significant financial commitment before you can obtain citizenship, permanent residence, or another status giving you the right to live there permanently. Preconditions range from making large investments or buying expensive homes to putting hundreds of thousands of dollars into long-term CDs or other government financial instruments. The United States, for-example, grants a greencard status to any foreigner willing to invest $1 million into a U.S. business that creates a minimum of 10 jobs. For the privilege of living in the United States, the foreigner must first pay the $1 million. and then he immediately becomes subject to U.S. taxation on his worldwide income, whether he earns it in Detroit, Berlin, or Kuala Lumpur.

You need only US$2,000 per month to qualify
In Belize, you'll find very little "Fine print" and few strings associated with the offer. As a QRP, you must show a monthly income of US S2,000 or arrange to deposit on or before the April I deadline each year 524,000 for your own general maintenance and support. You or your spouse must be at least 45 years old, and you should plan to set up an address in Belize.

Minor children under 18 who are your dependents automatically qualify.

Few strings attached
There is no requirement that you buy property, invest in business, create jobs, or loan your money to the government on interest-free terms. You may seek professional assistance with the process, but it is not required. I'd advise you to act quickly if you're considering applying for QRP status. Insiders tell me that a ceiling of approximately 20,000 applications will be allowed before the program is closed to new applicants., This could take several years, as it did in the case of Costa Rica, or it could happen in as little as one year, depending on demand.

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