

BELIZE FAST FACTS

CAPITAL:

Belmopan

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE:

English. Belize is the only country in Central America where English is the official language.

CURRENCY:

Belize dollar (BZD), fixed exchange rate of BZD2 to USD1

ETHNIC GROUPS:

Kriol, Garifuna, Mestizo, Spanish, Maya, English, Mennonite, Lebanese, Chinese and Eastern Indian

POPULATION:

327,719 (2012 est.)

SIZE:

8,867 square miles, including 266 square miles of islands

INDEPENDENCE:

September 21, 1981

GOVERNMENT TYPE:

Parliamentary Democracy, part of the British Commonwealth

PHONE CODE:

International access code - 011

TIME:

CST (however, Daylight Savings Time is not observed, as it is in the United States Central Standard Time Zone)

LOCATION:

Belize lies on the east coast of Central America in the heart of the Caribbean Basin. It borders Mexico to the north, Guatemala to the west and the south, and is flanked by the Caribbean Sea to the east.

CLIMATE:

Subtropical with a prevailing wind from the Caribbean Sea. Average winter: 75° F. Average summer: 81° F. Annual rainfall ranges from 50 inches in the north to 170 inches in the south.



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Kirsten Long
klong@olson.com // 612.215.2218



TRAVELING TO BELIZE

ENTRY REQUIREMENT

Visitors to Belize must possess a passport valid for at least three months after the date of arrival and a return ticket with sufficient funds to cover their stay. Visitors are given a one-month stay, after which an extension can be applied for with the Immigration Department. Visas are not required for citizens of the United States and its territories, Canada, United Kingdom and its territories, European Union, Caribbean and Central American Countries. The Immigration Department can be reached at 501-222-4620.

CURRENCY

Belize currency exchange is extremely easy for American visitors. The Belize dollar is locked at \$2 BZ = \$1 USD. Most places readily accept USD currency as well as traveler's checks with a valid passport or driver's license. Large bills (anything above a \$20 bill) are a little more difficult to cash. ATMs are available across the country, particularly in most tourist destinations.

TAXES, TIPS AND FEES

Hotel Room Tax - 9%
Sales Tax (on goods & services) - 12.5%
Int'l Passenger Airport Departure Fee - \$39.25 USD (payable only in U.S. currency)
Int'l Airport to Domestic Airport Fee - \$0.75 USD or \$0.80 CAD
Boat Departure to Int'l Destination Fee - \$3.75 USD or \$3.98 CAD

HEALTH SERVICES

Hospitals: There are three hospitals in Belize City; one public and two private. There are also health clinics throughout the country.

Water: Potable water is available in most areas of Belize, but it is advisable to ask, and if in doubt, to drink boiled or bottled water.

Vaccinations: No vaccinations are required for entry, but anti-malaria tablets are recommended for extended stays in the jungle.

TRANSPORTATION

Airplane: Flying is by far the most popular form of transportation in and around Belize. The country has one international airport located in Ladyville (nine miles north of Belize City), called Philip Goldson International Airport (BZE). Travelers coming from the United States and Canada can find several direct flights into BZE.

Nonstop air service is available from: Atlanta, Dallas, Houston, Miami and Newark. Carriers that offer flights from these cities are American Airlines (www.aa.com), United Airlines (www.united.com), Delta Airlines (www.delta.com), U.S. Airways (www.usairways.com), Grupo TACA (www.taca.com).

From BZE, connections can be made to various destinations within Belize, including Ambergris Caye, Caye Caulker, Caye Chapel, Corozal, Dangriga, Big Creek, Placencia, San Ignacio, Corozal and Punta Gorda.

Local Belizean carriers include Maya Island Air (www.mayaislandair.com), Tropic Air (www.tropicair.com), Cari Bee Air Service (telephone: 501-224-4253).

Helicopter: Helicopter transfers are another available form of transportation in Belize and can operate between the international airport, local airports and private heliports throughout the country. There is one helicopter company in Belize: Astrum Helicopters (www.astrumhelicopters.com). The company offers helicopter adventures, transfers and chartered flights to many of Belize's attractive destinations.

Car: Depending on the course taken, the route through Mexico to Belize can be anywhere from 1,350 to 2,000 miles. Any visitors trying to drive into Belize from Guatemala or Mexico must obtain a temporary importation permit at the point of entry. Permits are only valid for one month and can be extended by applying to the Customs Department.

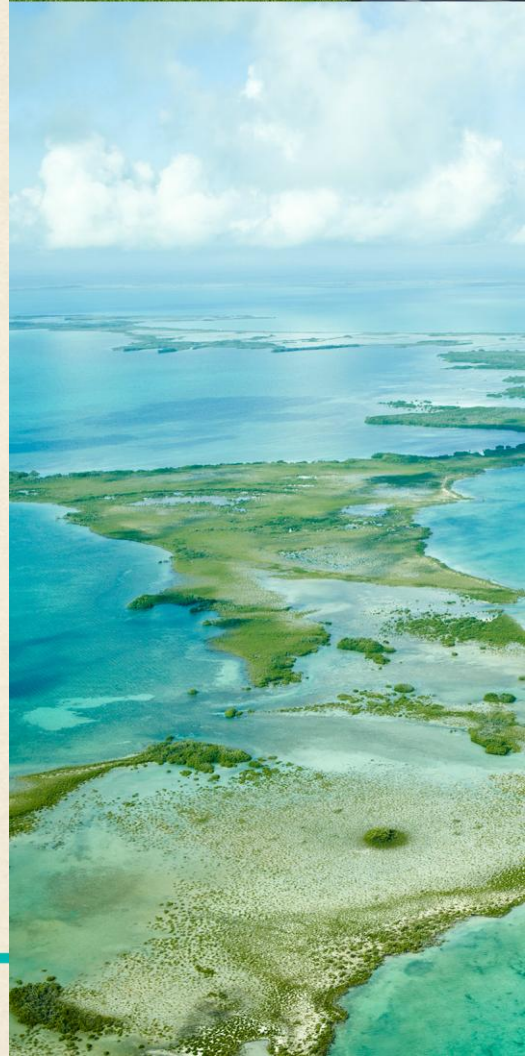
To receive a permit, visitors must present the following at the point of entry: travel documents and identification, proof of ownership (vehicle registration), proof of insurance (available from any of the companies at the borders), and rental documents for vehicles rented in Mexico or Guatemala.

There are four major highways in Belize, including the Northern, Western, Southern and Hummingbird highways.



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klong@olson.com // 612.215.2218



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The following are road distances from Belize City to various destinations within the country:

- Belmopan: 55 miles
- Benque Viejo: 81 miles
- Corozal Town: 96 miles
- Dangriga: 105 miles
- Orange Walk Town: 58 miles
- Punta Gorda: 210 miles
- San Ignacio: 72 miles

Bus: Belize is bordered to the north by Mexico and to the west and south by Guatemala. Routes are offered from the U.S. border cities to Belize via Cancun, Mexico City and Chetumal. All buses connect with the Mexican cities with the border City of Chetumal. Regularly scheduled buses from Belize run to and from Chetumal to Belize City, stopping in Corozal and Orange Walk as well. Belize City, Belmopan and San Ignacio can also be accessed by bus from Guatemala City. Buses travel from any of these major Belize cities to almost any destination within the country.

Water Taxis: There is a regular schedule of water taxis traveling between Belize City and Ambergris Caye, Caye Caulker, Caye Chapel, and St. George's Caye. There is also a ferry from Corozal Town to San Pedro, Ambergris Caye. Furthermore, any hotels and resorts located on the other cayes either have private water taxis, or can arrange transport for guests.

Cruise and Private Vessel Ports of Entry: Cruise and private vessel ports of entry include the areas of Belize City, Corozal, Dangriga, Big Creek, San Pedro and Punta Gorda.



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ADVENTURE FOR ALL

ADVENTURE LEVEL 1: THE "MILD IS WILD" TRAVELER

Bird-Watching: Do you like birds? We have some. Home to over 600 species of birds, Belize offers some of the best bird-watching in the world and the national parks of Belize are great places to begin the adventure. With 66 percent of the country still forested, viewers can easily spot upwards of 50 species in a single outing. Orange-breasted falcons, keel-billed toucans, red-legged honey creepers and white hawks are just a few of the many rare birds you'll find. With so many birds, all you have to do is look up.

Hiking: Hiking our national parks is a great way to see many kinds of birdlife, plants and animals. As intimidating as some of our trails may look on a map, don't worry. Most are designed in loops so you easily return to your starting point. Some trails are self-guided, some require the expertise of a licensed tour guide who can point out birds, wildlife and local plants.

Whatever level of hiker you consider yourself, we have the trail to match what you're looking for. Take a day tour or spend several days camping—either one provides you with the chance to encounter exotic tropical plants and birds, or to see wildlife, including howler monkeys, crocodiles, or the tracks of the elusive jaguar and tapir (just hope they're only the tracks).

Fishing: No matter what type of fisherman you fancy yourself, we can provide. From spin to fly to trolling, our abundance of game fish guarantees excellent sport fishing all year round. And since many rivers empty into the Caribbean Sea, you're practically guaranteed a daily catch. Not to mention the fact that our guides have no problem sharing their own "secret" spots with guests. Explore Turneffe Atoll, which provides you with some of the most desired areas in the world for fly fishing. Bonefish, permit and tarpon are everywhere here. In fact, Belize is one of few

places where you can fish a Grand Slam—bonefish, permit and tarpon all in the same day. How many times do you get to win a Grand Slam on a vacation?

ADVENTURE LEVEL 2: THE "TRY NEW THINGS" TRAVELER

Snorkeling: Think the sea looks beautiful from the beach? You should see what's happening below. Even if you've never snorkeled before, our knowledgeable local guides will help you explore the kaleidoscope of colors found in hard and soft corals, sponges, and over 500 species of fish and marine life. There are hundreds of snorkeling sites of varying depths along the Belize Barrier Reef. Every snorkel spot is a little different from the other and if you go back to the same spot, each time you will see something different. From schools of fish to turtles to the occasional barracuda, there's a lot going on underwater. Check for yourself, you won't be disappointed.

Kayaking: Kayaks are a great way to explore the sea and rivers of Belize. Look down on the clear waters to see the reefs, fish, rays and sea turtles. Overhead there are migratory birds and sunshine for days. By the way, pack some sunscreen. Coastal and island resorts offer kayaks for short excursions up the beach and around the islands while professional kayak outfitters offer multiday packages that operate from a single base camp, or you can do an island hopping tour. Either way, when the water calls, we have the answer.

Horseback Riding: Some of our most beautiful places can only be accessed on foot. Or hoof. Horseback riding tours can be arranged through many resorts or tour operators. Popular tours travel through the jungles of the Cayo District, or you can see Maya sites like El Pilar, Xunantunich and Cahal Pech.

Sailing: Belize provides a thrilling challenge for those sailors who consider themselves experts. Hidden coral heads make navigation tricky. So if you're up for it, this could be your most rewarding sailing experience ever. If not, charter a boat and let our people do the work.

ADVENTURE LEVEL 3: THE "MAKE IT EXTREME" TRAVELER

Cave Tubing: For a wet-and-wild trip down rivers and through the limestone caves of Belize, travelers can take advantage of the many cave-tubing adventures offered here. Caves Branch River, Barton Creek Cave and Crystal Cave all have skilled tour guides to take visitors on an adrenaline-pumping ride down the rivers of these ancient caves, some of which still hold Maya relics.



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Kirsten Long
klong@olson.com // 612.215.2218



ADVENTURE FOR ALL

Cave Rappelling: Take a cave trip you're sure to never forget. Actun Tunichil Muknal (commonly referred to as ATM) and Cahal Pech offer amazing cave rappelling tours that will send you hundreds of feet down into places like Black Hole Drop.

Jungle Tumble: The new Jungle Tumble offers travelers a thrilling ride inside a giant 11-foot-tall inflatable ball. Also known as Zorbing, the Jungle Tumble was originally invented in New Zealand. This new eco-adventure activity allows guests the opportunity to tumble down custom designed tracks stretching throughout the Belizean jungle and is available just outside of Belize City.

Diving: Diving in Belize provides an experience unlike anywhere else. See our diving page for all of the best locations and amazing sights to see.

Windsports: A parasailing adventure takes place a thrilling 400 feet above the boat, and offers riders spectacular views of the blue Caribbean Sea, amazing barrier reef and sandy beaches. This experience is offered on Ambergris Caye as well as Caye Caulker and the pace of the ride can change to cater to either those who long for an exciting adventure, or those looking to just enjoy a leisurely ride with picturesque scenery.



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BELIZE BY REGION

From reefs to jungles to beaches to the mysteries of ancient Maya, Belize has it all. Just make sure to schedule some time to relax.



Northern Belize Northern Belize is a destination for those wanting to get closer to Mother Nature, avoid large crowds or experience everything from the archaeological wonders of the Maya sites to exploring the jungles, rainforests and lagoons. If you're looking to get off the grid, head here.



North Islands Two of the most popular Belizean islands, Ambergris Caye and Caye Caulker, are located off of the northern coast of Belize. Caye Caulker signs caution visitors to "Go Slow," but few need to take notice, as the island's unwritten motto is evident by its easygoing people, sandy roads for golf carts and the rhythmic pace of the waves. Ambergris Caye is known as "the place to get away," and it provides something for everyone, whether it's underwater adventure or relaxing on the beach. It's all here, what you do is up to you.



Central Coast Home to the howler monkeys and many rare bird species, Central Belize is perfect for travelers looking to get into the wild. Consisting of the Belize and Cayo districts, Central Belize brings together some of the country's best features, including Maya sites, dense jungles, rushing waterfalls and extensive caves. The Central Coast is also home to Belize City, the cultural and business epicenter of Belize.



Western Belize Western Belize is home to many archaeological sites, like Cahal Pech. Other points of interest include the Butterfly Farm and the Rainforest Medicinal Trails and the Benque House of Culture in Benque Viejo Del Carmen. For the more adventurous traveler, Nachuch Che'em Park is known for its cave tubing and zip-lining offerings. And for everything from Maya temples to caving to hiking to kayaking or horseback riding, San Ignacio is definitely the place to be in Western Belize.



Southeast Coast The Southeast Coast is a blend of culture and adventure. From the Maya Mountains views to the golden-sand beaches, this region has something for everyone. Dangriga, a laid-back Garifuna seaside community near Hopkins, is a great beach destination and Placencia is known for water activities like kayaking, snorkeling and diving. Inland is full of adventures, like Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary, Mayflower Bocawina National Park and Blue Hole National Park. This coast has it all.



Southern Belize Known by many as "The Forgotten Land," Southern Belize's undiscovered landscapes serve as a threshold for lush rainforests, ancient Maya artifacts, fascinating cultures and enough eco-adventures to impress even the most discerning traveler. Punta Gorda is the gateway to everything from off-shore fishing; to river trips, as well as caving, birding and Maya archaeological sites. Not to mention, some of the nicest people you'll ever meet.



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BELIZE CUISINE

With so many different cultures living together in the same country, it's only natural that we would have a wide variety of food. From seafood to traditional food to wonderful BBQ, there's plenty to love about eating here. For the best in Belizean cuisine, look no further than local eateries and food stands. Locals really know what good food is.

CENTRAL COAST:

Meat Pies: Belize City is the hot-spot for this traditional Belizean dish. Ask the locals and they'll have a favorite place to get their meat pies and a tried and true way to eat it. Meat pies are a delicious combination of onions, peppers, meat and spices inside a warm crust.

Rice and Beans: Typically used to complement a main dish, white rice and red kidney beans are most commonly found in Belize and a specialty in this region. A truly authentic Belizean dinner would pair either of these varieties with stewed or fried chicken.

Cowfoot Soup: For a culinary experience not found at home, try Cowfoot soup in the Central Coast region. The cowfoot is boiled to soften and mixed with a variety of vegetables, coco seasoning and okro pepper.

Stewed Chicken: One of the most traditional Belizean dishes, stewed chicken is one that every visitor should experience. The secret to this delectable dish is to brown the chicken that's been rubbed with an annatto paste called "recado," and sprinkled with salt, pepper and garlic before adding water, a dash of vinegar, chopped onions and sweet peppers.

NORTHERN BELIZE:

Escabeche: This dish expertly blends flavors from Mestizo, Spanish and Maya cultures with a spicy combination of chicken smothered with onions in vinegar, peppers and other spices. Fresh corn

tortillas are made to complement the dish, which are prepared by mixing ground whole corn with white lime and water.

Chimole Soup: Chimole, also known as "Black Dinner" is a tasty, black-colored soup with roots in Mayan and Mestizo cultures but enjoyed by all in Belize. This savory hearty soup made with the unique ingredient black recado is a local favorite.

SOUTHERN BELIZE:

Cohune Cabbage: Cohune cabbage, made with hearts of palm flavored with yellow ginger (turmeric), is one not to be missed! This curried cabbage is at its best in the Southern towns of Belize.

NORTH ISLANDS:

Seafood: Due to Belize's excellent geographical location, the seafood is plentiful, of high quality and available almost anywhere in the country, but is at its freshest on the islands. Conch, shrimp, squid, crab soup, ceviche are just a few of the seafood selections found on Belizean menus.

Lobster: At the close of lobster season, which runs from February through July, several coastal towns including San Pedro on Ambergris Caye, Caye Caulker and Placencia host the world-renowned Lobster Fests. This celebration features live music and dancing along with the delicious catch of the season. The Lobster Fest is scheduled every year in June and attracts visitors from all over the globe to enjoy the wide array of lobster delicacies.

BELIZEAN BRANDS:

Marie Sharp's Hot Sauce: No dining table in the country is complete without a bottle of Marie Sharp's Hot Sauce. An extremely distinctive element of Belizean dining, the original Marie Sharp's sauce is made from a base of habanero peppers, carrots and onions. The brand now offers the pepper sauce in varying degrees of heat, from "mild" to "beware," as well as jams and chutneys to go with any food or dish.

Belikin: In Belize, no meal is truly complete unless it's accompanied by the country's national beer—an ice-cold Belikin. Produced by the Belize Brewing Company, this beer comes in varieties of stout, lager and premium. The original beer recipes came from the founding brew masters who all came to Belize from Germany. Since then, the beer has varied ever so slightly to give it a distinctly Belizean taste.

Rum: The liquor of choice in Belize is rum. Five-year-aged Prestige rum is considered the best of the Belizean rums; other local favorites include 1 Barrel and Caribbean Gold Rum.

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Kirsten Long
klong@olson.com // 612.215.2218



BELIZEAN CULTURE

From the moment you arrive in Belize—whether you are an adventure traveler, part of a family trip or in the country for a relaxing beach vacation—Belize's people and culture make you feel welcome and comfortable. Our goal is always to make you feel at home, even though you're nowhere near it.

MESTIZO:

Roughly 48 percent of the Belizean population is Mestizo, or a mixture of the Spanish and Maya cultures. Many people of this heritage migrated from Mexico in the mid-1800s, to flee La Guerra de Castas, or the Caste Wars. Mestizos are found everywhere in Belize, but most make their homes in either the northern regions of Corozal and Orange Walk, or in the western district of Cayo. They can also be found in the Northern Islands as well.

GARIFUNA:

People of Garifuna descent make up about 6.6 percent of Belize's population. With their own language and culture, the Garifuna are the descendants of African slaves, Caribbean tribes and Arawak Indians. This group dominates the southern towns of Punta Gorda and Dangriga, as well as the villages of Seine Bight, Hopkins, Georgetown and Barranco. On November 19, Garifuna Settlement Day is celebrated to honor the first arrival of the Garifuna to Belize in 1832.

MENNONITES:

The Mennonites began arriving in Belize in 1958 from Canada, Chihuahua and Mexico. They reside in the Orange Walk and Cayo Districts in six main communities: Blue Creek, Shipyard, Little Belize, Progreso, Spanish Lookout and Barton Creek. Easily identified by their apparel, the women in bonnets and long dresses and the men wearing denim overalls and hats, the Mennonites have made it a point to have their own school, church and financial institution in their community.

KRIOLS:

Kriols make up 30 percent of the population in Belize. They are the descendants of early British settlers and African slaves, who came to the region in the early 1800s. Two-thirds of the Creole population resides in Belize City.

EAST INDIANS:

People from Eastern India first began to arrive in Belize after 1838, and now make up about 2 percent of the population. Originally coming to the country as indentured servants, many Eastern Indians stayed to work on the sugar plantations. People of Indian descent are now spread across Belize in many villages, as well as the larger towns in the Corozal and Toledo districts.

CHINESE & TAIWANESE:

In an attempt to escape the Japanese invasion of China just before World War II, many Chinese immigrated to Belize. Currently, there are around 6,000 people of Chinese descent living in the country. More recently, an economic citizenship program was offered by the Belizean government, so many people of Taiwanese descent have also immigrated to Belize to establish businesses.

MIDDLE EASTERN:

People of Middle Eastern descent make up a small group of Belizeans. Arriving in the late 19th century, these groups have a strong presence as merchants in towns and cities throughout Belize.



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