

Tell me about Mexico's ADO bus service between Mexico and Belize

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Mexico's ADO buses serving Belize

Belizeans seeking medical attention in Merida or a beach vacation in Cancun can now travel in air-conditioned comfort for Bz\$79 one way on a new premier bus service introduced by Mexico's bus company Autotransportes del Oriente, ADO for short.

ADO began its service from the Novelo terminal in Belize City to Cancún and Merida without any fuss or fanfare last Friday, August 26, after finalizing the details of their road service permit with Minister of Transportation Melvin Hulse in Belmopan the day before.

The company screened their drivers and chose the 10 best to pioneer this new service which makes travelling to Mexico much easier for Belizeans. It also promises to bring more tourists to Belize, as ADO Public Relations Officer Gabriela Osuna explained to the Belizean media at Belize City on Wednesday afternoon, August 31.

The ADO buses seat 44 passengers in seats that recline 60 degrees for maximum comfort in traveling at night. The bus also has three flat screen displays for passengers to enjoy onboard entertainment, and has an onboard restroom.

Fares are Bz\$79.00 one way to Merida or Cancun. The bus to Merida leaves Belize at 8:00 pm and arrives in Merida at 6:15 am. The service is called "The Hospital Route", and the bus will stop in Orange Walk and Corozal to pick up passengers who also wish to travel Merida. The bus makes courtesy stops at the most important hospitals of Merida before its final stop at the Merida bus terminal. The return route makes the same stops and the bus arrives in Belize City in the morning.

The bus for Cancun departs from Belize City at 8:15 pm and arrives in Cancun 7:00 am. This bus also

stops in Orange Walk and Corozal, before travelling on to Playa del Carmen, Cancun Airport and its final stop at Cancun's bus terminal. On the return portion leg the bus also stops in Tulum, where ADO is promoting Belize and offering special deals for international tourists to travel to Belize.

Local bus operators had raised a storm of protests when ADO made its first overtures to introduce the service two years ago, but ADO's Operations Manager Luis Perez explains that this is an international service and not a local bus run, so tickets will only be sold for Merida or Cancun. Passengers will not be able to get a ticket to Orange Walk or Corozal on the northbound run, as the stops at those terminals are only to pick up passengers travelling on to Mexico, and the southbound buses coming from the border will stop in Corozal and Orange Walk only to let off passengers wishing to disembark, but will not be taking on any passengers for Belize City. Each ticket has an assigned seat number, and passengers are given a ticket stub for their checked in baggage, just as on an airline, with the same security. The buses do not enter Chetumal at all.

ADO's Gabriela Osuna said the service is intended to save Belizeans time and money, because travellers will not need to spend money on an extra night at a hotel or have their family to come to pick them up at the Mexican terminal in the wee hours of the morning. The bus company will initially assign 15 seats to made available for passengers from each of the three Belize terminals: Belize City, Orange Walk and Corozal, so when there is a demand for more seats at one terminal, that ticket agent will need to inform the other terminals before selling the seats.

ADO's Luis Perez said the break-even occupancy is 20 seats, but the first runs have been arriving with only 18 passengers, and some of the runs over the weekend had only 12-13 passengers. But Perez is optimistic that occupancy will improve as travelers get to know of the ADO service.

This first week the buses were also monitored for the time taken to cover each stage of the route, while ensuring that the drivers stay within the speed limit, and drive in a manner that does not cause any undue discomfort to the passengers.

The Reporter

from a friend...

I've twice been to Belize this year, the first in January / February and again last week. Since I hadn't been to Cancun for a few years, I decided to brave it and take the ADO bus to Cancun on my way back to Houston to test the service out.

My kids travel to Belize at least once a year to spend the summer with their dad, and sometimes they use this route. I'd never heard them complain. What's there not to like about Cancun?

The first eye opener was that a one-way ticket from Cancun to Houston costs half the price of a one way ticket from Belize to Houston. At about US\$200 (or so) one way, I could actually splurge on a nice hotel, spend a night or two in Cancun, eat to my heart's content, and still arrive in Houston under the price of the one way from Belize to Houston (US\$450+).

I booked a hotel in Cancun online (about US\$48 a night) for two nights before I left Belize.

On the day of departure, I took, the last water taxi into Belize City (4:30 P.M.) which arrived in Belize City at around 5:30 p.m. A short BZ\$7 taxi ride to the bus terminal later, I found out the ADO bus departs Belize at 7:30 (I believe). This gave me an hour or so of free time, so the taxi driver and I headed out to Li Chee for some fried chicken with steak sauce before departure.

The price of the one way ticket was US\$40. It departed right on schedule. The buses are luxury buses, nicely air-conditioned (even TOO cold, maybe), there are drop-down movie screens, the chairs tilt backwards a bit ... All in all, the experience was as nice, or better, than flying in an airplane. The rows are four seats across, two, a space, and then two more. The buses are equipped with bathrooms.

The border crossing was smooth and easy. There were no problems on the Belize side, and the immigration and customs personnel were friendly and warm.

I can't remember much about arriving in Mexico, but other than filling out an immigration form and having the passport stamped, I don't think it was eventful.

The bus ride is about 8 hours long, and it is for the most part a direct service with little to no stops. The bus does not stop in Chetumal. Since it is overnight, most passengers doze of and try to nap. The bus was about 60% full. Thankfully the space next to my seat was vacant, and I was able to stretch a bit while I napped.

After a pretty much uneventful 8 hour ride, we arrived in Cancun at around 6:30 a.m. Mexican time. I

went to the hotel where I had booked the room, and it turned out to be a very nice hotel, well worth the US\$48 per night and probably double. In Houston, if a hotel is charging US\$48 a night, you usually stay away from it, as there is a high likelihood prostitutes would be using it as a base. Not so in this hotel in Cancun, it was mostly filled with college kids from the US on Spring Break.

Cancun is as beautiful and wonderful as ever. I spent the two days in Cun soaking up the sun, the view, the sea breeze, the salt air ... all the things that make me nostalgic for the Caribbean. I love Mexican food, and their ceviche is second to none. Ceviche, frozen drink, beautiful beach, sunshine, sea breeze, what more could anyone ask for? It was sheer bliss. I did a few odd trips (to Isla Mujeres - US\$17.50 round trip), etc. but with only two days to spare, there is not a lot that goes into the "to do" list.

On the day of departure, I was asked to pay a US\$25 exit fee. I paid the fee at an airport bank, got a receipt, and had to present the receipt to the customer service agent for the airline I was flying on.

I am glad I made the choice to go the route that I did. The overnight bus, while it may sound like an awfully long commute, actually goes by very quickly when you are sleeping, lol.

It turns out that I had to make a second trip to Belize this week, and I again chose to travel via Cancun. My flight arrived in CUN at 2:30 P.M. I walked out of the terminal, inquired about the whereabouts of the ADO terminal, and to my surprise, there was a bus leaving in 15 minutes to Playa del Carmen.

Having also not been to Playa for several years, the idea of it was enjoyable. It was US\$10 for the one hour or so bus ride which I boarded right at the airport. The overnight bus to Belize would stop in Playa at 11:40 p.m., giving me several hours to look around and explore Playa. The bus terminal in Playa has lockers, so you can padlock your luggage and head out to explore quite easily. No need to take a taxi or anything, the bus terminal is about a half a block from the amazing 5th avenue, and about a block or so from the awesome beach. Playa is beautiful. I would definitely go back again. The popular 5th avenue, the heart of Playa's tourism district, is bustling with activity. The shops are quaint and colorful. Artists abound on every street. It is an exciting sensory event.

At 11:40, right on schedule, the bus to Belize arrived. It got to the border around 4:30 p.m. The Mexican side once again billed me an exit tax of US\$25, which the immigration officer promptly placed inside his pocket. Hmmm. Crossing the border in Belize was also smooth and easy. Even though it was very early in the morning when we got there, the immigration officer was extremely pleasant and cheerful. It was a very pleasant experience.

I got to Belize City around 6:30 a.m. When I departed the bus terminal, the friendly faces of the San Pedro Water Taxi land taxi drivers were already there, easing any discomfort I might have had about

being in Belize City at the crack of dawn. Cab to the water taxi terminal - \$6BZ. The water taxi left for CC at 7:45 a.m., and before you know it, I was safely back on my island home.

Aside from the long commute which I do not find anywhere close to unbearable, I find the experience of spending a few days or a few hours in Mexico quite refreshing. I would do the journey any day if I were not in a hurry and time was not an issue. Many Belizeans also probably think the same, as the bus back to Belize was full, with at least half of them being Belizeans.

It got me thinking how upside down we in Belize have gotten. Once upon a time, the Mexicans used to come to Belize to take our cheaper international flights to North America. Those were the days of TAN, TACA, SAHSA, and BAL. The Belize International Airport serviced not only Belizeans, but most of Quintana Roo. (The Port of Belize back then also serviced Quintana Roo as well, with a high percentage of cargo shipped through being in transit cargo bound for Mexico).

The Riviera Maya of Mexico is delightful and beautiful. The passenger who sat beside me talked about paying \$100 US a night in Cancun at a beautiful all inclusive hotel (the OASIS) where for the rate I just quoted, she and her boyfriend could eat, drink, and chug anything they wanted. Alcoholic drinks were also included.

I can't help but think how much local business Belize is bleeding to Mexico. We are over priced as a destination. And our flights have become so expensive that we are now bleeding passengers to Mexico, which will in turn drive up airline prices to Belize even more.

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RESPONSES:

Airfares to Belize are retarding the entire tourism industry. They are waaaay over every neighbor's fares. Joshua Berman's Maya 2012 guide even mentions entering Belize via a neighboring country if at all possible due to the consistently high airfares to Belize. The GOB is obviously addicted to the upfront tax money they are getting from the airlines. They'd get so much more in the long run if they'd drop the tax down but we should not hold our breath. It's a major bummer. I personally would be able to convince many more people to go to Belize with airfares at the same rates as Guatemala City or San Pedro Sula (Cancun is a special case and those fares are probably always going to be lower than everyone else).

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That US\$25 "exit tax" at the border has long been a real issue with foreign travelers. Used to be, you paid

the fee as the Mexico entrance fee and it was included in your airline ticket price, but the border officials at Chetumal would still try to collect it as an exit fee (there was no such thing as an exit fee if you had paid coming in.) They must have made a fortune. Rules changed a few months ago, and I'm not sure the airlines still collect the fee, but it's kind of a cloudy issue.

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Just returned from Merida and will be filing my report shortly. I share your sentiments only my return trip allowed me some very interesting comparisons. On my return, I took the ADO to Chetumal and the Belize bus the rest of the way. I would not recommend it nor would I do it again.

1. Route Belize Mexico	Route	Cost BZ \$	Departs Belize Time	Itinerary	Ar Ti
	Belize To Cancun Airport	\$79.00	19:30 Belize City Terminal	BZ>OW>CZL>TUL >PDC>CUN	06
		STOPS: Belize to Tulum – BZ \$54.00 Belize To Playa Del Carmen – BZ \$63.00 Orange Walk To Tulum – BZ \$44.00 Orange Walk To Playa Del Carmen – BZ \$52.00 Corozal To Tulum – BZ \$38.00 Corozal To Playa Del Carmen			
	Belize-Mérida	79.00	19:00 hrs Belize City Terminal	BZ->O.W->CZL-> MER (stops at hospitals ORAM, Juárez, Clínica Mérida, Star Médica and final stop at Terminal Alta Brisa.	06 Al
		There are no stops on the Corozal-Mérida run.			

2. Route Mexico Belize	Route	Cost MX \$	Departs Mexico Time	Itinerary	Arri
	Cancún-Belize	474.00	22:15 hrs International Airport	CUN->PDC->TUL- >CZL->OW->BZ	06:00 Belize
		Stops: Cancún to Corozal – BZ \$ 62.00 Cancún to Orange Walk – BZ \$69.00 Playa del Carmen to Corozal – BZ \$46.00 Playa del Carmen to Orange Walk – BZ \$52.00			
	Mérida-Belize	474.00	21:00 hrs Terminal Alta Brisa	MER->CZL->OW- >BZ	06:00 Belize
		There are no stops on the Mérida- Corozal run.			

The ADO Belize-Mexico runs are every day of the week.

Passengers MUST present valid passports before boarding bus.

Contact Telephone: +52 (983) 832-9877 ADO Chetumal; +52 (998) 887-1149 ADO Cancún

ADO Bus tickets can be purchased in Belize:

- Belize City: Gilberto Carlos Pérez, Cell Phone: 600-8100
- Orange Walk: San Francisco Restaurant, Tel: 302-2240 and Cell Phone: 624-8200
- Corozal: Cruzob Travel, Cell Phone: 607-7930

If dialing Belize from abroad add Belize Country Code 501 to above Telephone or Cell Phone numbers.

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