

# Seafood Guide to Belize

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**Seafood Guide to Belize:** Closed seasons, banned catches, size and catch limits, Special laws and permits.

**Why you Should Care.** Fisheries Stocks are declining globally the ocean is not the unlimited resource we once thought it was. Many Scientists are predicting a complete collapse in the next 50 years. While Belize is better off than some countries, catches have declined in recent decades and most of the large (>40cm) fishes are gone.

The Belize Fisheries Department is doing their best by implementing seasons and size limits for many commercial species but data collection and enforcement are often difficult obstacles.

We need greater protection of our wild fisheries stocks and better ways to rebuild dwindling stocks not only for continued seafood production for future generations but also to preserve the marine ecosystem which in turn will help protect the planet.

**You are what you eat.** Pollution in our oceans has a real trickle down effect. Mercury has been found in many large fish and shark species and warnings exist especially for pregnant women on just how much fish they should eat. There are currently no regulations on shark fishing in Belize and it is often substituted for fish in local treats like panades.

**Lionfish** are an invasive species to the Caribbean that eat up our commercial fish and have no natural predators here; the best eradication methods are to kill them and they are good to eat too. But take care as their fins are poisonous (not the fillet though).

**You can Make a Difference.** Supply and Demand. If the consumer knows the proper seasons for seafood in Belize they are better equipped to make decisions at the restaurant or on their fishing trip. BY ensuring your local guides and restaurants comply with Belize's Fishery Laws you are helping to protect commercial seafood species for generations to come. While we are making strides in mariculture options they can never replace natural stocks which still need more protection now and forever.

**Complete Ban** – Coral – All Parrotfish – Blue Tang – Surgeon Fish – Permit – Tarpon – Bone Fish –

Marine Turtle (all species) -Whale Shark – All Marine Mammals – Diced Conch – Diced Lobster

**Closed Seasons** – Conch July 1st to Sept 30th – Lobster February 15th to June 14th – Nassau Grouper – December 1st to March 31 Wild Shrimp (trawler sources; farm shrimp is legal all year around) July 14 – March 14th – Hickatee May 1st to May 31st

**Catch & Size Limits** – Conch Shell Length – 7 inches Market Clean – 2.5oz, Lobster Cape Length – 3 inches Tail Weight 2.75 oz, Nassau Grouper must be 20 – 30 inches only and must be landed whole (no fillet)

**Special Laws and Permits** – All fishermen must have a valid license. You must be a Belizean Citizen or permanent resident in order to obtain a fisheries permit. Sea Cucumber requires a special permit. Fish fillets must have a skin patch left on (2 inches by 1 inch). No fishing while using artificial breathing devices (SCUBA gear or Hookah) In Marine Protected areas several restrictions on fishing gear apply. No nets, no long lines, no traps. Information from [Belizelaw.org](http://Belizelaw.org) Chapter 2105

### Why should you care?

Fisheries stocks are declining globally—the ocean is not the unlimited resource we once thought it was. Many scientists are predicting a complete collapse in the next 50 years. While Belize is better off than some countries, catches have declined in recent decades and most of the large (>40cm) fishes are gone.

The Belize Fisheries Department is doing their best by implementing seasons and size limits for many commercial species but data collection and enforcement are often difficult obstacles.

We need greater protection of our wild fisheries stocks and better ways to rebuild dwindling stocks not only for continued seafood production for future generations, but also to preserve the marine eco-system which in turn will help protect the planet.

### You are what you eat.

Pollution in our oceans has a real trickle down effect. Mercury has been found in many large fish and shark species and warnings exist especially for pregnant women on just how much fish they should eat. There are currently no regulations on shark fishing in Belize and it is often substituted for fish in local treats like panades.

#### Lionfish:

Lionfish are an invasive species to the Caribbean that eat up our commercial fish and have no natural predators here; the best eradication methods are to kill them and they are good to eat too! But take care as their fins are poisonous (not the fillet though).

See this website for catching and cooking advice:  
[www.lionfishhunter.com](http://www.lionfishhunter.com)



### You can make a difference.

Supply and demand. If the consumer knows the proper seasons for seafood in Belize they are better equipped to make decisions at the restaurant or on their fishing trip. By ensuring your local guides and restaurants comply with Belize's Fisheries Laws you are helping to protect commercial seafood species for generations to come. While we are making strides in mariculture options they can never replace natural stocks which still need more protection, now and forever.

[www.healthyreefs.org](http://www.healthyreefs.org)  
[www.science2action.org](http://www.science2action.org)  
[www.agriculture.gov.bz](http://www.agriculture.gov.bz)  
[www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/seafoodwatch.aspx](http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/seafoodwatch.aspx)  
[www.research.calacademy.org/aquatic/mercury](http://www.research.calacademy.org/aquatic/mercury)



## SEAFOOD GUIDE



for  
**BELIZE**

### COMPLETE BAN

Coral  
All Parrotfish  
Blue Tang  
Surgeon Fish  
Doctor Fish  
Permit  
Tarpon  
Bone fish  
Marine Turtle (all species)  
Whale Shark  
All Marine Mammals  
Diced conch  
Diced lobster

### CLOSED SEASONS

**Conch:**  
July 1 - September 30

**Lobster:**  
February 15 - June 14

**Nassau Grouper:**  
December 1 - March 31

**Wild Shrimp** (trawler sourced; farmed shrimp is legal all year round):  
July 14 - March 14

**Hicatee:**  
May 1 - May 31

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### SIZE & CATCH LIMITS

**Conch:**  
Shell length > 7 inches  
Market clean > 2.75 oz.

**Lobster:**  
Cape length > 3 inches  
Tail weight > 4 oz.

**Nassau Grouper:**  
Must be 20-30 inches only.  
Must be landed whole (no fillet)

**Hicatee:**  
Females must be 15-17 inches.  
Three per person. Five per vehicle.

### SPECIAL LAWS & PERMITS

All fishermen must have a valid license.

You must be a Belizean citizen or Permanent Resident in order to obtain a Fisheries permit.

**Sea Cucumber:**  
Requires Special permit.

**Fish Fillet:**  
Must have skin patch left on 2 inch by 1 inch.

No fishing while using artificial breathing devices (scuba gear or hookah).

In marine protected areas, several restrictions on fishing gear apply: No Nets, No Longlines, No traps.

[www.belizelaw.org](http://www.belizelaw.org) Chapter 210S

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