

How to Visit Belize on a Budget

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Yes, the words “Belize” and “budget” can go together. Here’s how to explore this tropical paradise without breaking the bank.

If you’re skeptical about the words “Belize” and “budget” in the same sentence, it’s understandable. Overall, Belize can be a pricier destination than say, its neighbouring backpacker haven, Guatemala. But in reality, it’s entirely possible to afford a trip to Belize without breaking the bank. There are plenty of areas with affordable lodging, food and entertainment—and beaches, too. It just requires a little more research, flexibility and preparation. Here are my best tips on how to afford your first trip to “The Jewel” of Central America.

Travel Overland from Mexico

The first thing you’ll notice in planning your trip is that roundtrip airfare to Belize from North America can be fairly expensive, often well above \$600. A popular way to get around this hurdle is to fly to Cancun, usually a cheaper and direct flight. Once there, spend a relaxing rest of your day and night in Playa del Carmen, before making your way to Belize in the morning by catching the reliable ADO Mexican bus line, to Chetumal. From Chetumal, Belize’s San Pedro or Caye Caulker are easy boat rides away. Another option is to catch the ADO bus to Belize City.

Stay in Affordable Parts of the Country

Head to either Hopkins, Caye Caulker or the Cayo District, all of which offer the widest range of affordable hotels, guesthouses, or even camping options for the backpackers among you. On Caye Caulker, look into Dirty McNasties for hostel-type quarters, or Caye Caulker Plaza Hotel for mid-range. In Hopkins, Tipple Tree Beya or Whistling Seas Guest House are excellent bets. The interior, western area of Cayo has the most options of all, with everything from hostels to quaint guesthouses like Casa

Blanca.

Visit in the Summer

A sure way to save is to visit during what's otherwise known as "hurricane season" or the summer season. I've spent two summers in Belize; there were fewer tourists, more locals enjoying local activities and super affordable lodging. Many hotels offer up to 50 percent off their high season rates, and walk-ins are often a good deal. You're likely to score big during these months when demand is low and rooms sit empty.

Travel by Bus

The old ladybird buses from the U.S. are Belize's main bus transportation vehicles, and they work just fine. The seats can be hard to bear beyond an hour-long journey but you can't beat the price. A ride from Belize City to Dangriga—about two and half hours—will set you back less than US\$5, compared to say, over \$100 by air. The routes are abundant and can get you to all the major towns in the country.

Book Tours Ahead of Time

Tours can be expensive in Belize and quickly eat up your travel funds. The best way to skirt this is to plan ahead. Research using a solid guidebook—these often provide names of the best local guides and give you an idea of cost. Then, decide which tours are your priority, which you can do on your own, and see if you can combine any to limit your expense. Contact the guides ahead of time and negotiate.

Eat and Drink Local

Visitors are in luck: Belizean food is delicious and affordable! And it includes plenty of daytime snacks—like tacos and pupusas for a dollar—and full meals like stew chicken with rice and beans for just US\$4. Save up and eat local during the day, and treat yourself to nice restaurant dinners in the evenings. Caye Caulker and San Pedro have excellent food—particularly seafood—as does the Cayo District and Placencia. Shop at the weekly farmers' markets and drink fresh-squeezed fruit juices at just US\$2.50 a bottle. Love your local beers or mixed drinks? Find out where the locals all flock to after work and, more likely than not, it's where the drinks are cheapest.

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