

Tips for travelling by bus in Belize

Article Number: 302 | Rating: Unrated | Last Updated: Mon, Sep 2, 2013 6:58 AM

Belize is a very small country with a very small population (about 325,000 people) and relatively few highways. The greatest country width (east to west) is 68 miles. And length only 170 miles!

It's one of the coolest coolest COOLEST things about Belize. You can go from barrier cayes...

to a Mayan temple surrounded by jungle in about an hour.

But that sort of flitting about sure ain't gonna happen by bus.

It's going to cost quite a bit more to flit...whether going by one of the two air lines in the country or, for those who live the lifestyle of the rich and famous, by helicopter.

If you don't have a car on the mainland, bus is the most popular way to get around Belize. It can be slow, but IT IS CHEAP (Belize City to San Ignacio is only \$8bzd) and you get to really see the landscape, the people and the local color of Belize. If you live in the country, you always see someone you know. And for all of these reasons, I really like it.

Sometimes there are problems...

But most issues can be avoided with a few tips.

First, for a lay of the land, here is a quick overview of the relatively simple highway system. [This map](#) pretty much says it all. We've got the The Northern Highway, the Western Highway, the Southern Highway and my favorite, The Hummingbird Highway.

Here are my tips to make things as easy and stress-free as possible.

1. Ask Questions – Lots of Them

There are schedules online ([like on this website](#)) but for the best, most up to date information just ask at the bus station. All major stations have the guys in the yellow shirts who work there. The back of their

shirts say something official.

Ask which gate you need to be waiting at, what time you should line up, can he give you the head's up when the bus arrives. Just ask! They are very helpful.

For even faster answers, just ask the person waiting next to you on the bench or in line. In my experience, everyone has been great.

2. Tickets are purchased on the bus.

Don't look for a ticket window at the station. Each bus has the driver and the money collector. You PAY ON THE BUS. Don't worry about exact change, these guys have plenty.

The money collectors during the ride have an amazing ability to keep track of who and when everyone has boarded.

3.If the station is busy, sharpen your elbows, the push to get on the bus can be fierce and there are no rules. Or try to find a bit of help...

I mean it when I say no rules. "I was here first" does not apply. People will enter through different gates and making absolutely no eye contact use their newborn baby to cut in front of you. If you want a seat, you are going to have to work for it. If you don't get a seat, you will be waiting for the next bus. And that you do not want.

Eyes down everyone! If you don't see the person you are cutting then maybe it didn't happen.

See Tip #1 if you are looking for additional help. Sometimes you can find a super nice employee of the bus station (often the yellow shirted guys cleaning up) who is willing to get on the bus for you and save you a seat. I've never asked...they often just suggest it with the unspoken agreement that you will slip them a few bucks.

It is money well spent.

Worst station for boarding the bus: Belmopan

Days to avoid if possible: Friday afternoon and Sunday afternoon/evening. Both are heavy travel days for people going back to work.

4. Use the Bathroom Right Before you Get on the Bus

Obviously there are no bathrooms on these vehicles. And when you stop for the 5 minute breaks at the larger stations (like Belmopan and Dangriga), the very LAST thing you want to do is lose your seat.

Limit your beverages.

If you MUST use the facilities at a stop, ask your seat mate to save yours for you. She will have to say “no someone is sitting there” 1000x while you are gone, so be quick!

It's 50 cents Belize and not a place where you want to linger. But it does the trick.

5. If you require Air Conditioning or to arrive at your destination with good hair, do not take the bus.

These are retired US school buses. Exactly like you remember from your school days. And if you went to school in the 90s or before, it could be the very same bus you took to Benjamin Franklin Junior High.

Windows are open, the wind and the dust is whipping. Sunglasses are helpful on dry days.

6. Don't Worry Too Much About Packing Food And Drinks (refer to Rule #4)

At each major bus station stop and some other smaller ones, people will board the bus or sell you food and drinks through the windows. Don't worry about a lack of selection. At my last stop at Belmopan (the nation's capital), I was offered: Dukunu and tamales, packaged cookies and gum (well...he called it chicle), watermelon juice, seaweed shakes, bags of craboo, fresh guavas with or without pepper, pizza and chicken sandwiches, creole buns and banana cake.

The last cost me \$1bzd. It was a huge hunk and super moist and delicious.

7. Always Try to Get An Express Bus

It just saves SO much time – the non-express can literally stop every 100 feet. Ask for it by name.

8. The Most Important Rule: BE EASY GOING.

The driver might be blasting music you hate (think modern country), the woman who boarded the full bus handed you her baby and proceeded to the standing room in the back, you might have to help an

elderly lady load her sack of potatoes, the driver might stop at a Chiney shop to pick up his fried chicken lunch or the “express” bus might stop at every single village in the Maya Mountains...all of these things have happened to me.

The bus seats are not all that comfortable. And if you are forced to squeeze three to seat so the bus driver doesn't get in trouble for having people standing in the aisle? You are going to be extra uncomfortable.

If you are coming from the south, you are probably going to get stopped by BAHA (Belize Agriculture Health Association), where you are asked unload and stand on the side of the road (in summer bring your mosquito repellent), the bus is then boarded by BAHA guys and police and the bus searched for mangoes and drugs (I'm guessing) or maybe drugs stuffed in mangoes. Who knows. My mango got taken.

SO in the end, I think Ralph Waldo may have been talking about the bus in Belize when he wrote “Life is a journey, not a destination”.

I hope I didn't scare you off. I really do like travelling by bus. I take it quite often both alone or with a friend.

I suggest you try it. The scenery will be interesting...ever thought about stopping at the Hattieville Prison gift shop? and the people watching some of the best in the world.

For information on the *very different* bus from Belize City to Cancun, Mexico, [check this post](#).

Posted : Marty Casado - Mon, Sep 2, 2013 6:58 AM. This article has been viewed 8950 times.

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