

What can you tell me about the Belize health system for travelers?

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Unexpected things can happen when traveling, so it's a good idea to know a bit about how the local Belize healthcare system works.

Belize is definitely not a country that first comes to mind when thinking about medical tourism; many areas are not at the same standards found in first world countries. However, there are some good aspects about the availability of medical care.

How it works?

Health care in Belize is divided into a very cheap but very basic government controlled public system, and an expensive but more dependable private system. Surgeries and other complicated medical procedures can cost as little as a few hundred dollars at the government-run hospitals, but the overall service is very rudimentary. For example, don't expect private rooms; patient's beds are in wards with shared bathrooms, and patients are expected to provide their own toilet paper. The biggest government-run hospital, Karl Heusner, is in Belize City, and has the widest variety of services and specialists available. Other cities and towns have smaller hospitals or polyclinics, which are much more basic facilities often staffed with nurses and an on-call doctor.

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Privately run clinics and hospitals give faster and often more modern services, but they are considerably more expensive. The best private hospital in Belize is Belize Medical Associates, also located in Belize City. This facility is the closest Belize has to what would be found in a first-world country.

Good vs Bad

So what are the good aspects of Belize health care? Some things are really, really cheap. Think you might have picked up a parasite in your travels? Testing for common tropical parasites at a local lab will run

you around \$15 USD, and you will get results in ½ a day. Medication for treatment will probably cost even less, and you don't need a prescription to buy medications at any pharmacy. I'm happy to say there are tons of pharmacies throughout Belize.

However, if you have the misfortune of a serious health problem while in Belize, it is best to go to a private facility, or get out of Belize entirely. Chetumal, a nearby Mexican city has world class medical services. Make sure to carry traveler's insurance that includes coverage for evacuation expenses. Most importantly, make sure a friend or family member at home knows how to use the insurance in case of an emergency. Hopefully you will never have to use it, but you will be very grateful to have it if the need arises.

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