

Why Do Expats Fall in Love with Belize?

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Recent years have seen expats flocking to Belize at an ever-increasing rate. While it's long been a favorite of scuba divers and explorers, what is it about this Central American nation that's brought it onto the radar of people looking to relocate there for the long haul?

Here are a few of the reasons more and more North Americans are turning to Belize as their retirement destination of choice.

1. It's physically and linguistically close to the U.S.

Belize is the northeastern-most of all the Central American nations, making it the easiest of all to access from the U.S. You can be there in as little as two hours from Houston, or closer to three from a number of other cities in the eastern United States.

Sure, expats move abroad looking for a change from their former lives and culture. But it's still nice to be able to get back to visit friends and family without too much time or hassle. Not to mention, the shorter, less expensive flights make loved ones more likely to come visit you as well. Besides, despite its proximity, Belize offers plenty in the way of new and different experiences.

However, one important factor that isn't different from North America is the language. Belize is the only Central American nation where English is the official language, as it's also the only one that originated as a British colony. Belize's legal system is also based on British law, so many processes will be much more familiar to North Americans. Not to mention, all legal documents are written in English (as are all the road signs).

2. Centuries of immigrants have turned it into

an explosion of cultural fusion.

Belize's history is a timeline jam-packed with the arrivals of people from all over the world who came seeking freedom. Originally inhabited by the Mayans, it became a destination for pirates looking to trade their treasures undetected. Its next immigrants were Mennonite farmers from Germany and the Netherlands, who just wanted a place where they could be left alone.

Next came the British, looking to do their banking in private, followed by Latin Americans from the surrounding countries who were seeking safety from the turmoil in their own nations. This trend continues today in the form of expats from all over the globe, looking to make a new start.

This cultural fusion is evident throughout the landscape of this diverse tropical paradise. Just down the street from the roundabout, you might see a restaurant serving rice and beans in handmade tortillas, situated right next door to a German bakery. The diversity is also reflected in the country's cuisine, which blends the flavors of many cultures to create something unmistakably Belizean.

3. It offers as much (or as little) activity as you'd like.

From its 174 miles of sand beaches (much of them virtually untouched) to its inland rainforests and the barrier reef, Belize has no shortage of attractions to entertain even the most adventurous expat. However, if simplicity is what you're after, you can find that as well.

Destinations like Ambergris Caye offer opportunities for scuba diving and enjoying other aquatic adventures, due to its location along the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System, second in size only to Australia's Great Barrier Reef. Popularized by famed explorer Jacques Cousteau, the reef boasts spectacular sights such as the Great Blue Hole, one of the top scuba destinations in the world.

You can enjoy similar activities, but with even smaller crowds, on nearby Caulker Caye. This friendly, laid-back little island offers enough scenery, shops, and restaurants to make for an all-day stroll or leisurely bike ride, since no other vehicles are allowed on the island.

A whopping 80% of Belize is unspoiled. The remaining twenty is all that's used for human purposes (including farmland). For comparison's sake, if Belize were the United States only Alaska and California

would be developed, leaving the rest completely untouched. Except in Belize, those natural habitats contain rainforests, waterfalls, undisturbed archaeological sites, and thousands of species of flora and fauna.

The abundance of remote areas also leaves Belize very conducive to a lifestyle of leisure. Locals and expats enjoy a much slower pace of life, operating on what some have nicknamed “Belize Time.” Depending on how much you’re willing to do without (e.g. hot water and electricity), there are areas that offer a lifestyle completely removed from North American concerns and consumerism.

4. It all comes at an incredibly attractive price point.

Like anywhere else in Central America, the cost of living in Belize is a fraction of that of its North American neighbors. A couple could easily retire on \$1,000 per month without making any changes to their lifestyle. However, with a little more to spend, they can also enjoy luxuries like full-time domestic help for as little as \$350 per month.

Real estate in Belize is also relatively affordable, although it can vary greatly depending on the area. The country’s retiree program offers an assortment of special discounts, benefits, and tax advantages.

So, just to recap...that’s a long list of attractions and cultural diversity with a reasonable price tag. Or a life of simplicity for next to nothing. All in a place with great food, unrivaled natural beauty, and a language we all recognize. All those expats are definitely onto something!

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