

10 travel tips to navigate the Belize International Airport

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Over the years, we have learned a ton from our own travel, and the questions and problems guests have had in getting here. Here are the top 10 tips we've learned on how to navigate the Belize airport and regional jet system like a pro!

1.) Tropic and Maya Island Air -

The most popular method of travel around Belize, is to take one of Belize's regional planes ("puddle jumpers") from the Belize International Airport (BZE) to the village airports (in our case, Placencia). You can pre-book this flight by going to www.tropicair.com, or www.mayaislandair.com. The flights are scheduled throughout the day to most larger villages. The flight is only 40 minutes long to Placencia, and once you're away from the mainland, the water turns beautiful shades of blue and turquoise. It is like an excursion in itself!

2.) Make it fun! Ask the pilot if you can sit in the co-pilot seat - they will let you if you ask. The right side of the plane shows you the Maya Mountains, the lagoon, and across the mainland. The left side shows you spectacular views of the Caribbean Sea - get your camera out!

3.) Money saving tip!!!! Laurie, "Taco Girl" - a great blogger from San Pedro, provides (for free) the most up to date code for 10% off your Tropic Air flight. You can enter your email here - you'll get the code immediately - and no spam email. <http://tacogirl.com/flights-to-belize/>.

4.) How much time should I leave between flights? What is the airport like?

We recommend leaving at least 75-90 minutes between your incoming flight and your puddle jumper flight. Please note that the airlines still recommend 2-3 hours in between. As there is always a chance of delays, please schedule what makes you comfortable. If you breeze through customs and immigration, they will put you on an earlier flight. How to ensure you get through immigrations/customs as quickly as possible? Read on!

5.) Expert Tip!!!! International flights deplane from front AND back at BZE - you really want to try to be one of the first off, as this will get you in the front of the line for immigration - this makes a big difference! (and don't dawdle...walk fast - don't run people down, but move stealthily through the crowd.) We recommend you book in the last few rows or as close to the front as you can, but avoid the

middle of the plane. When you get off the plane (all planes deplane right on the runway, total old-school, exotic fun!) you'll go through Immigration and Customs, and then after collecting your bags (see notes on immigration and customs below), you will proceed to the Tropic Air/Maya Island Air counter, to check in for your flight to Placencia (or wherever.) If you breeze through Immigration and Customs, you may be bumped up to an earlier Tropic or Maya Air flight. No worries, this happens often, ask the desk to call your hotel or ride (CBC is 622-4142) and let them/us know you got on an earlier flight, so they/we can be there to pick you up.

6.) Immigration - After getting off the plane have your passport and Arrival Form (they give it to you on the plane) available to go through Immigration. As noted above, try to sit at the front or back of the plane, not the middle, to get off the plane first. Immigration is pretty straightforward, and you just need to get your passport stamped. You then pick up your bags...BUT FIRST...

6.) ****MONEY SAVING TIP!** Before you leave the baggage claim area to head to customs (the baggage claim duty free store is the only place you can buy duty free at arrival in BZE, to take with you for your vacation - the others are in the main waiting area, and for taking back OUT of the country when you are leaving). After you are in the baggage claim area look around and you'll see a store called "Arrival Duty Free". This is not your typical duty free store where you buy wine or perfume, etc, when you leave; this store is for buying when you arrive in Belize - they have the very best prices. If want to enjoy any of the name brand liquors like Bombay Gin, Johnny Walker Scotch, Stolli Vodka or any of the others, make sure you buy those liquors here at this store. Because of the high import tax, these same liquors will cost twice as much in Belize (local rum, beer, vodka are relatively inexpensive.)**If you buy duty free, as you head towards customs, you will have to get in the line for "Declaring" items. On to Customs....

7.) Customs - When you are on your way in, on the airplane, you'll get a Customs form, along with the Immigration form, to fill out. They basically want to know if you are bringing in things to sell, or anything that will be left in the country (for example, we have to declare items we bring in to use at the resort, like a lighting fixture or household item.) You are allowed to have your personal items and these do not have to be declared. Unless you go to the duty free shop at the airport, and you just have normal tourist things in your suitcase, don't declare anything. There is a line for those who are declaring and those who are not. They don't look in your bags in the latter group; once in a while they will spot check, but for common items, even expensive ones like cameras that are for personal use - this is a very common item and shouldn't raise any red flags. You can get through quickly if you are not declaring anything. The officer may direct you to the line to get your bags checked, but again this is pretty low stress. Your personal items are allowed duty free in Belize. There is an import allowance of 200 cigarettes, or 1/2 pound of tobacco goods, 20 ounces of alcohol and one bottle of personal perfume. For other questions regarding customs, please check: <http://www.customs.gov.bz/>

8.) Please note our time difference. We occasionally have had a guest get mixed up about the time change. Belize is on Central Standard time but they do not have Daylight Savings Time. One of the common ways people get screwed up is if they use Google calendar, which will record your flight times in your local time, unless you change your settings. When you are booking your puddle jumper, this will be on Belize time, so keep those times straight!

9.) If you get stuck at the airport, please keep note of hotels around the area that are to your taste. For example, the airlines like to put people up at Global Village hotel. Nothing against them, but note that you may want to check out all your options and make your own choices - everyone has a different tolerance for location/aesthetics etc. It doesn't hurt to have a back up plan! Also note - there are better food options than ever before at BZE - they changed the carb-happy old cafe, to a 1st rate grab and go sandwich place, with salads and sandwiches - and there is a stand with Chinese food (they also have salads and Belize food) - but if you are a picky eater, this is not a first world waiting area - you might be stuck eating cashews and bottled water. Oh, there is also a bar with just hot dogs :))

10.) One of the best back up plans we've come up with, if you come in to BZE too late to make a puddle jumper, or you miss your flight and have to stay, but want an adventure.... [The Belize Zoo](#) is about 45 min away from the airport.

The Zoo is well known as one of the most unique experiences you can have here; it is not a regular zoo. You only need about an hour or two to get through it. You can spend the night at or near the zoo- even go to the zoo in the morning, then drive down/take a shuttle/taxi back to the airport and puddle jumper, down to us....I highly recommend it! The zoo accommodations are quite rustic but might be a good story. :)

There is also a guesthouse nearby and you can see that link lower on the Zoo page. Alternatively, you could drive to many hotels in Belize City, and just come down to us, but I highly recommend the zoo for a memorable experience. Hotels in Belize City - I would recommend NOT staying right by the airport, driving just a bit, as you can have a night of an experience/memorable adventure at some really unique places. Here are some rather close to BZE:

Overall, I have been seriously impressed by my experiences with BZE and the puddle jumpers. They are friendly, safe, efficient, and pretty consistent. The experience is just exotic enough that you will really feel like you are doing something before you even start your vacation :)

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