

20 things first-time visitors to Belize should know

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We have had requests for a post to discuss the differences between rules/laws/expectations in Belize vs. North America, so that you can get the most out of some of the freedoms here, and also not get yourself in trouble by doing something that is natural in the US (drink from the tap for example), but that you are advised not to do, here!

1.) Placencia is the only place you can drink water straight from the tap - there is an underwater spring in Placencia, but the rest of the country uses city or cistern water. In other words - don't drink the water ANYWHERE else - brushing your teeth is fine, and some people in Ambergris Caye, will tell you they drink it. I can tell you from personal experience that I DO NOT drink the water anywhere but Placencia :).

2.) You can feel comfortable driving in Belize - it is not a place where you need to worry about crime on the road, and the "highways" are like country roads, but they are not terrible. You just need to know about speed "humps", the fact that the sun sets early and driving at night is not recommended for your first time, and to know what the check points are - you can read about all that [HERE](#).

3.) The sun rises at about 5:30 year round, and sets about 6 year round. Belize has a healthy appetite for happy hours, and these are right as the sun sets, which is awesome! You will DEFINITELY find yourself saying, "it is only 7pm?? I thought it was 10pm!" And then wake up, wide awake, at 6am :).

4.) I will tread lightly here because the laws do exist, and are sometimes enforced. But, here's what you will see all over the place... you will see people EVERYWHERE walking around (even riding a bike/driving!) with a beer. If you get carried away with it you might get approached (and it is not always advisable to carry glass around), but this country is very friendly to beer and alcohol drinking. You can even bring in a beer from home into a bar. You can drink on the beach, you can drink a beer with breakfast - no judging! There is beer sold everywhere as well.

5.) Watch yourself - in Placencia, Caye Caulker, and San Pedro, there are no sidewalks on the main roads - you really do want to watch yourself when you are walking in traffic. You will be inches from bikes, scooters, golf carts, and cars. So combine that with #4, and just be careful :)

- 6.) Beach dogs- you will see happy, friendly, mostly cute beach dogs everywhere. They are not going to hurt you, occasionally people report they were chased by a dog near a property, but in town this rarely happens. You will notice that they are all fat and happy in Placencia and Ambergris Caye.
- 7.) Tipping is appreciated, but it is not the same as the US. 10% is an appropriate tip.
- 8.) Ask before you get that third cup of coffee - most restaurants do not have free refills - I didn't know this was more of a US thing :)
- 9.) What's with the napkins on the beer bottles at bars? The bottles are recycled, and when the bottles sit in the salt air, they often get a bit of rust. Use that napkin to wipe off the mouth of the beer - recommended. Also there is only a couple kinds of beer you can get in the country and when you are ordering a Belikin, just order a "beer" - yes it feels weird but you'll get a Belikin every time. You can also bring your own beverage containers to bars - you'll see people do it all over the place.
- 10.) Golf carts - it is FUN to ride around on a golf cart as your transportation, because how many places can you do that?? It is like a video game. It is highly recommended you get one for a day, they are about \$40-50us per day, and very easy to rent everywhere.
- 11.) Almost everything can be delivered if you ask. Even a case of beer!
- 12.) This one is obvious.....but you'll see sunburns everywhere. The sun is HOT here....even when it is cloudy. Unless you have been hitting the tanning beds like a champ, wear sunscreen and don't ruin your trip. Especially when snorkeling - wear long sleeves and lotion up your butt and legs, the burn you can get on the water is astounding.
- 13.) You want to get up close to that turtle, the size of a car, while you are snorkeling? Go ahead! There are few regulations here compared to the US - you decide the level of risk you want. This is another shining example of why Belize is fun. Or, will leave you with a good story about the jacka** thing you did. What you actually see.
- 14.) You may hear Belize is dangerous - in reality, this is only in southern Belize City. There are few violent crimes here. What does happen is theft. It is highly recommended that you behave with your stuff as if you really, really care about it - only bring out with you the necessities - not ALL your credit cards, passport, etc. While I know few people who have gotten things stolen, it happens often enough and can happen so fast. Usually because of #4.
- 15.) Another reason people love Belize - you don't hang out in your all inclusive resort here. Locals hang

where everyone else does, and everyone lives in harmony. You'll hear people say "I want to go where the locals go" because they want to have an authentic experience - you don't have to say that here. Everyone is everywhere!

16.) You really do not need a car - unless you plan on jetting around the whole country, rental cars are expensive, gas is expensive, and you just won't use it. If you are staying near town you can walk to everything, and the tours will pick you up. See #10 for the alternative.

17.) People sometimes get freaked out because they hear Belize is a "third world country." Actually a better term is developing country - and that is what this is. If you get out of town at all, you will see very rustic villages, and in some Mayan villages they have dirt floors, palapa roofs, and sleep in hammocks. And if you visit, you will find that it is really peaceful. You will see that the maintenance is maybe not what you see in the US. By the end of your trip, you will hardly notice these differing standards. There is so much natural beauty here, and there is also a charm in rustic wood shacks painted in every color! There is very little begging in Placencia or Ambergris and MUCH less than most places. You will be asked if you want to buy a necklace by a child sometimes, but they are not pushy and rarely ask for money.

18.) Bugs - how to manage. "Sand fleas/no-see-ums" are present here, and everywhere warm. They come out in cooler weather, at night, after a rain, or by mangroves. You may not have a problem at all - a lot of it is pure luck. If you are hell bent on not getting bit, wear baby oil on your legs, they can't bite through it. Mosquitos - they are no worse here than anywhere in the summer - wear DEET at night, especially between 5:30-7.

19.) Sometimes I hear that Belize is expensive compared to other Central American countries. There are things that are expensive, like imported US foods and booze. Other things are cheap. There are beachfront hotels you can find for about \$40us a night. You can eat like a local (stewed chicken, rice, and beans) for \$5us. You can drink local beer, rum, and vodka for about \$2.50-3us a drink. You do not HAVE to go to the US standard restaurants, which have US prices. You can stay in a US standard hotel, which is really hard to run here because you have to import everything. A US standard hotel will be about the same cost as the US - BUT - for perspective, check the hotels in high season in Key West, in town - those run about \$500us a night, for what you can get for \$200 a night here. Belize is a tourism country, not a manufacturing country, so goods are expensive, and it is why it is simple and rustic here - and totally charming :). Let's not forget Belize has the 2nd biggest reef in the world, hundreds of islands, jungle, Mayan ruins, and a totally unique experience that is nothing like your sanitized Myrtle Beach vacation. There are almost NO chain restaurants or hotels in the country. If you think this is charming, you'll like it here.

20.) People will ask if the sea grass is a problem, and how are the beaches? We are very close to the reef and the reef life has to eat - and they eat sea grass. There is sea grass that washes in a few days a week, and some people are bothered by this. But, again, you are close to the reef!! The sea grass is part of the environment here, and while many places rake and keep it clean, it is also a part of the ecosystem. If you go snorkeling here you will feel better about it, because you will swim with all the creatures that are feeding off it :). There are MANY beaches that are among the most beautiful in the world, but 100% of the beach here is not pristine. You can easily find the pristine beaches if you want them here!

21.) Will I be inundated by people selling things to me? It is NOTHING like Mexico or any cruise port here - not even close. Yes, people will want you to buy their things but the culture here is very laid back. They will not argue or chase you down. If you say no thanks - that's it. And yes, you will easily find someone that may ask if you want to "buy some green." If you don't want it, just say no thank you :)

22.) Another reason people come back to Belize again and again is because - the locals really are that warm and friendly. Go out for one evening and you'll see and feel it :). It is a truly charming, welcoming culture here!

[Pure Placencia Blog](#)

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