

# What can you tell me about Belize History?

Article Number: 78 | Rating: Unrated | Last Updated: Thu, Dec 7, 2006 12:01 AM

The largest of the 200 plus islands of Belize, Ambergris Caye (Am-BURR-jis Key) is a twenty five mile long island made up of three main areas. Mangrove swamps, lagoons, and sand. European contact with Ambergris Caye settlers is documented from 1508. At that time, the area was populated by the Maya. An incredible people, the Maya lived throughout Central America, flourishing from 250 A.D. to 900. Many Maya settlements were still thriving when contact with Europeans was made.

When Europeans arrived on Ambergris Caye, the island was ruled by the declining, but still functional Maya principality of Chetumal. There was a trading system throughout northern Belize, especially between the Chetumal and the Ulna regions. Trade was based on cacao, with canoes travelling south from Yucatan with fish, cloth, clothing, slaves, and other items, then returning home with cacao. Ambergris Caye was a hub of a this activity. Centrally located in the trading web, it was a rest stop for traders headed north or south on the route. All the Chetumal traffic came by Ambergris Caye. The local economy was thus based on fishing, providing foodstuffs for the northern Belize logging camps as well as large parts of the Maya area. Boat related industry, due to the significance of the trade route, were also important to the island.

The island was also important for its abundant seafood supply and its strategic military position at the mouth of the Bay of Chetumal.

As time progressed the British settlers who inhabited mainland Belize achieved great economic and political advances. A company of wealthy businessmen formed a company named Belize Agriculture Company and held the first legal title to the island.

The economic base of the island has switched between fishing, logwood, chicle, coconuts, lobster, and tourism.

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Posted : Marty Casado - Thu, Dec 7, 2006 12:01 AM. This article has been viewed 10141 times.

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