

# BELIZE

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## HANDBOOK



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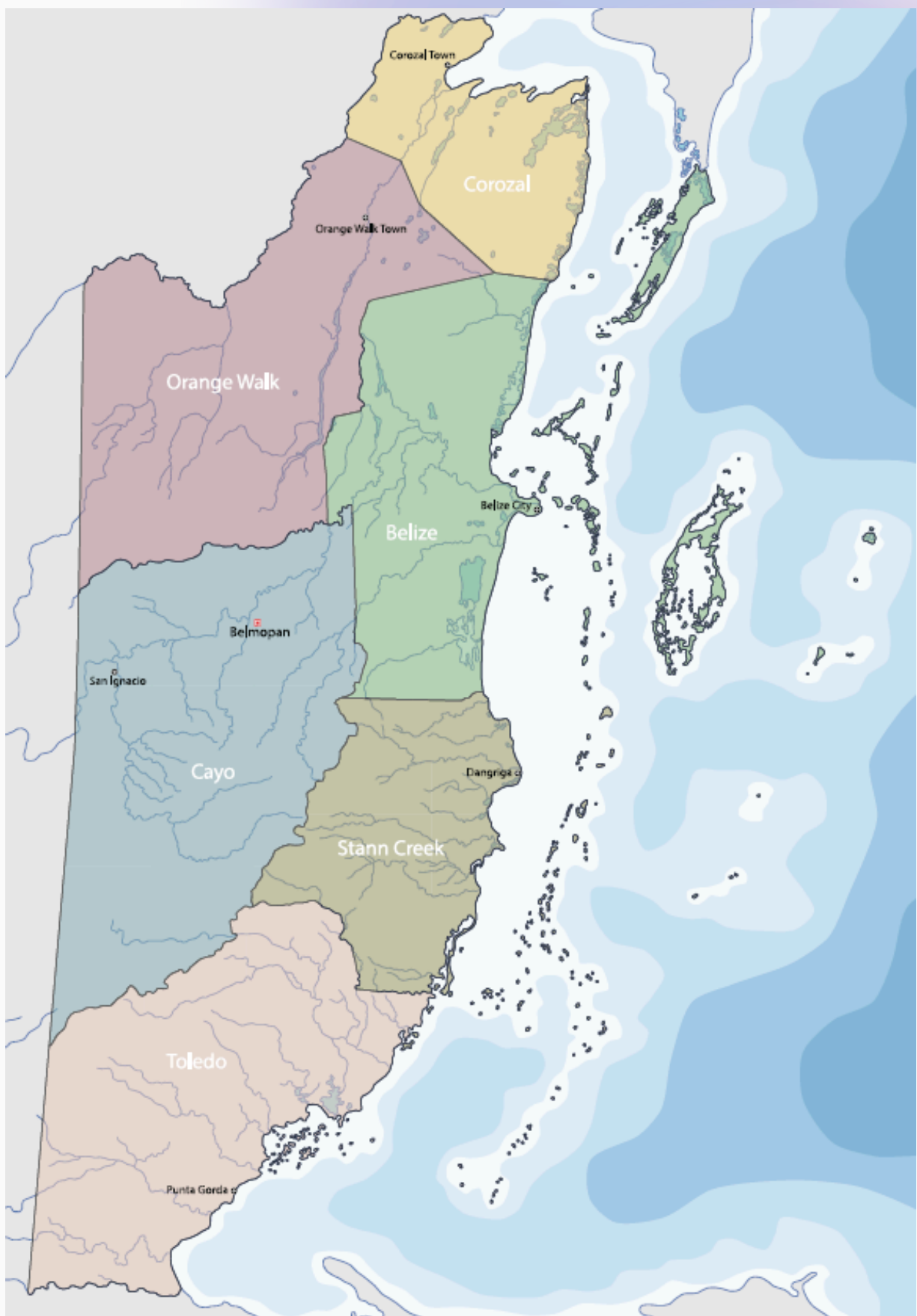
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# INTRODUCTION



Belize, formerly known as British Honduras, gained independence in 1981 and is a tropical paradise just a short journey from the United States. Though it's the only Central American country without a western coastline, Belize's eastern seafront more than makes up for it, with access to the sparkling Caribbean Sea. Here, visitors can explore the Belize Barrier Reef, the second-largest in the world and a UNESCO World Heritage site. Stretching over 190 miles, the reef is a vibrant underwater wonderland filled with colorful corals, tropical fish, sea turtles, and gentle sharks—an adventurer's dream for both snorkelers and divers.

On land, Belize is equally captivating, with its lush jungles, pristine nature reserves, and ancient Maya ruins like Xunantunich and Caracol that are hidden deep within the rainforest. These iconic archaeological sites offer glimpses into the history of a fascinating civilization, allowing travelers to connect with a past that stretches back thousands of years. The rich landscapes of Belize also provide countless opportunities for adventure, from hiking under towering jungle canopies to exploring mysterious caves and rivers.

Cultural diversity is one of Belize's most endearing qualities. With a population that includes Creole, Maya, Garifuna, Mestizo, and more, Belize is a true melting pot of traditions, languages, and customs. Visitors are encouraged to experience the lively Garifuna drumming, taste traditional dishes like fry jacks and rice and beans, and immerse themselves in the colorful festivals that celebrate the country's heritage. And with English as the official language, communication is effortless, ensuring that all who come to Belize are met with a warm welcome and a deep appreciation of its rich cultural and natural beauty.



# GEOGRAPHY

Belize is the northernmost country in Central America, located along the Caribbean coast.

On the north, it borders the Mexican state of Quintana Roo; on the west, the Guatemalan “department” (state or province) of Petén; and on the south, with the Guatemalan department of Izabal. The Belize Barrier Reef to the east spans approximately 190 miles; it is included within the greater Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System, the second largest in the world, behind only Australia’s Great Barrier Reef. In 1996, the Belize Barrier Reef was deemed a UNESCO World Heritage Site, worthy of international preservation based on its collective interest to humanity.

In total, Belize covers over 14,260 square miles – an area slightly larger than that of nearby El Salvador or Wales, and only slightly smaller than the state of Massachusetts. The country is only 70 miles across and approximately 250 miles long from top to bottom. Belize’s northern and southern borders are largely defined by the natural path of the Hondo and Sarstoon Rivers, with the Caribbean to the east and Mexico and Guatemala’s land borders to the west. The cardinal directions roughly indicate the four types of territory which comprise Beliz as a whole: the northern lowlands, the southern mountains, the western swamps and plains, and the tropical eastern coast.

Over 66% of the territory in Belize is forested, with much of that explicitly considered a government-protected “green zone” in the interest of preserving the nation’s unspoiled wilderness

The rainforests are home to a number of endangered or rare species, from big cats (pumas, jaguars, ocelots) to colorful tropical birds (keel-billed toucans, agami herons, macaws, and snowy egrets). Among the trees can be found 4,000 distinct species of flowers, including no fewer than 250 different orchids alone.

Belize’s coastline is as notable as its interior, and arguably more so. The Caribbean coast is lined with around 450 islands and smaller islets known as cays or cayes (pronounced “keys”), or cayo in Spanish. Ambergris Caye is the largest of these at 90 square miles, but other cayes can be as small as just 0.006 square miles in area.

Of the four coral atolls in the Western Hemisphere, all but one are located off the coast of Belize: Lighthouse Reef, Turneffe Atoll Islands, and Glover’s Reef. The Turneffe Atoll Islands is both the largest and closest to the coast, around 25 miles offshore. South of Turneffe Atoll Islands is Glover’s Reef Atoll, the most developed atoll in the Caribbean. Thanks to its nearly continuous ring of coral reef and no-fishing regulation enabling an abundant and diverse marine life, Glover’s Reef bears both marine reserve and U.N. World Heritage Site designations. The Lighthouse Reef Atoll, though the furthest offshore at 50 miles away, is the closest atoll to Belize’s Blue Hole, the impressively deep, circular sinkhole that plunges over 400 feet into the ocean floor.



# WEATHER & CLIMATE



Like other sub-tropical nations, Belize has two seasonal phases: wet season and dry season.

Dry season comes first in the year, from about February through May; wet season follows from around June through December, with the months of January functioning as a transitional period between seasons. Average daily temperatures remain steady around 84-86°F/29-30°C, with temperatures no lower than 60°F/16°C in Belize's version of winter.

Although rain during Belize's dry season falls infrequently and only for brief periods of time, wet season more than makes up for the lack of rainfall. Rainy season is synonymous with hurricane season, and though Belize is spared much of the brunt of major hurricanes, it nonetheless experiences heavy afternoon storms, strong winds, and up to 150 inches worth of rain in some areas. June and August are the wettest months, but a reprieve comes during the "little dry" in late July or early August, when the rains let up for a little while.

March, right in the middle of dry season, sees the most hours of sunshine over the year.

Like the temperature, humidity in Belize remains largely stable throughout the year at around 83%, though this can vary throughout the country based on region. The north in particular is far less susceptible to the rest of the country's high humidity, and the gentle easterly trade winds offer a cooling breeze throughout the dry season.

# CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS

## Language

Belize is the only country in Central America where English is the official language, thanks to their heritage as a former British colony. Although it is not necessarily a primary language, with only 5.6% of the population speaking it at home, over 62.9% of the Belizean population reports that they can speak English fluently, with another quarter demonstrating some knowledge of it. With the majority of the population considered bilingual or multilingual, communication should present no obstacles.

Visitors will also hear speakers using Spanish or Kriol (an English-based Creole language similar to Jamaican Patois), languages adopted from the populations who also settled in Belize. The country harbors a small percentage of speakers conversant in German (mainly Mennonites), as well as the three most predominant native Mayan languages: Q'eqchi, Mopan, and Yucatec Maya. Anywhere you go in Belize, you'll be sure to encounter a rich tapestry of interwoven culture and language.

## Religion

Belize practices an official policy of religious freedom, which is evident in the varied distribution of religions among its populace. Christianity remains the dominant faith, with over 40% adherents to Roman Catholicism and 31.5% subscribing to a number of Protestant denominations, including Pentecostal, Seventh Day Adventist, Mennonite, Baptist, Methodist, and Anglican churches. Other declared faiths (Jehovah's Witness, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Mormon, Baha'i, Rastafarian) constitute 12.5% of the population, with 16% declaring themselves wholly nonreligious.

## Currency

The currency in Belize is the Belize dollar (BZ). It is tied to an exchange ratio of 2:1 with the American dollar, although actual exchange rates may vary very slightly. Bills are available in denominations of 100, 50, 20, 10, 5, and 2. Coins are available in 1 dollar, 50, 25, 10, 5, and 1 Belizean cent denominations. A "shilling" in Belize refers to the 25-cent coin.

U.S. dollars are accepted throughout Belize; however, the Belize dollar is only valid within the country and in nearby towns along its border. Belizean law stipulates that only the Central Bank of Belize should be allowed to deal with transactions involving foreign currency, but businesses nationwide openly flout this rarely enforced restriction, freely accepting U.S. dollars as payment for goods and services. Therefore, it is often more convenient to simply use American currency in all transactions.



# GOVERNMENT & POLITICS



Belize is a parliamentary democracy and is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, a constitutional monarchy that recognizes Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom as its sovereign.

Belize borrows both its governmental structure and its legal system from Britain. Its head of state is the reigning monarch, currently King Charles III, represented in local government by a Governor General who must be Belizean. Belize also elects a local Prime Minister who, along with the Cabinet, exercises legal authority.

Belize practices universal adult suffrage. All Belizean citizens over the age of 18, or 51.32% of the population, are eligible to vote. Of these, over 91% of eligible voters are actually registered. A General Election takes place every five years.

Belize's National Assembly is a bicameral legislature divided into a House of Representatives and a Senate. The 12 Senators are appointed by the Governor General under advisement of the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, and religious, commerce, and trade organizations.

Belize called its first national referendum in 2008 to determine whether Senators should be elected; although a 61% majority voted in favor, the nonbinding resolution has yet to be enacted. The House passes bills to the Senate, which debates and ultimately approves them.

Unlike the appointed Senators, Area Representatives in the House are directly elected, one per each of 31 constituencies. Each political party nominates a candidate of their choice to become the party's Standard Bearer; should that candidate win an election, they graduate to Area Representative of their constituency, while candidates from losing parties remain Standard Bearers for their respective parties within a constituency.

Belize is a member of three regional bodies: the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), and the Central American Integration System (SICA). It is the only nation in the world to hold full membership in all three organizations.



# SPORTS

The main sport of choice in Belize is association football (soccer). Teams playing in the Premier League of Belize regularly have matches covered by national media. The national football team has performed well in regional competition as a member of the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF), but has not won any international titles.

Belize has a semi-professional basketball league, the Belize Basketball Federation. A few Belizean athletes have had successful careers in the United States playing at NCAA or NBA level. Softball is also gaining in popularity across the country, and Belize has often won regional titles in competition with other Central American and Caribbean countries.

# HOLIDAYS

DATE	HOLIDAY
January 1	New Year's Day
March 9	Baron Bliss/National Heroes and Benefactors Day
March/April	Good Friday
March/April	Holy Saturday
March/April	Easter
May 1	Labor Day
May 24	Commonwealth/Sovereign's Day
September 10	National Day
September 21	Independence Day
October 12	Columbus/Pan-American Day
November 19	Garifuna Settlement Day
December 25	Christmas Day
December 26	Boxing Day

Baron Bliss Day celebrates the trust left behind by British-born Baron Bliss, earmarked for the betterment of what was then British Honduras. In 2008, it was renamed “National Heroes and Benefactors Day” to better represent the number of generous contributors to Belize’s development.

The holiday formerly known as Columbus Day has recently been rebranded “Pan-American Day,” to honor not the controversial arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Americas (setting into motion European colonization of the region), but instead the melting pot of mestizos, indigenous peoples from the Yucatan, the Garifuna, and more that now inhabit Belize.

As many other Commonwealth nations do, Belize celebrates Boxing Day immediately after Christmas, a day on which servants and tradespeople would traditionally receive “Christmas boxes” from their employers or customers.

# VISITOR ESSENTIALS



## Visitor information - required documents

Although visitors from most Caribbean countries, the United States, and the United Kingdom do not require a visa to enter Belize, all infants, children, and adults must provide valid passports and proof of return.

## Dress Code

Belize's subtropical climate (average annual temperature: 80° Fahrenheit) necessitates light clothing, often fairly casual. T-shirts and shorts are common attire. Jeans are also acceptable. Informal dress extends even to local nightlife; bars rarely have a stringent dress code for entry. Long pants and long shirts in a breathable fabric such as cotton or linen are the most suitable for trekking through the jungle. Although the mountains are cooler than the surrounding areas, a "cold" day in Belize will rarely go lower than 65° F, so a light sweater or windbreaker will suffice. Of course, a swimsuit (or two) is a must!

## Time Zone

Belize observes GMT-6:00 hours as its standard time. Belize does not observe Daylight Savings Time (DST). Standard time in Belize is therefore equivalent to U.S. Central Standard Time during non-DST periods, and U.S. Mountain Standard Time during DST periods.

## Phones

The international country code for Belize is 501, followed by a seven-digit telephone number. The area code for Belize City is 2 and the outgoing code is 00 followed by the country code. Cell phone service is available throughout most of Belize through Belize Telemedia Limited, which was nationalized by the government in August 2009 and has the most subscribers to its services than any other provider.



# VISITOR ESSENTIALS



## Local laws

Under local law, it is illegal to transport firearms or ammunition into or out of the country. Animals entering Belize must be in possession of a Belize Agricultural Health Authority-issued import permit and a valid rabies vaccination certificate, as well as an official veterinary certificate issued by a registered veterinarian in the country of origin.

While private boats or vessels may be approved at the ports of San Pedro, Belize City, Dangriga, Punta Gorda, and Big Creek, all aircraft must be approved with the Belize Civil Aviation Department and the Belize Airports Authority through the Philip Goldson International Airport.

Unless returning from a visit to a neighboring town, a visitor is only allowed one liter of liquor and 250 grams of tobacco, totaling 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars, upon entry into the country. A C300 Report of Currency Importation form must be completed if the entering visitor possesses the equivalent of BZ\$10,000 or more.

When departing Belize, it is illegal to bring unprocessed coral, turtle shells, or other marine products, unless approved by the fisheries department. Pre-Columbian items are also forbidden from leaving the country under antiquities laws protecting native artifacts from smugglers.

## Business Hours

Typical business hours are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. However, some businesses may close for lunch from around 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. Grocery stores are open until around 8:00 or 9:00 p.m., including on weekends and some holidays.

## Sales Tax

The general sales tax in Belize is levied at 12.5% on most goods and services, with certain exemptions: financial services, agricultural supplies, medical items, and basic food commodities like rice, flour, bread, eggs, beans, sugar, baby formula, and local produce.



# VISITOR ESSENTIALS



## Gratuities

Tips are often included in the bill. If no service charge is listed, it is customary to pay an additional 10% - 15% of the bill's total. Outside hotels and restaurants, taxi drivers should be tipped only if they take you on a guided tour or assist you with your luggage. Accompanying tour guides should be tipped a few dollars extra for their services.

## Payment Options

Cash and credit/debit cards are widely accepted. While some businesses may apply a 5% surcharge for using a card, this practice is growing less common. The most commonly accepted cards are MasterCard and VISA. A few restaurants, hotels, and shops may also accept American Express and Discover.

## Souvenirs

Be sure to pick up traditional Belizean crafts such as Maya jippi jappa baskets, mahogany sculptures, black slate carvings, hammocks, and pottery.

Other Belizean specialties include Hot Mama sauces, which allow any traveler to savor the taste of Belize's beloved hot pepper sauce in their own home. Mayan Secrets is a line of all-natural personal care products with an array of scented oils, lotions, and soaps, all derived from plants, nuts, flowers, and herbs from the local rainforest and packaged in biodegradable boxes and refillable glass bottles.

Belizean shops sell a wide selection of jewelry made with precious stones. Jade, amber, and emeralds are common local luxuries.

# DEPARTURE TAX



Visitors exiting Belize by boat from San Pedro, Dangriga, or Punta Gorda are required to pay a fee of \$3.75 USD, which includes a Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT) fee.

At land borders, U.S. citizens are required to pay an exit fee of \$15 USD for stays less than 24 hours, and \$18.75 USD for stays over 24 hours.

If leaving through the Philip Goldson International Airport (PGIA), the departure fee is \$55.50 for non-Belizean residents (this must be paid in American dollars). Additionally, a security fee of \$0.75 is charged for domestic security screening.

If you are leaving Belize through the Guatemalan or Mexican border, the departure fee is \$20 (40 BZD), but when subdivided includes a 30 BZD border exit fee, a 7.50 BZD Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT) conservation fee, and a 2.50 BZD land border development fee.

All tourists and non-Belizean citizens are required to pay a \$39.25 USD departure tax when exiting Belize. This tax is often included in the cost of airline tickets; however, travelers should contact their airline in order to verify this. Belizean citizens carrying proof of residency are only required to pay a \$35 BZ departure tax.



# TRAVEL ENTRY REQUIREMENTS



All visitors to Belize must present a valid passport when entering the country. Driver's licenses and birth certificates are not approved travel documents and are not valid for entry. Passports must be valid for at least nine months following departure.

A Belize visitor visa is valid for 30 days. Any visitor who wishes to remain beyond the given 30-day period must request a visa extension, which is available for a certain fee:

- Up to 6 months: \$50 USD
- After 6 months: \$100 USD per month

Nationals of the following countries do not require visas for entry when carrying appropriate identification: Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, United States, Venezuela, and Caribbean Community (CARICOM) member states.

Nationals of the following countries must secure a visa to enter Belize: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Bosnia, Brazil, Central African Republic, Chad, China, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Haiti, Honduras, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Libya, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Nicaragua, Panama, Poland, Russia, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia.

# TRAVEL ENTRY REQUIREMENTS



## Arriving by air

Flying is the most popular method of traveling to Belize, which is extremely accessible by plane. Several U.S. cities offer flights to Belize, including Atlanta, Charlotte, Dallas, Houston, Miami, and Los Angeles. Transfers can also be made on small planes flying out of Guatemala.

Most commercial air flights arrive at the Philip Goldson International Airport, 9 miles outside of Belize City. No public buses depart directly from the airport, but a taxi can be hired for around \$50 BZ (\$25 USD) to drive approximately 20 minutes into the city. A more affordable option is to walk or take a taxi to the Philip Goldson Highway, then catch a public bus from there to the central Belize City bus terminal.

## Major Airlines

- **American Airlines (AA)** | +501 223 2522 | [aa.com](http://aa.com)
- **United Airlines (UA)** | +501 226 2613 | [United.com](http://United.com)
- **Delta Airlines (DA)** | +501 225 2263 | [Delta.com](http://Delta.com)
- **Avianca (formerly TACA)** | +501 227 7363 | [Avianca.com](http://Avianca.com)
- **US Airways (US)** | +501 225 3589 | [USairways.com](http://USairways.com)

## Arriving by car

Although it is possible to drive into Belize through Mexico, doing so requires considerable effort. The trip can take anywhere from 930 to 1860 miles and will take a toll on any vehicle, not to mention its driver. When entering Belize from Mexico or Guatemala, visitors will be required to secure a temporary importation permit, valid for one month (subject to extension by application to the Customs Department), by presenting travel documents and ID, vehicle registration, proof of insurance, and any relevant vehicle rental documents.

## Arriving by bus

Bus services offer affordable travel into Belize from U.S. border cities by way of Cancun, Mexico City, and Chetumal in Mexico, as well as connections from Guatemala City.



# TRAVEL ENTRY REQUIREMENTS



## Arriving by boat

Belize is a popular cruise ship stop, with 700,000 passengers each year arriving at the port in Belize City. These ships dock offshore to avoid the shallow waters near the coast, and passengers are ferried to land on smaller boats called “tenders.” Norwegian Cruise Lines has also developed its own private port at Harvest Caye, which will offer a pier in southern Belize exclusively for its ships’ passengers.

San Pedro Belize Express Water Taxi offers an international service from Chetumal, Mexico to San Pedro in the afternoon on alternating days. The boat ride from Chetumal to San Pedro takes approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes. Upon arriving in Belize, passengers will be required to undergo the customs and immigration process, then will spend another half hour traveling onward to Caye Caulker.

Travelers from Guatemala may take advantage of the daily speedboat services that run from Puerto Barrios to Punta Gorda for around \$20 USD one way. A service also operates from Livingston, Guatemala to Punta Gorda on Tuesdays and Fridays for \$25 USD.

## Ports

The main commercial ports in Belize are Big Creek Port in the Stann Creek District, the Commerce Bight Port, and the Port of Belize in Belize City. Big Creek is used primarily for banana exports, Commerce Bight for citrus exports, and the Port of Belize for most other commercial imports and exports. Both Commerce Bight and the Belize City Port fall under the administration of the Belize Port Authority. Cruise ships dock off shore and travelers must board local ferries in order to get from the ships to the city.

Sailors can enter from ports at Belize City, Caye Caulker, Punta Gorda, and San Pedro. Entry through these ports requires travelers to undergo customs and other travel clearances.

# TRAVEL ENTRY REQUIREMENTS



## Inland by air

Flying between locations in Belize offers a speedy but scenic option for local travel. In addition to the Philip S. W. Goldson Intl. Airport in Belize City, there are a number of smaller municipal airports and airstrips scattered throughout the country.

Small planes (capacity anywhere from 8 to 68 seats) fly regularly out of both Philip Goldson (BZE) and Belize City Airport (TZA), but flights from TZA are likely to be cheaper. Due to seating limitations on these short-haul flights, it's best to make reservations in advance. Hotels may be able to assist with bookings, or flight reservations can be made directly on the sites of regional air carriers, Maya Island Air and Tropic Air.

Helicopter tours are a popular way to tour Belize by air, when the journey is more important than the destination. Passengers can book pre-planned tours, transfers between hotels or airports, or charter a private helicopter for a custom experience.

- **Astrum** | [astrumhelicopters.com](http://astrumhelicopters.com) | +501 222 5100
- **Javier's Flying Service** | [JaviersFlyingService.com](http://JaviersFlyingService.com) | +501 223 1029
- **Cari Bee Air Service** | +501 223 3542

LOCAL AIRLINES	CONTACT INFO
Maya Island Air (MW)	<a href="http://MayaIslandair.com">MayaIslandair.com</a>
Belize City International	+501 225 2336
Belize City Municipal Airstrip	+501 223 1140
Caye Caulker	+501 226 0012
Corozal	+501 422 2333
Dangriga	+501 522 2659
Placencia	+501 523 3475
Punta Gorda	+501 722 2856
San Pedro	+501 226 2435
Tropic Air (PM)	<a href="http://TropicAir.com">TropicAir.com</a>
Belize City International Airport	+501 225 2302
Belize City Municipal Airstrip	+501 224 5671
Caye Caulker	+501 226 0040
Corozal	+501 422 0356
Dangriga	+501 522 2129
Flores	+501 926 0348
Placencia	+501 523 3410
Punta Gorda	+501 722 2008
San Pedro	+501 226 2012



# TRAVEL ENTRY REQUIREMENTS



## Inland by car

Renting a car in Belize is one way to ensure a truly customized travel experience, without being held to tour bus itineraries or preset hotel destinations. It is not necessarily a cheap option, but offers a level of flexibility that many travelers consider worth the cost. However, do not cut corners when choosing a rental; certain companies are more reliable than others, and a reputable business will be clear and up-front about all rental conditions and costs involved.

Driver's licenses from most countries will be accepted, but some companies may require drivers to be over 25. A credit card may be required to make a deposit. Cars may be rented on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. In Belize, cars drive on the right side of the road, as in all neighboring regions of Central America.

Make sure that your rental insurance policy is comprehensive in case of accident or injury. Be careful to read the fine print on the rental contract: even when renting off-road vehicles, some companies may require that drivers stay only on paved roads, which limits a driver's options while ensuring minimum liability for the rental company. Other companies also forbid their vehicles being taken into neighboring Guatemala or Mexico. Check that your vehicle is in good condition before leaving the lot, so as not to be liable for any repairs which may be necessary to get it in sound driving condition.

A selection of rental companies is listed below. Most agencies will be located in Belize City, with a number of offices located directly across from the airport. Companies may also have rental outposts in Corozal Town, San Ignacio, Placencia, and Punta Gorda.

- **Avis Belize** | +501 225 2629 | [Avis.com.bz](http://Avis.com.bz)
- **Budget** | +501 223 2435/3986 | [Budget-Belize.com](http://Budget-Belize.com)
- **Crystal Auto Rental** | +501 223 1600 | [Crystal-Belize.com](http://Crystal-Belize.com)
- **Hertz** | +501 225 3300 | [CarsBelize.com](http://CarsBelize.com)
- **Pancho's Auto Rental** | +501 224 5554 | [PanchosRentalbelize.com](http://PanchosRentalbelize.com)

Numbers given are all local when calling within Belize; however, savvy travelers may want to reserve a car in advance before their arrival to ensure its availability. Belize has only four major highways: Northern, Western, Southern, and Hummingbird. All are standard two-lane roads, and traveling along them will allow stops at all of the country's major towns and cities, although more rugged destinations may not be accessible via standard automobile.



# TRAVEL ENTRY REQUIREMENTS



## Inland by bus

The most affordable means of everyday transport around Belize is by bus. Routes run on regular schedules and will stop to pick up or drop off passengers at locations along the way as requested. Buses are the most common form of transportation for local Belizeans. Belize City and Belmopan are the central hubs for bus transportation. Buses travel to and from major towns and districts multiple times a day; however, more remote villages may see only one bus arrival and departure per day. Each bus operates with both a driver and a conductor to collect fares.

Bus stops or stations will often relocate and schedule times can change periodically, so it may be best to ask for assistance with public transport from a taxi driver or local person.

## Water Taxi travel times

- Belize to San Pedro: 60 minutes
- Belize to San Pedro via Caye Caulker: 90 minutes
- Belize to Caye Caulker: 45 minutes
- San Pedro to Caye Caulker: 45 minutes

OPERATOR	ROUTE	DESTINATION
BBDC	North	Corozal, Orange Walk
Gilharry	North	Corozal, Orange Walk
James	South	Placencia, Punta Gorda
National	National	City, Corozal, Benque, Punta, Gorda
T-Line	North	Corozal, Orange Walk
Tillet	North	Corozal, Orange Walk
Shaws	West	Belmopan
Guatemala	West	Guatemala City
Mexico	North	Chetumal, Cancun

# TRAVEL ENTRY REQUIREMENTS



## Getting around on Ambergris Caye

Vehicles are only permitted on Ambergris Caye with a special permit from the San Pedro Town council, and rental cars are not available. Therefore, both local residents and visitors alike often opt to travel the relatively short distances by golf cart. Several companies offer both gas and electric golf cart rental.

In order to rent and operate a golf cart, a valid driver's license from your home country is required. Rates vary depending on the season, with discounts often available during the off-season or for longer-term rentals. On average, an 8-hour rental should cost around \$40 USD, a 24-hour day rental should range in price from \$50 USD to \$65 USD, and a week's rental should cost \$250 USD.

- **J&H Golf Cart Rental** | +501 226 2351
- **Ultimate Golf Cart Rental** | +501 226 3326
- **Moncho's Golf Cart Rentals** | +501 226 3262
- **Carts Belize** | +501 226 4084

## Departure Fees

All non-Belizean citizens and non-Belizean permanent residents are subject to the following fees:

- Airport Departure: \$35.00 USD
- Border Departure: \$18.75 USD / \$37.50 BZ
- Sea Departure: \$3.75 USD / \$7.50 BZ
- Domestic Air Passengers: \$0.75 USD / \$1.50 BZ



# DISTRICTS



## Belize

Although most of the Belize District is on the east coast of the mainland, the district also includes a number of major offshore cayes, including Ambergris Caye, Caye Caulker, St. George's Caye, and Turneffe Atoll. The Belize River passes through the Belize District and reaches its outlet to the Caribbean Sea on the coast. The district was the first to be settled by European colonizers, and many communities and landmarks in the area are still named for old colonial estate owners. Its capital, Belize City, is the largest city in all of Belize and its former capital. Originally known as Holzuz by its Maya inhabitants, then later renamed Belize Town by British loggers, from which they successfully defended their settlement against Spanish invasion in 1798. Although the government officially moved to Belmopan in 1970, Belize City's long history has helped it to remain the country's central hub for commerce and transportation.

## Cayo

Occupying most of western Belize adjacent to Guatemala, the Cayo District is the country's largest and second most populated (after the Belize District). Its name is derived from the Spanish El Cayo, from when its settled area was surrounded by a creek that effectively turned it into a "cayo," or island.

It contains the nation's capital city of Belmopan, although the district's own capital is San Ignacio. Agriculture is important to the region, where the primary crops are citrus fruits and bananas. Its offshore territory includes the Great Blue Hole, a world-famous spot for scuba divers to witness the Belize Barrier Reef's biodiversity and clear waters.

The district capital of San Ignacio is the second largest settlement in Belize, after Belize City. It has recently absorbed the small neighboring village of Santa Elena, and the two are now collectively known as the "Twin Towns."

Built as a planned community in 1970 after a hurricane razed most of Belize City, Belmopan is located directly in the center of Belize. Its name is a portmanteau of two rivers: Belize and Belmopan. Despite Belmopan's official status as the nation's capital, foreign governments have been slow to move establish embassies and consulates there, so that the foreign diplomatic community is divided between Belmopan and Belize City.



# DISTRICTS



## Corozal

Belize's northernmost district, Corozal is bordered on the west by the Rio Hondo and the Mexican state of Quintana Roo, and on the east by the Caribbean Sea. Its capital is Corozal Town. The district's economy once relied more heavily on sugar production, but has since diversified to include tourism and other agricultural interests like papaya. Corozal Town is the northernmost settlement in Belize, founded in 1848 by Mestizo refugees fleeing the Mayan revolt against Spanish rule in nearby Mexico. As a result, the local culture is largely based in Mestizo traditions, from use of the Yucatec Maya language and folklore to the practice of Catholicism. A hurricane destroyed nearly all of Corozal Town in 1955, but it has since been rebuilt.

## Orange Walk

One of only two districts in Belize to be totally landlocked, the Orange Walk District shares a border with Mexico, as separated by the Rio Hondo. Originally settled by British loggers, the district is now populated mostly by Maya mestizo descendants of refugees fleeing Mexico in the 19th century. As the logging industry declined, the sugar industry rose up as the Orange Walk District's main source of profit.

Today, the district's agricultural tradition continues but has expanded to include crops like potatoes, onions, soy, sorghum, rice, and citrus, as well as sugar cane.

## Stann Creek

Located in the southeast of Belize, the Stann Creek District takes its name from "stann," the name for designated safe havens for colonists traveling from Europe to the New World. Other major locales within the district include Big Creek, the main port for banana exports; Hopkins, a village populated mostly by the Garifuna people descended from escaped African slaves; Placencia, Stann Creek's most tourist-friendly city; and Victoria Peak, site of the highest point in all of Belize.

Stann Creek's capital, formerly known as Stann Creek Town, has since been renamed Dangriga, meaning "standing waters." The town is heavily influenced by cultural practices of the Garifuna (also known as Garinagu or Black Caribs), who immigrated from Honduras to settle the town in the early 19th century. Dangriga is sometimes called the cultural capital of Belize, thanks to its influence on folk and punta music.

# DISTRICTS



## Toledo

Inhabitants of the southernmost and least populated district of Belize refer to their region as “the forgotten land,” forgotten by both visiting tourists and the government that has neglected to develop its infrastructure. However, this has left its many rainforests, caves, plains, cayes, and Mayan ruins some of the most unspoiled in the country.

Agriculture is the cornerstone of Toledo’s economy. Farmers grow an abundance of corn, beans, and rice, as well as cacao that is sold both locally and internationally. Other crops are grown on a smaller scale to be sold at the market in Punta Gorda: sweet potatoes, peppers, avocados, oranges, coffee, and plantains.

Toledo has been classified as an “emerging destination” as its tourism industry begins to grow, supporting a swell of adventurous ecotourists looking to explore the district’s caves, sinkholes, and waterfalls. There are also largely untouched Mayan ruins that are accessible to the public.

Punta Gorda is Toledo’s modestly populated capital, with only 20,057 inhabitants. The populace consists of a mix of Garifuna, East Indian, Kriol, and Maya descendants. It is a fishing town that also serves as the main transport hub for the Toledo District and its many offshore cayes.



# CAYES & ATTOLS



Belize's unique geography includes not only its diverse mainland, but a collection of 450 small barrier islands off the coast, offering easy access to the expansive stretch of the Belize Barrier Reef.

## Ambergris Caye

Ambergris Caye ("am-BER-gris kee") deserves special consideration as the largest island in Belize and easily its most popular tourist destination. Despite falling under the administration of the Belize District, its closest point to the mainland actually places it geographically nearer to the Corozal District. The island is over 25 miles long from north to south, but only about a mile wide.

Ambergris Caye is often affectionately referred to as "La Isla Bonita," or "the beautiful island," a nickname popularized in part by Madonna's release of a song by the same name with Latin musical influences in 1986. In many ways, Ambergris Caye fulfills the typical fantasy of a Caribbean paradise with its coral sand beaches and sparkling turquoise waters, an image further enhanced by islanders' hospitality and a strong infrastructure in place to support tourism. Its draws are twofold: upscale amenities and luxury for those who want it, alongside a relaxed flip-flop-friendly vibe suitable for travelers of all stripes.

San Pedro, the main hub of activity on the island, is second in size in the Belize District only to Belize City. While San Pedro is the island's only designated town, Ambergris Caye's 16,000+ inhabitants (as of 2015) also populate a number of smaller villages and settlements.

From San Pedro, the barrier reef and its marine riches are only half a mile offshore. The journey between the mainland and the caye is only 20 minutes by air, making it one of the most accessible offshore destinations in Belize.





# CAYES & ATTOLS



## Caye Caulker

After Ambergris Caye, Caye Caulker is perhaps the second most popular destination for visitors to Belize. The island's more relaxed atmosphere holds appeal for budget travelers, who sacrifice some of the developed tourist infrastructure of Ambergris Caye for a more laid back, informal way of living. Street signs warn bicyclists and golf cart drivers to "Go Slow," a mantra that the whole island takes to heart. When walking the entire island takes only 20 minutes from end to end, there's not much reason to rush.

Visitors to the island have two methods by which to travel to Caye Caulker: air or water. Like many of Belize's main barrier islands, Caye Caulker has its own small but serviceable airport, with flights arriving and departing from the main Belize City airport as well as other regional airports. Water taxis provide another reliable transport option, with speedboats capable of traveling the distance in approximately 45 minutes departing regularly from Belize City, as well as similar services offering a 30-minute journey from Ambergris Caye.

The modest caye is, unfortunately, quite vulnerable to the ravages of major hurricanes. Only reaching eight feet at its highest point of elevation, Caye Caulker might easily be overcome by a strong storm surge.

Hurricane Hattie in 1961 devastated Caye Caulker Village, which had to be rebuilt with the assistance of the Governor's Emergency Committee and the British Army. The most recent storm to hit the island was Hurricane Keith in 2000; islanders have since vowed to be better prepared for such potential natural disasters.

One of the main reasons to visit Caye Caulker isn't on the island itself, but about an hour's boat ride away: the famed Hol Chan, a bucket list location for dedicated scuba divers. Non-divers can still partake in the fun with a snorkeling expedition in shallower portions of the Belize Barrier Reef, and can even venture out to Shark Ray Alley for an opportunity swim alongside manta rays and Nurse sharks. (safe for humans!) For a particular treat, Caye Caulker visitors might want to schedule a manatee snorkel tour. While passing through clear, warm waters, swimmers will have plenty of opportunity to observe the gentle "sea cows" calmly moving around them, peacefully coexisting with the boats that pass them daily. Hol Chan Marine Reserve, which derives its name from the Mayan phrase for "little channel," additionally plays host to a dazzling rainbow of tropical fish.

# CAYES & ATTOLS



## Glover's Reef

Named after a 17th-century pirate who used the atoll as a base for his raids, Glover's Reef is now home to one of the Caribbean's most diverse reefs. Snorkelers and scuba divers can appreciate this ecological abundance thanks to the reef's unusually clear waters. It is also home to a research station from which over 200 expeditions been launched to research conservation strategies for the Belize Barrier Reef.

## Laughing Bird Caye

Due to its restrictions against overnight stays, Laughing Bird Caye is strictly a day trip-only destination, but one worth the journey out for even a short while. Named for the laughing gulls that once used to populate the island before being forced to migrate elsewhere by increasing crowds of humans, Laughing Bird Caye is an ideal spot for snorkeling, scuba diving, kayaking, and swimming. It is one of Belize's protected natural areas, and its unspoiled beauty is a testament to those conservation efforts.





# CAYES & ATTOLS



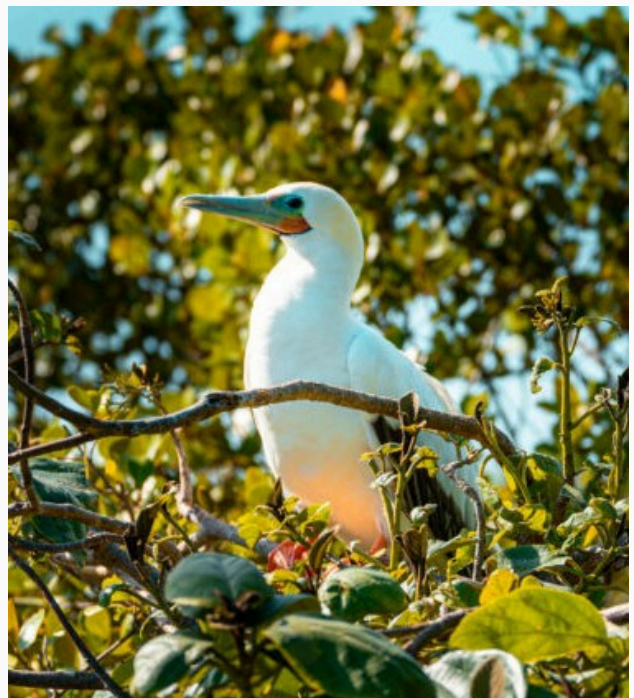
## Lighthouse Reef

This atoll 50 miles off the coast of Belize City is one of three atolls (lagoons surrounded by coral reef formations) in Belize, and only four total in the Western Hemisphere. It is a prime destination for scuba divers, who can take advantage of the many spectacular dive sites throughout the reef. These include the world-famous Great Blue Hole, which measures more than 1,000 feet wide and 400 feet deep, opening into a former Ice Age cave that collapsed around 10,000 years ago.

The Great Blue Hole derives its color and its name from the stunning contrast between the dark, deep water within the walls of the hole and the lighter blue shallows surrounding it. The transparency of the water juxtaposed with the white sand of neighboring beaches allows a vibrant shade of blue to reflect back. The bright blue spot in the middle of the Lighthouse Reef atoll is visible all the way from space.

In 1971, French explorer and conservationist Jacques Cousteau declared the location one of the world's top ten spots for scuba diving. Several species of fish, including the midnight parrot fish, angelfish, butterfly fish, Caribbean reef shark, and hammerhead shark, populate the Blue Hole's waters.

In addition to the Great Blue Hole, another UNESCO World Heritage site in Lighthouse Reef is Half Moon Caye Bird Sanctuary. Half Moon Caye has been Belize's oldest national monument ever since it was designated for the protection of the red-footed booby in 1924. It is also a nesting ground for various endangered species of sea turtle: loggerheads, hawksbills, and green turtles.



# CAYES & ATTOLS



## South Water Caye

There's stiff competition for the crown, but South Water Caye may have some of the finest beaches in all of Belize. It's home to Pelican Resort for all the luxury pleasure-seekers, and a marine lab for the more science-minded.

The South Water Caye Marine Reserve (SWCMR) is the largest in all of Belize, part of the Belize Barrier Reef System that was recognized in 1996 as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its "outstanding universal value." Along with the honor, the designation comes with an expectation that the Belizean government should go to certain lengths to preserve the region's rich biodiversity of coral types, vegetation, and sea life.

## St. George's Caye

This unassuming island eight miles east of and a 20-minute water taxi ride away from Belize City once had a much grander role to play, as the largest settlement in 17th and 18th century British Honduras (precursor to Belize today) and the nation's original capital. It was a stronghold for the British settlers fighting against Spanish invasion, most notably during the 1798 Battle of St. George's Caye, now celebrated as a Belizean national holiday each September 10.

These British settlers, known as Baymen, settled on St. George's Caye in the mid-17th century. While taking advantage of Belize's abundant mainland forests to sell lumber back to European buyers, the Baymen were simultaneously fighting against encroaching Spanish forces attempting to claim the region for themselves. Outgunned and outmanned, the Baymen claimed an improbable victory over Spain that has since been commemorated with a map of St. George's Caye on the Belizean five dollar bill.

Today, St. George's Caye is best known as an adventure training location for the British Forces, where military members and their families can go sailing and diving. The island also hosts a large resort that draws in the tourist set. Its population is largely transient, with only about 20 permanent residents calling the island home year-round.

## Turneffe Islands

The largest of Belize's three atolls, Turneffe, is home to over 150 distinct islands and cays inhabited by mangroves, over 500 species of fish, crocodiles, lobster, sea turtles, seabirds, manatees, and 65 types of stony corals. It was officially declared a marine reserve in November 2012.



# ECONOMY



As late as the 1900s, Belize's fortune was built on trees. When Caribbean pirates in the 1650s realized that wealth could be gained by selling logwood to European buyers for textiles, they initiated what would become Belize's primary industry for decades to come. When the supply of mahogany began to run low, the burgeoning sugar industry came to prominence in place of the struggling lumber trade.

Today, Belize's primary exports include bananas, molasses citrus, and sugar. Sugar and molasses alone account for about 30% of the nation's exports and bananas account for about 18.5%. Other important Belizean commodities include lumber, lobsters, citrus (15.7%), petroleum (6.3%), clothing, and fish products (10.7%). As a result, agriculture is the biggest local industry, contributing 20% of GDP and employing around one-fifth of the country's labor force. Tourism comes in second, with an approximately 17% share of GDP, but may well overtake agriculture (10.3%) in coming years as Belize's profile rises in international travel circles and the agricultural sector experiences the consequences of Belize's susceptibility to natural disasters.

Economic growth in Belize is unfortunately stymied by the country's widespread corruption and the government's lack of effort to proactively combat it.

It is the only country in Central America not to adopt the United Nations Convention against Corruption. However, the upside of Belize's small economy is insulation from the global market; despite worldwide financial difficulties, Belize's economy has remained largely unaffected.





# EDUCATION



The school system in Belize is divided into three tiers: primary, secondary, and tertiary, loosely based on the British educational system it inherited from its colonial past. Children in Belize are required to undergo eight years of primary education from around ages 5 to 13, including two years of “infant” classes and a further six “standards,” or the equivalent of American “grades.” The country’s facilities only provide enough places for half the graduates of primary education to move on to secondary schooling, which requires the completion of four “forms” in four years. Students intending to attend a university remain for a two-year “sixth form” course to prepare them for their A-Level exams. Belizeans who are unable or choose not to complete their secondary education have the opportunity to enter vocational training, assisted by the Department of Labor. Adult education initiatives are also available for older citizens who wish to improve their existing skill sets.

Primary schooling itself is free, but educational expenses like uniforms and books may be out of reach for certain poor families. By 2014, 13% of Belizeans aged 15-24 had failed to complete even their primary education, with 2% having received no formal schooling at all.

## Basic Education

Although eight years of primary education are compulsory in Belize and the Education Act subjects parents to a fine if their school-age children are not enrolled in and regularly attending school, a certain portion of the population is unable to bear the financial strain of school their children.



# EDUCATION



## Colleges and Universities

Upon completion of sixth form, students in Belize may be eligible for Associate of Arts degrees accredited by the American Association of Community Colleges. There are also a number of junior colleges in the country that offer equivalent qualifications.

The University of Belize, located in Belmopan City, is the national university of Belize. It offers certificates, diplomas, Associate's degrees, Bachelor's degrees, and one Master's degree in Biodiversity Conservation & Sustainable Development, offered in partnership with other universities in the region. Undergraduate degrees are divided into four main faculties: Education and Arts; Management and Social Sciences; Science and Technology; and Nursing, Allied Health, and Social Work.

The university's newly inaugurated Environmental Research Institute focuses on work that is somehow relevant to the sustainable management of the nation's wealth of natural resources and support of its tourism and agriculture industries.

Galen University, a private university located just outside San Ignacio in the Cayo District, also offers Bachelor's and Master's degrees in the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences, Business and Entrepreneurship, and Science and Technology. It serves both local Belizean students and the 5% of its population on study abroad programs from other countries. Thanks to a partnership with the University of Indiana, established in 2003 with an incoming class of only 14 students, Galen remains Belize's only privately administered tertiary education institution.

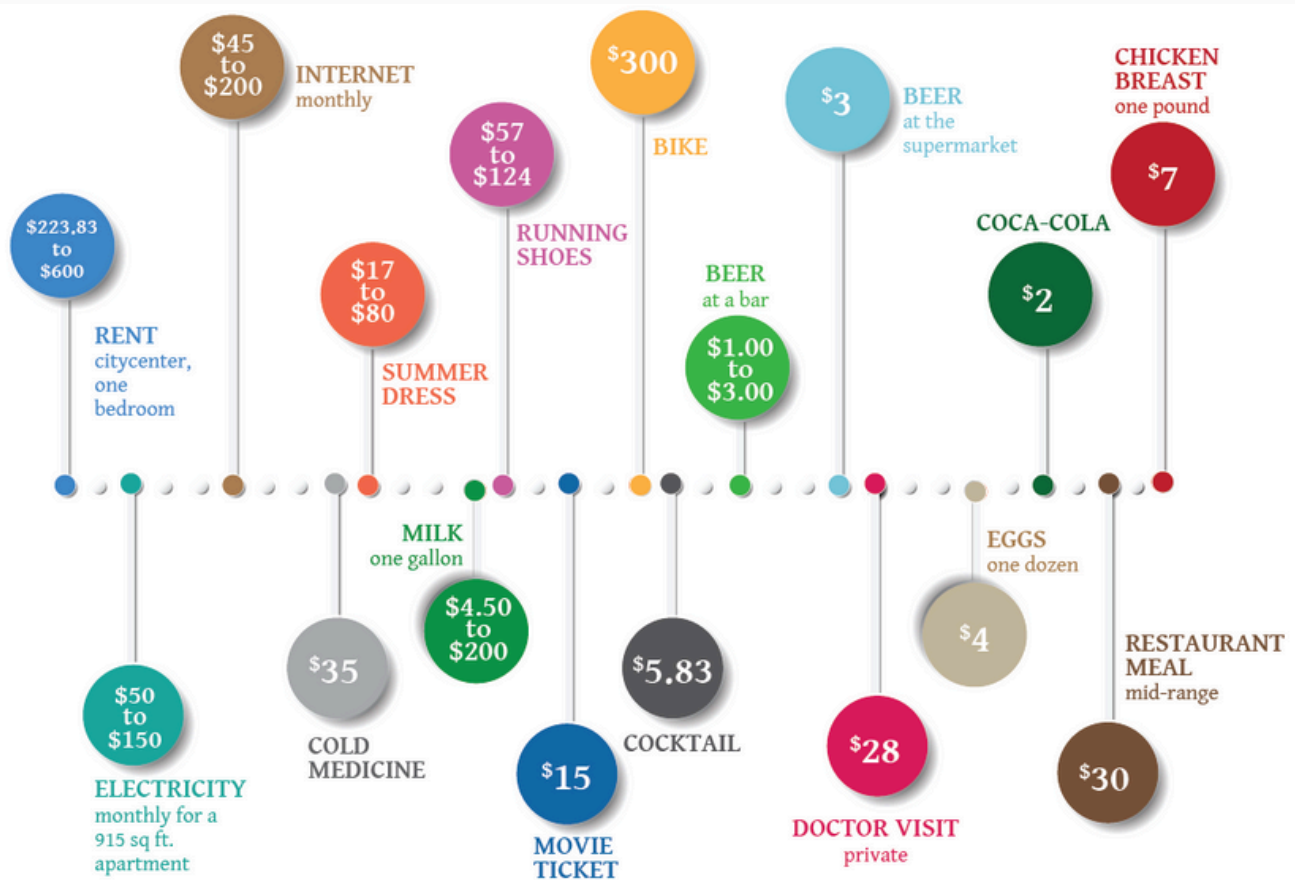


# COST OF LIVING

The cost of living in Belize is lower than that of more developed nations like the United States or Canada, but is likely higher than many of its neighboring Central American countries. Life in Belize can meet a wide range of budgets, depending on certain factors: standard of housing,

location, transportation (public or private), buying local vs. imported goods, etc.

Keeping in mind that \$2 BZ = \$1 USD, a sample mid-range cost of living estimate is included here (prices are in BZD and are current as of October 2020):





# BANKING



## Local Banking

Belize has five commercial banks for residents: five are domestic (Atlantic Bank, Belize Bank, Heritage Bank, National Bank of Belize, and Scotia Bank) and five are international (Atlantic International, Belize Bank International, Caye International, Heritage International, and Choice Bank Limited) with local branches. There are also a small number of credit unions to choose from.

Opening a bank account in Belize requires more paperwork than might be expected in other Western countries. A prospective account holder must provide written references, including a signed reference on letterhead from a previous banking institution confirming a client's length of relationship with them, current good standing, and account totals. The bank may also ask a new client why they want to open a new account, e.g. moving to Belize full-time, starting a business, buying property, etc.

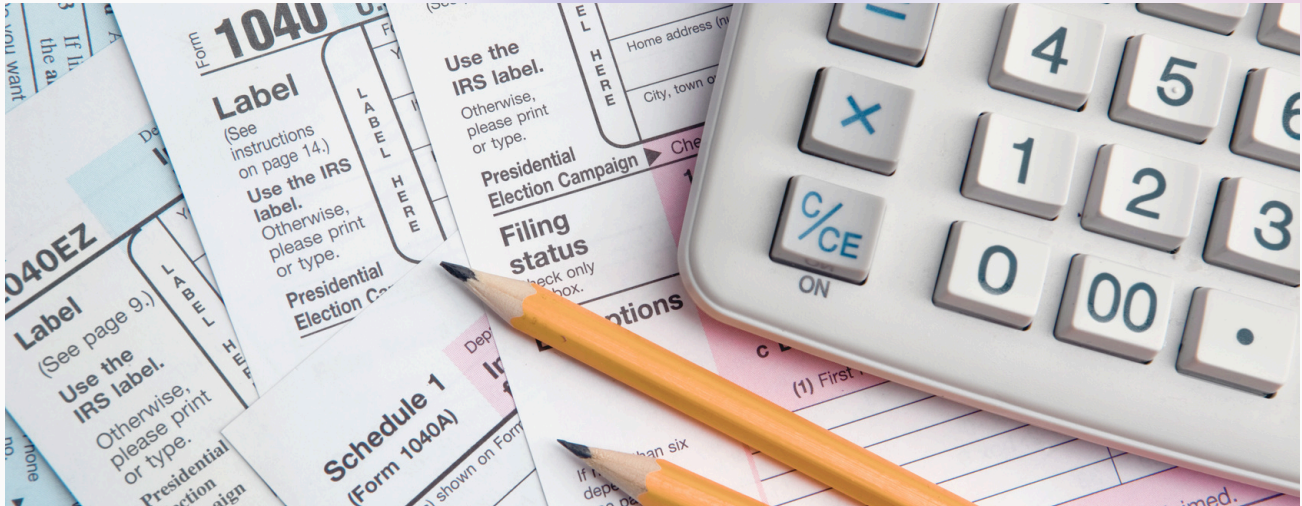
Banks usually keep relatively short business hours, often closing by 2:00 p.m. on a normal day and/or closing for lunch. Most branches, however, do offer ATMs that also accept foreign-issued debit cards. These will issue cash in Belize dollars.

## International Banking

Enjoy easy access to your accounts while providing a private and secure residence for your assets outside your home country. Belize is a stable and growing democracy with a currency pegged to the U.S. dollar, a zero tax regime, and is now the leading International Jurisdiction for banking in Central America. With a 24% liquidity rate you can feel safe when your money is with Caye International Bank and you will have the opportunity to invest in new markets that are not accessible in the USA.



# TAXES



Everyone in Belize, including non-citizen residents and visitors, is subject to the national general sales tax (GST) of 12.5% on most goods and services, with exemptions for certain food items and medical necessities. These include nutritional basics like rice, flour, bread, corn, fresh meat, eggs, beans, sugar, tortillas, and condensed milk, as well as cough and cold medicine, insulin, analgesics, oral dehydration salts, and more. Textbooks, children's picture books, seeds, and other agricultural supplies are also exempt from GST.

Import taxes provide essential revenue to the Belize national government, and it is the responsibility of the importer to pay these upon the goods' arrival within the country, with limited exemptions for materials deemed "essential" by the Minister of Finance. Customs will also be levied on shipments of goods whose total value exceeds \$200 BZ. Duties can range from 0% to 45%. Finally, all goods imported to Belize are subject to a 2% environmental tax.

Employees in Belize are subject to a progressive personal income tax, in which the first \$20,000 BZ is tax-free, and any further income is taxed at a flat rate of 25%. Belize does not have estate or capital gains taxes.





# TOURISM & ECOTOURISM



As the nation's second largest industry, tourism plays an important role in Belize. 2012 set a record as the first year in which one million tourists visited Belize in a calendar year, and the government has since declared tourism its second highest priority after agriculture. As Belize grows in popularity as a destination, local industry reaps the benefits.

Belize's Ministry of Tourism is the governing body in charge of all tourist-related activity in the country, with the Belize Tourism Board working within the ministry as a liaison between public and private sector initiatives.

In contrast to more conventional forms of commercial tourism, ecotourism is a growing movement that intends to promote socially responsible, low-impact visits to largely undeveloped natural sites. Ecotourism promotes ecological conservation, the economic and/or political empowerment of local communities, and an understanding of foreign cultures.

One of the key tenets in ecotourism involves supporting local citizens by patronizing their businesses, rather than giving money to large corporations or remote organizations.

Putting money directly into the local economy ensures that the ecotourism industry is not only environmentally, but also financially sustainable.

## Rainforest and animals

More than half of all land in Belize consists of rainforest or jungle, including 26% of the country that is officially protected through federal and private preservation initiatives. These areas enjoy varying levels of protection. Forest reserves are designated for timber extraction upon federal approval; national parks encourage recreation and tourism; nature reserves require permits for entry and are usually restricted for serious research.

For its size, Belize possesses an impressive level of biodiversity. The country hosts over 500 Distinct species of birds, 150 types of mammals, 150 varieties of amphibians and reptiles, and more than 3,000 species of plants. Its waters contain nearly 600 assorted species of fish. Very few of these species are unique to Belize, but it is nonetheless considered a part of the Mesoamerican biodiversity hotspot.

# THINGS TO DO



## Birdwatching

Avid birders will be delighted with the number and diversity of birds they'll have the chance to see in Belize. With nearly 600 species spotted around the country, there's not much work necessary to guarantee a successful birdwatching trip.

A good birding tour will take visitors all around to the different habitats where birds may be found. While the tropical forests harbor enough birds alone to make for a satisfying trip, there are also the open fields, scrubland, mountain habitats, marshes, and riverbanks to explore. A single day's watching might include toucans, woodpeckers, swallows, and jays in one location, then grebes, boobies, herons, and pelicans in another.

In recognition of Belize's diverse and numerous bird population, six areas of the country have been designated as Important Bird Areas. These are subject to the same protections as other nationally recognized nature reserves, to ensure that future generations can have the same opportunity to appreciate nature.

## Hiking

One of the best ways to get around Belize while appreciating its abundant natural beauty is on foot. Hikers will have plenty of opportunity anywhere in the country to trek through jungles, rainforests, savannas, wetlands, and beaches, each journey as exciting as the last.

## Scuba diving

Belize's reputation as one of the world's premier destinations for divers is well earned. Its signature, bucket-list dive is at the Blue Hole, which reaches over 1,000 feet across and 450 feet deep. However, not all dives are quite so intimidating, and there's a site to suit divers of all levels and interests, whether they want to see fish or sharks, coral, sponges or stingrays

At The Elbow in Turneffe Atoll, bigger fish are the draw, including barracuda, snapper, and several species of shark. Hol Chan Marine Reserve has grouper, coral, and countless species of smaller tropical fish. For some of the best views of coral, there's also Silk Cayes Canyon just south of Belize City.



# THINGS TO DO



## Snorkeling

For those who want to explore Belize's warm tropical waters without the hassle and expense of getting a scuba diving certification, snorkeling is always an option. All snorkeling trips take place offshore, right on the Belize Barrier Reef, in the shallower regions of the atolls.

Ambergris Caye is the most popular starting point for snorkelers, who can mix and match their destinations depending on what they'd like to see. Shark Ray Alley lives up to its name, harboring harmless nurse sharks as well as rays, while Hol Chan and Tres Cocos offer more variety in fish species. Half Moon Caye in the Lighthouse Reef Atoll has a large shallow area perfect for snorkeling, as does Glover's Reef Atoll, which is the best spot to view coral up close.

## Kayaking

One of the best ways to get around Belize while appreciating its abundant natural beauty is on foot. Hikers will have plenty of opportunity anywhere in the country to trek through jungles, rainforests, savannas, wetlands, and beaches, each journey as exciting as the last.

## Museums & Galleries

Cultural enrichment can be found among Belize's many outdoor attractions, if one only knows where to look. Each major city in Belize hosts a handful of well-curated cultural institutions, from museums to art galleries to historic cathedrals.

The Museum of Belize, located in an old prison building in the heart of Belize City, is a small but must-see exhibition of the nation's history, culture, and environment. Friendly, well-informed museum guides are available for pre-booked tours or questions about any of the exhibits. Visitors will also appreciate the air-conditioned interior, complimentary Wi-Fi, and well-stocked gift shop.

St. John's Cathedral in Belize City is the oldest Anglican cathedral not only in Belize but in all of Central America, built by slaves from discarded bricks previously used as ballast in British colonial ships. Inside can be found many original features, including pews carved from local mahogany, stained glass windows, and an antique organ. The adjacent graveyard, Yarborough Cemetery, is the oldest in Belize and was designated a protected archaeological reserve in 2009. Both are open to the public on select days of the week.

Other sites that may be worth visiting depending on your particular interests include the Gallery of San Pedro, the Maya Center Mayan Museum, the Gulisi Garifuna Museum, and the Maya House of Cacao.

# THINGS TO DO



## Mayan Ruins

Remnants of ancient Mayan civilization can be found throughout Belize. Many of these sites are remarkable for how untouched they remain to this day, with some temples still unexcavated from layers of growth that have hidden them from view over centuries.

In the Orange Walk District, the ruins of Lamanai (from the Maya word for “submerged crocodile”) are buried within an overgrown jungle. Jaguars roam the area and illustrations of them are carved into the temple walls, a testament to how long they’ve been there. Howler monkeys’ screeches are an inescapable part of the local soundscape. Travelers who trust themselves to make the careful climb can ascend to the top of the High Temple, where the view from a hundred feet up is unlike any other in Belize.

Altun Ha is another popular Mayan site, due to its proximity to Belize City. Crocodiles can be found in the original Mayan reservoir, and the surrounding area is home to foxes, raccoons, tapirs, agouti, bats, armadillos, white-tailed deer, and around 200 species of birds.

The Jade Head, the largest carved jade object yet discovered from the remains of Mayan civilization, was found at Altun Ha. However, the site may be known best to Belizeans as the illustration on a bottle of Belikin beer.

Caracol is the largest known Maya center in Belize, but one of the most difficult to access today, with only a single access road. It contains Canaa, or “Sky Palace,” the largest manmade structure in Belize, reaching 140 feet high. At its largest and most populous, Caracol covered an area larger than present-day Belize City and was inhabited by over two times the city’s current population.



# CUISINE



Traditional Belizean food incorporates a blend of Mayan, Mexican, Spanish, and Caribbean culinary traditions. The national cuisine in all its diversity reflects the same kind of cultural blending found among its people.

## Rice and Beans

No Belizean diet is complete without rice and beans, one of the country's staple dishes, which can be consumed for every meal.

Red kidney beans and rice are prepared with coconut milk, then served with meat, fish, or vegetables on the side. Potato salad, plantains, and coleslaw are also common accompaniments. Variations on the traditional rice and beans recipe may substitute black-eyed peas for the kidney beans. Rice and beans is not to be confused with beans and rice, in which the rice and beans are cooked separately but served together.

## Stew Meat

Stewing is a popular preparation for chicken, beef, or fish. This technique makes use of recado, a locally beloved spice mix heavily reliant on achiote/annatto. The resulting stew is hearty, flavorful, and richly colored. Stew meat is usually served with rice and beans.

## Coconut

Valued for its versatility the world over, the coconut is a staple of the Belizean diet. In Belize, every single part of the coconut gets put to use, whether for food or for alternative purposes. The most common commercial product to emerge from coconuts is coconut oil, which can be used as a cooking oil or for cosmetic purposes. Coconut water is an everyday beverage and alcoholic mixer, not to be confused with coconut milk, which is produced by squeezing and straining the coconut meat. If you like piña coladas, you can thank coconuts for their invaluable contribution to the tropical cocktail.

The coconut fruit itself is a typical ingredient in many Belizean recipes, both entrees and desserts. Coconut shavings can be mixed into rice, cooked into curries, baked into pies and tarts, frozen into popsicles, or simply eaten fresh from the husk.

Young coconuts have a unique texture, described as soft and almost custardy, that is distinct from the experience of eating a matured coconut.

# CUISINE

## Johnny Cakes

Also known as journey cakes, Belizean johnny cakes are a type of unsweetened bread made with flour and sometimes coconut milk. They are often served for breakfast, either with butter and marmalade or sliced in half and turned into a savory breakfast sandwich with eggs, cheese, and meat.



## Fry Jacks

Similar to johnny cakes, fry jacks are a fried dough served for breakfast, usually shaped into squares or triangles. They also bear some similarity to New Orleans beignets and Mexican sopapillas. Fry jacks can be served savory or sweet, topped with powdered sugar, jam, beans, or cheese.





# CUISINE



## Boil Up

The most common cultural dish from Belize's Kriol population is boil up, or bile up. This kitchen sink stew combines hard-boiled eggs, fish or pig tail, cassava, sweet potatoes, plantains, carrots, flour dumplings, tomatoes, and whatever other ingredients are on hand all get combined in a single pot. The result is a traditional Belizean dish that's different every time.

## Seafood

Belize's proximity to the ocean and its historically strong fishing industry have both contributed to culinary traditions that commonly incorporate various forms of seafood. Lobsters, often considered a luxury food item, could easily become an everyday dinner, priced as low as \$10 for a full freshly caught lobster on Caye Caulker. Ceviche, made by marinating fresh fish, shrimp, octopus, lobster, or conch in lime juice, is readily available. Conch fritters, made of diced conch deep-fried with batter, are another common seafood dish sold and eaten casually.

## Pepper Sauce

Spice, at varying heat levels, is an important component in Belizean cooking. If peppers are not included in a dish, a kick of spice can be added with a local pepper sauce. The most popular brand in Belize is Marie Sharp's, which offers multiple varieties of hot sauce made with locally grown habanero peppers.

## International Cuisine

As the reputation of Belize as a must-see tourist destination rises, it is not uncommon to see international flavors from Europe and other parts of the Americas being incorporated into the local cuisine. In keeping with the foundation of Belizean cuisine as a melting pot of food traditions, elements of Chinese, Indian, and Nigerian cookery have infiltrated as international outsiders immigrate to Belize.

# CUISINE



## Beverages

The legal drinking age in Belize is 18. Belikin beer is the most popular alcoholic beverage in Belize, though Caribbean and other imported beers are also available in most bars. Decorated with a Mayan temple at Altun Ha on the label, Belikin beer, including Belikin stout and Lighthouse Lager, is a light-bodied beer rich in flavor and typically available for \$2 to \$3 USD.

Bowen & Bowen, the Belizean beverage bottling company, also produces popular Coca-Cola products (including Fanta, Coke Light, and the original Coca-Cola), as well as Guinness Stout.

Belize also manufactures its own rum. Travellers Rum is among the most popular labels, offering both white and gold varieties made with crushed locally grown sugar cane. Bottles of local rum are available in grocery stores, usually priced around \$9 to \$16 USD each. Belizean vodka and gin are also available, but enjoy far less popularity among locals.

Rum punch is a common accompaniment to many casual Belizean meals, both for lunch and dinner. While recipes vary according to taste and whatever ingredients are available, the standard formula usually includes both white rum and coconut rum and some mixture of fruit juices (orange, pineapple, lime, grapefruit) with grenadine syrup.



# HOTELS BY DISTRICT

*Please note: These lists only make up a small portion of hotels in Belize. Before traveling, be sure to do your research to ensure that you find lodging most suitable to your wants and needs. Hostels and homestays may be other options to consider.*

## Ambergris Caye

NAME	PHONE	ADDRESS	PRICE	AMENITIES
Athens Gate	+501 226 4151	Coconut Drive, San Pedro	\$278 - \$386	A/C, Airport Transport, Beachfront, Babysitting, Bar, Laundry, Parking, Pool, Refrigerator, Wi-Fi
Blue Tang Inn	+866 881 1020	Sand Piper Street, San Pedro	\$122 - \$244	A/C, Beachfront, Breakfast, Dry Cleaning, Hot Tub, Room Service, Pool, WiFi
Corona del Mar Hotel	+501 226 2055	Coconut Drive, San Pedro	\$88 - \$305	A/C, Beachfront, Bar, Breakfast, Business Center, Laundry, Non-Smoking, Pool, Restaurant, Wi-Fi
El Pescador Resort	+501 226 2398	North San Pedro	\$185 - \$850	A/C, Airport Transport, Beachfront, Bar, Gym, Laundry, Parking, Pool, Non-Smoking, Restaurant, Wi-Fi
Exotic Caye Beach Resort	+1 800 290 1026	Coconut Drive, San Pedro	\$98 - \$250	A/C, Beachfront, Bar, Gym, Kitchenette, Non-Smoking, Pool, Restaurant, Wi-Fi
Isla Bonita Yacht Club	+501 226 4059	Coconut Drive, San Pedro	\$155-\$285	A/C, Airport Transport, Beachfront, Bar, Pool, Refrigerator, Room Service, Wi-Fi
Paradise Villas	+501 226 2087	Pescador Drive, San Pedro	\$126	Airport Transport, Beachfront, Kitchenette, Laundry, Parking, Pool, Wi-Fi
RAMON's Village Resort	+501 226 2071	Coconut Drive, San Pedro	\$155-\$590	A/C, Beachfront, Airport Transport, Restaurant, Laundry, Concierge Services, Room Service, Pool, Wi-Fi
Grand Baymen Gardens	+501 226 4771	Hurricane Street, San Pedro Town	\$99 - \$149	Fitness Center, 2 Tennis Courts, Swimming Pool, Security 6Pm-6Am, Onsite Property Manager, Laundry & Cleaning Services Available

# HOTELS BY DISTRICT

## Belize District

NAME	PHONE	ADDRESS	PRICE	AMENITIES
Best Caribbean Belize Pickwick Hotel	+501 223 2950	160 Newtown Barracks, Belize City	\$70 - \$80	A/C, Airport Transport, Dry Cleaning, Laundry, Non- Smoking, Parking, Pool, Tennis Court, Wi-Fi
Best Western Belize Biltmore Plaza	+501 223 2302	Mile 3, Philip Goldson Highway, Belize City	\$105 - \$148	A/C, Babysitting, Bar, Business Center, Dry Cleaning, Gym, Laundry, Non-Smoking, Parking, Pool, Restaurant, Room Service, Wi-Fi
Black Orchid Resort	+501 225 9158	2 Dawson Lane, Burrell Boom	\$121 - \$267	A/C, Airport Transport, Bar, Business Center, Laundry, Non-Smoking, Parking, Pool, Restaurant, Room Service, Shuttle Bus, Wi-Fi
Maruba Resort Jungle Spa	+501 225 5555	40 ½ Mile Old Northern Highway, Maskall	\$192- \$236	A/C, Airport Transport, Babysitting, Bar, Gym, Parking, Pool, Restaurant, Room Service, Shuttle Bus, Spa, Wi-Fi
Radisson Fort George	+501 223 3333	2 Marine Parade Boulevard, Belize City	\$158 - \$213	A/C, Airport Transport, Babysitting, Bar, Business Center, Dry Cleaning, Gym, Laundry, Parking, Pool, Restaurant, Room Service, Wi-Fi



# HOTELS BY DISTRICT

## Cayo

NAME	PHONE	ADDRESS	PRICE	AMENITIES
Amber Sunset Jungle Resort	+501 824 3141	Mile 59 Western Highway	\$135 - \$191	Bar, Parking, Pool, Restaurant, Room Service, Wi-Fi
Black Rock Lodge	+501 834 4049	Negroman Road, Black Rock, San Ignacio	\$74 - \$210	Airport Transport, Bar, Kid-Friendly, Non-Smoking, Parking, Pool, Restaurant, Wi-Fi
Hidden Valley Inn	+501 822 3320	Cooma Cairn Road, Mountain Pine Ridge	\$275 - \$1123	Airport Transport, Bar, Hot Tub, Kid-Friendly, Laundry, Non-Smoking, Parking, Restaurant, Room Service, Spa, Wi-Fi
Mariposa Jungle Lodge	+501 670 2113	San Antonio Road, San Antonio	\$175 - \$293	A/C, Airport Transport, Babysitting, Bar, Kid-Friendly, Laundry, Parking, Pool, Restaurant, Wi-Fi
Midas Resort	+501 824 3172	Branch Mouth Road San Ignacio	\$45 - \$158	A/C, Bar, Kid-Friendly, Laundry, Non-Smoking, Parking, Pet-Friendly, Pool, Restaurant, Wi-Fi
Rumors Resort	+501 824 2795	Mile 68 Western Highway	\$73 - \$135	A/C, Air Transport, Bar, Kid-Smoking, Parking, Pet-Friendly, Pool, Restaurant, Room Service, Wi-Fi
Sleeping Giant Rainforest Lodge	+786 472 9664	Mile 36 Hummingbird Highway, Belmopan	\$176 - \$427	A/C, Bar, Laundry, Non-Smoking, Parking, Pool, Restaurant, Wi-Fi
RAMON's Village Resort	+501 226 2071	Coconut Drive, San Pedro	\$155-\$590	A/C, Beachfront, Airport Transport, Restaurant, Laundry, Concierge Services, Room Service, Pool, Wi-Fi
Windy Hill Resort	+501 824 2017	Graceland Ranch, San Ignacio	\$58 - \$145	A/C, Bar, Gym, Non-Smoking, Parking, Pool, Restaurant, Wi-Fi

# HOTELS BY DISTRICT

## Caye Caulker

NAME	PHONE	ADDRESS	PRICE	AMENITIES
Anchorage Resort	+501 206 0304	Beachfront Street, Caye Caulker	\$69 - \$132	A/C, Beachfront, Laundry, Refrigerator, Wi-Fi
Barefoot Beach Belize	+501 226 0205	Oceanfront Street, Caye Caulker	\$49 - \$129	A/C, Beachfront, Kitchenette, Parking, Pet-Friendly, Refrigerator, Room Service, Wi-Fi
Caye Caulker Condos	+501 226 0072	26 Front Street, Caye Caulker	\$86	A/C, Beachfront, Kid-Friendly, Kitchenette, Pool, Refrigerator, Wi-Fi
Caye Reef	+501 226 0382	Front Street, Caye Caulker	\$105 - \$240	A/C, Airport Transport, Beachfront, Breakfast, Hot Tub, Kitchenette, Parking, Pool, Refrigerator, Wi-Fi
Iguana Reef Inn	+501 226 0213	Caye Caulker	\$139 - \$389	A/C, Airport Transport, Bar, Beachfront, Breakfast, Minibar, Non-Smoking, Parking, Pool, Restaurant, Room Service, Wi-Fi
Rainbow Hotel	+501 226 0123	Front Street, Caye Caulker	\$92 - \$125	A/C, Bar, Beachfront, Laundry, Refrigerator, Restaurant, Room Service, Wi-Fi



# HOTELS BY DISTRICT

## Cayes Offshore

NAME	PHONE	ADDRESS	PRICE	AMENITIES
Blackbird Caye Resort	1 866 909 7333	Turneffe Island	\$504 - \$766	A/C, Airport Transport, Bar, Beachfront, Breakfast, Pet-Friendly, Pool, Restaurant, Wi-Fi
Blue Marlin Beach Resort	1 800 798 1558	South Water Caye	\$247 - \$313	A/C, Airport Transport, Babysitting, Bar, Beachfront, Kid-Friendly, Minibar, Non-Smoking, Parking, Restaurant, Room Service, Wi-Fi
Coco Plum Island Resort	1 800 763 7360	Coco Plum Caye	\$728 - \$991	A/C, Adults Only, Airport Transport, Bar, Non-Smoking, Refrigerator, Restaurant, Wi-Fi
St. George's Caye Resort	1 800 813 8498	St. George's Caye	\$350 - \$443	A/C, Airport Transport, Bar, Beachfront, Breakfast, Non-Smoking, Pool, Restaurant, Spa, Wi-Fi
Tobacco Caye Lodge	+501 520 5033	Tobacco Caye	\$80	Bar, Beachfront, Restaurant

# HOTELS BY DISTRICT

## Stann Creek

NAME	PHONE	ADDRESS	PRICE	AMENITIES
Bonefish Hotel	+501 522 2243	15 Mahogany Street, Dangriga	\$82 - \$84	A/C, Laundry, Non-Smoking, Refrigerator, Wi-Fi
Chabil Mar	1 866 417 2377	Placencia Road, Placencia	\$259 - \$521	A/C, Airport Transfer, Bar, Beachfront, Breakfast, Business Center, Hot Tub, Kid-Friendly, Kitchenette, Laundry, Non-Smoking, Parking, Pool, Restaurant, Room Service, Wi-Fi
Green Parrot Beach Houses	+734 667 2537	Maya Beach Road, Placencia	\$145 - \$195	Airport Transport, Bar, Beachfront, Kitchenette, Parking, Pet-Friendly, Restaurant, Room Service, Wi-Fi
Hopkins Bay Resort	+305 433 8394	North Road, Hopkins	\$131 - \$533	A/C, Bar, Beachfront, Kid-Friendly, Kitchenette, Laundry, Parking, Pool, Restaurant, Wi-Fi
Jungle Jeanie's by the Sea	+501 523 7047	Hopkins	\$55 - \$120	Bar, Beachfront, Parking, Restaurant, Wi-Fi
Maya Beach Hotel	+501 267 4718	Maya Beach, Placencia	\$99 - \$210	A/C, Bar, Kitchenette, Non-Smoking, Parking, Pool, Refrigerator, Restaurant, Wi-Fi
Seaspray Hotel	+501 523 3148	Placencia	\$25 - \$60	A/C, Bar, Beachfront, Kitchenette, Non-Smoking, Parking, Restaurant, Wi-Fi
Singing Sands Inn	+501 533 3022	30 Maya Beach Road, Placencia	\$106 - \$160	Airport Transport, Bar, Beachfront, Non-Smoking, Parking, Pool, Restaurant
Villa Margarita	+786 472 9664	Sitee River Road, Hopkins	\$195 - \$273	A/C, Airport Transport, Bar, Beachfront, Hot Tub, Kid-Friendly, Kitchenette, Laundry, Minibar, Non-Smoking, Parking, Pool, Restaurant, Spa, Wi-Fi



# RESTAURANTS BY DISTRICT

## San Pedro

NAME	CUISINE	PHONE	ADDRESS
Ammore' Pasta	Italian	+501 634 5641	445 Coconut Drive
Blue Water Grill	Caribbean	+501 226 3347	Sunbreeze Hotel
Caliente Restaurant	Mexican	+501 226 2170	Barrier Reef Drive
El Divino	Caribbean	+501 226 3890	Banana Beach Resort
El Fagon	Caribbean	+501 673 2121	Trigger Fish Street
El Patio	Local	+501 226 3898	Reef Drive/Black Coral Street
Elvi's Kitchen	Local	+501 226 2404	Pescador Drive
Frenchy's	French	+501 610 3764	Coconut Drive
Hidden Treasure	Caribbean	+501 226 4111	2715 Flamboyant Drive
Hungry Grouper	Seafood	+501 650 6278	Black Coral Street
Izzy's Smoothies	Juice Bar	+501 674 0233	Pescador Drive/Caribena Street
Jyoto	Japanese	+501 600 5458	Mahogany Bay
Melt Café	American	+501 226 6358	Boca Del Rio Beachfront
My Secret Deli	Local	+501 226 3223	Caribena Street
O Restaurant	Central American	+501 226 4249	Las Terrazas Resort
Palapa Bar and Grill	American	+501 226 3111	Wet Willies Pier
Pepperoni's Pizza	Pizza	+501 226 4515	Coconut Drive
Pier 366	Local	+501 226 2565	Banyan Bay Resort
Stella's Sunset	Wine Bar	+501 602 6574	Tres Cocos
Taco Shack	Local	+501 651 3181	Coconut Drive

# RESTAURANTS BY DISTRICT

## Belize District

NAME	CUISINE	PHONE	ADDRESS
Big Daddy's	Local/Buffer	+501 227 0932	Commercial Center
Chon Saan Palace	Chinese	+501 223 3008	1 Kelly Street
Dit's Saloon	Creole	+501 227 3330	50 King Street
Harbour View	Seafood	+501 223 6420	Fort Street
The Ice Cream Shoppe	Dessert	+501 223 1965	17 Eve Street
Macy's Café	Local	+501 227 3419	18 Bishop Street
Nerries	Local	+501 223 4028	Queen and Daly Streets
Riverside Tavern	American	+501 223 5640	2 Mapp Street
Sugarfix Bakery	Bakery	+501 223 7640	8 Heusner Crescent
Sumathi	Indian	+501 223 1172	190 Newtown Barracks Road
The Smoky Mermaid	Seafood	+501 223 4759	13 Cork Street
The Sahara Grill	Middle Eastern	+501 203 3031	1st Floor Vista Building, Philip Goldson Highway
Wet Lizard	American	+501 223 2664	1 Fort Street



# RESTAURANTS BY DISTRICT

## Caye Caulker

NAME	CUISINE	PHONE	ADDRESS
Amor y Café	American	+501 610 2397	Playa Asunción
Au French Corner	Dessert	+501 670 4870	Avenida Hicaco
Bondi Bar & Bistro	Mexican	+501 226 0610	Avenida Hicaco
Glenda's Café	Local	+501 226 0148	Back Street
Habaneros Restaurant	Seafood	+501 226 0487	Playa Asunción
Ice and Beans	Coffee Shop	+501 626 9818	10 N. Front Street
Il Pellicano	Italian	+501 226 0600	Pasero Street
Maggie's Sunset Kitchen	Local	+501 633 4530	Linds Coral Street
Wish Willy's	Seafood	—	40 Park Street

## Cayo

NAME	CUISINE	PHONE	ADDRESS
Caladium Restaurant	Local	+501 822 2754	Market Square, Belmopan
Cenaida's	Local	+501 631 2526	16 Bullet Tree Road
Corkers	American	+501 822 0400	Hibiscus Plaza
Erva's	Local	+501 824 2821	4 Far West Street
The French Bakery	Bakery	+501 804 0054	Joseph Andrew Drive
The Ice Cream Shoppe	Dessert	+501 634 6160	24 West Street
Pasquale's Pizzeria	Italian	+501 822 4663	Forest Drive/Slim Lane
Roots Wraps & Smoothies	Vegetarian	+501 666 2889	14 Burns Avenue, 2nd Floor
Scotchies	Jamaican	+501 832 2203	7753 Hummingbird Highway

# RESTAURANTS BY DISTRICT

## Corozal

NAME	CUISINE	PHONE	ADDRESS
Blue Iguana	American	+501 622 1471	Finca Solana
Cactus Plaza	Mexican	+501 422 0394	Corozal Town, 6 6th Street South
June's Kitchen	Local	+501 422 2559	3rd Street South
Patty's Bistro	Local	+501 402 0174	4th Avenue
Tony's	Local	+501 422 2055	Corozal Town, South End
Venky's Kabob Corner	Indian	+501 402 0536	5th Street South

## Orange Walk

NAME	CUISINE	PHONE	ADDRESS
Cocina Sabor	Local	+501 322 3482	Corozal Road
The Dinner House Restaurant	Local	+501 302 1039	Otro Benque Road
Hong Kong Restaurant	Chinese	+501 322 2406	Corozal Road
Ice Break	Dessert	+501 322 0602	Park Street
Nahil Mayab Restaurant & Patio	Local	+501 322 0831	Guadalupe Street
Western Dairies	Dessert	+501 322 0112	Sapodilla Street



# RESTAURANTS BY DISTRICT

## Stann Creek

NAME	CUISINE	PHONE	ADDRESS
Bahay Fiesta	Filipino	+501 664 7000	90 Sittee Point, Hopkins
Brewed Awakenings	Coffee Shop	+501 523 3312	Main Street, Placencia
Dawn's Grill 'n Go	Local	+501 523 4079	Main Street, Placencia
De Tatch	Local	+501 502 3385	Beachfront, Placencia
Innie's Restaurant	Local	+501 503 7333	191 South, Hopkins
La Dolce Vita	Italian	+501 523 3115	Placencia Road
Mimi's Ice Cream Café	Dessert	+501 615 2922	34 Havana Street, Dangriga
Omar's Creole Club	Seafood	+501 523 4094	Main Street, Placencia
The Pickled Parrot	American	+501 636 7068	Lot 1956, Placencia
Rumfish & Vino	Central American	+501 523 3293	Main Street, Placencia
Tiger Beach Club	Indian	+501 628 1250	Placencia Road

## Toledo

NAME	CUISINE	PHONE	ADDRESS
Asha's Culture Kitchen	Seafood	+501 722 2724	74 Front Street, Punta Gorda
Grace's Restaurant	Local	+501 702 2414	21 Main Street, Punta Gorda
Norvilly's Restaurant	Local	+501 622 2598	Southern Highway, Big Falls
A Piece of Chicken	Pub	+501 665 2695	1050 Pelican Street
The Snack Shack	Breakfast	+501 620 3499	Main Street, Punta Gorda

# EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

COUNTRY	ADDRESS	PHONE
Brazil	2 Floral Park Avenue, P.O. Box 548, Belmopan	+501 822 0460
Canada	80 Princess Margaret Drive, P.O. Box 610, Belize City	+501 223 1060
Costa Rica	Mountain View Executive Apartment 2, Belmopan	+501 822 1582
France	109 New Road, P.O. Box 976, Belize City	+501 223 0399
Germany	57 Southern Foreshore, Belize City	+501 822 2350
Greece	1416 Unity Boulevard, Belmopan	+501 822 0351
Honduras	22 Gabourel Lane, P.O. Box 285, Belize City	+501 224 5889
Mexico	3 North Ring Road, P.O. Box 388, Belmopan	+501 822 0406
Nicaragua	50 Vernon Street, P.O. Box 915, Belize City	+501 636 7068
Poland	35 New Road, P.O. Box 1846, Belize City	+501 223 0088
Sweden	18 Roseapple Street, Belmopan	+501 822 2387
Switzerland	83 North Front Street, Belize City	+501 223 5505
Taiwan	20 North Park Street, Belize City	+501 227 8744
Turkey	42 Cleghorn Street, Belize City	+501 224 4158
United Kingdom	N. Ring Road/Melhado Parade, P.O. Box 91, Belmopan	+501 822 2146
United States	Floral Park Road, Belmopan	+501 822 4011
Venezuela	17 Orchid Garden Street, P.O. Box 49, Belmopan	+501 822 2384



# SAFETY



## Crime

Tourists are targets for criminals in any country. Most criminal acts in Belize are thefts or burglaries, but gang-related crimes in Belize City drive up the country's national homicide rates. Travelers should remain mostly unaffected by such localized criminal acts. To prevent incidents of petty theft, travelers should always maintain awareness of their belongings and refrain from flashing money or expensive belongings in crowded public spaces.

## Violence

Belize is not normally subject to terrorist threat, and is classified as a low-risk country. Certain areas of Belize City are particularly prone to gang activity and gun violence, so avoid George Street and Kraal Road for this reason.

## Driving

Although Belize posts official speed limits of 55 mph on highways and 25 mph on most other roadways, local drivers rarely adhere to them. Weather during the rainy season can exacerbate poor road conditions, so drivers should take additional care on the road after storms. Many Belizean roads feature speed bumps or "sleeping policemen," which may or may not be marked by a corresponding sign.

At police checkpoints, officers do not need a reason to stop drivers. Anyone who is stopped should comply fully with the police, providing identification upon request.

However mundane, traffic accidents are a cause for concern in Belize. Due to poor driver training and less education on the risks of drinking and driving than in industrialized nations, car accidents are the leading cause of death in Belize, accounting for one-fourth of fatalities nationwide – a rate higher than that of homicide, AIDS, illness, or any natural causes. Just like at home, it's best to buckle up and look both ways before crossing the street to reduce the risk of injury from a collision.

Road conditions in Belize are inconsistent, with some tending towards a very poor state. Long stretches of highway are unlit, and more rural roads are unpaved. Stoplights are uncommon, and drivers share the same streets as buses, cyclists, pedestrians, and stray dogs. Roads are particularly dangerous during the rainy season and immediately after a storm. In all cases, drivers should remain defensive at all times and aware of their surroundings while maintaining maximum following distances from other cars.

# SAFETY



## Weather

The months of June through November are hurricane season in Belize. Stay apprised of any inclement weather developments by checking local media sources.

## Health

As with travel to any unfamiliar locale, the key to staying healthy in Belize is to be aware in advance of what dangers may arise and to take any necessary precautions against illness. Should you require any prescription medications while on a short visit to Belize, it is best to obtain them in your home country before arrival. Be sure to keep everything in its original packaging, and carry a current prescription for each medication in case of questioning when entering the country.

For the sake of convenience, travelers can also pack basic first aid supplies. Some suggested items:

- Antibiotics
- Antihistamines (for allergic reactions)
- Antibacterial cream
- Band-aids
- Painkillers
- Thermometer
- Insect repellent

- Sunblock
- Anti-itch ointment
- Aloe (for sunburn relief)

## Vaccines

The U.S. Department of State does not currently require that American travelers receive any particular vaccinations before leaving for Belize. However, the Center for Disease Control recommends that all travelers be up to date on their routine schedule of vaccinations, including measles/mumps/rubella (MMR), diphtheria/tetanus/pertussis, chicken pox, polio, and an annual flu shot. Additionally, they suggest that most travelers be vaccinated against hepatitis A and typhoid, which can be spread through contaminated food or water. Some travelers may also consider vaccines for hepatitis B, rabies, and malaria.

## Drinking Water

Tap water in Belize's major urban areas is usually safe to drink. In more rural areas, water may need to be boiled or sanitized first. However, most hotels can provide guests with drinkable water upon request.



# SAFETY



## Insects

Sandflies (also known as sand gnats or sand fleas) are a common annoyance throughout the country, but do not normally pose any serious risks. However, bites from infected sandflies may result in leishmaniasis, which manifests in swollen glands and skin lesions that can become infected, take weeks to heal, and leave scarring. The best way to prevent leishmaniasis is to avoid forests, mangrove swamps, and outdoor activities after the sun has set. Of course, this may not always be possible. In such cases, the greatest safeguard is frequent applications of an effective insect repellent containing DEET, picaridin, or oil of lemon eucalyptus.

Mosquitoes are a common pest in Belize, with the potential to transmit various illnesses. Prevention is the best protection against such diseases, and travelers should always have insect repellent on hand, particularly after sundown or in wet, marshy areas.

## Illnesses

Belize's otherwise pleasant tropical climate unfortunately lends itself to the propagation of certain mosquito-borne illnesses. Zika has recently

begun receiving worldwide attention for the threat it presents to pregnant women, who may give birth to children with birth defects if infected during the gestation period. Because there is no vaccine for Zika, pregnant women should avoid traveling to Belize. Other travelers who contract Zika may not demonstrate symptoms of illness, although these can present as mild flu-like symptoms for a period up to one week. However, all travelers should keep exposed skin covered when possible and use an appropriate insect repellent. Zika can also be transmitted by sexual contact, so travelers should always be sure to use condoms or refrain from intercourse to avoid passing on the disease.

Visitors with stomachs unaccustomed to Belize's usually harmless everyday bacteria may suffer from "traveler's diarrhea." To avoid such affliction, travelers should avoid drinking tap water without first boiling or filtering it, cook or peel all fresh produce, ensure that all dairy products use only pasteurized milk, and be careful when consuming street food. Mild cases of diarrhea can be treated by consuming sufficient fluids, salt, and sugar, but more serious cases may call for antibiotics or medical attention.

# SAFETY



## Medical Care

Belize's national healthcare system includes both public clinics and private practice physicians, the latter of which can be seen quite cheaply compared to more developed countries. While Belize does not offer more advanced medical care, minor ailments can easily be handled by local doctors. A private doctor visit will cost around \$15-20 USD, while a public hospital stay will cost anywhere from \$20-\$50 per day. For more serious medical conditions, many Belizeans opt to go abroad to Guatemala or Mexico for non-emergency treatment.

## Insurance

While some medical insurance plans provide overseas coverage within the standard package, many plans do not. Before leaving your home country, determine what kind of coverage your existing insurance offers, if any. Supplemental insurance plans may be of some interest for those wishing to have costs covered in case of emergency medical evacuation. U.S. Medicare does not apply overseas, and most health providers in Belize may only accept cash payments.

## Pharmacies

Many over-the-counter medications are imported to Belize from North America or Europe, so they are readily accessible at a number of pharmacies found in major cities. However, due to import taxes, the same medications will be around 25% more expensive in Belize than in their country of manufacture. To obtain prescription medication, it is best to make an appointment with a local doctor first.

## Dentistry

Dental work is significantly cheaper in Belize than in North American or European countries. To ensure the highest standards of oral care, seek out dentists who have been recommended by others and ensure that their educational history includes training from a reputable institution.



# HOSPITALS

A number of public hospitals and treatment centers in Belize offer both emergency and non-emergency medical services. Emergency room treatment will be offered to all those arriving in dire circumstances, regardless of ability to pay. Be aware, however, the medical care in Belize is relatively more expensive than in neighboring Central American/Caribbean countries, with an overnight stay in a private clinic costing around \$500 USD.

A brief directory of select hospitals is provided here for your convenience.

COUNTRY	PHONE	ADDRESS/DETAILS
Belize Medical Associates	+501 223 03030	5791 St. Thomas Street, Kings Park, Belize City
Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital	+501 223 1548	Princess Margaret Drive, Belize City
Northern Regional Hospital	+501 322 1468	Holy Trinity Street, Orange Walk
Punta Gorda Hospital	+501 722 2026	Main Street, Punta Gorda
San Ignacio Hospital	+501 824 2066	Bullet Tree Road, Cayo
San Pedro Polyclinic II	+501 226 2918	San Pedro Town, Ambergris Caye
Southern Regional Hospital	+501 522 3836	Dangriga
Western Regional Hospital	+501 822 2264	Florina Avenue, Belmopan
Alcoholicos Anonimos San Pedro	+501 627 1585	Various, Call for Details
Alcoholicos Anonimos Corozal	+501 620 2251	Various, Call for Details
Alcoholicos Anonimos Belize City	+501 601 7839	Phoenix Group
Alcoholicos Anonimos Belize City	+501 636 6261	Grupo Primero de Julio
Alcoholicos Anonimos Belize City	+501 626 7121	Grupo Una Luz en el Camino - Juntas en Español
Alcoholicos Anonimos Belize City	+501 601 7839	The Group At Divine Mercy Church - English Meetings
Alcoholicos Anonimos Placencia	+501 623 4633	Placencia Group, English Meetings
Alcoholicos Anonimos Orange Walk	+501 633 1031	Grupo Vivir en Libertad- Juntas en Español
Alcoholicos Anonimos Orange Walk	+501 626 3225	New Horizon Group - Bilingual Meetings
Alcoholicos Anonimos San Ignacio & Santa Elena	+501 620 1811	Various, Call for Details

# EMERGENCY NUMBERS

In case of serious medical emergencies, threats of violence, knowledge of an imminent crime, crimes in progress, or other situations requiring urgent attention, call **911** to reach the Belize Police Department.

The service is available 24 hours a day. Non-urgent concerns should be relayed to the nearest police station, located in Belize City, Belmopan, Benque Viejo, Corozal, Dangriga, Orange Walk, Placencia, Punta Gorda, San Ignacio, San Pedro, and a select few smaller villages.

Crime Stoppers Belize, a nonprofit organization run by Rotary International, is another option to relay information about any potential or witnessed crimes. Calls to their tip line at **0-800-922-8477** remain anonymous.



# WHY AMBERGRIS CAYE?



Belize is emerging as a premier destination for those desiring a unique vacation experience similar to that of Costa Rica, but closer to home and English-speaking. Belize's diverse geography, flora and fauna, spectacular reefs, comfortable climate, and intriguing Mayan culture make it a destination that appeals to many people seeking a reasonably priced lifestyle that also provides the major amenities they have come to expect. Belize is easy to reach – it is a bit more than a two-hour flight from major American cities such as Houston, Dallas, and Miami, thus readily accessible for most projected hottest markets for 2007.

There is only so much property available on the islands dotting the Caribbean Sea. For anyone who has always wanted to live on or near the Caribbean, Ambergris Caye offers the small island feel preferred by many of North Americans. The fact that English is the primary language and the Belize dollar is tied to the U.S. dollar provides a margin of comfort to many potential expats. Given the expanding tourism industry and the Belizean government's continued commitment to tourism, investment in Belize, a stable democratic country, presents an opportunity to buy into a strong real estate market that will continue expanding far into the future.

Why move to the island of Ambergris Caye, Belize? In June of 2008, Islands Magazine selected Ambergris Caye as one of their top 10 favorite islands to live on. Likewise, in the January 2007 CNN Money issue, they listed "hot" locations where Americans would be buying second homes overseas during the next year. Belize was listed as one of the six projected hottest markets for 2007. There is only so much property available on the islands dotting the Caribbean Sea. For anyone who has always wanted to live on or near the Caribbean, Ambergris Caye offers the small island feel preferred by many of today's retirees and vacationers who are tired of living in major cities and vacationing at mega resorts. There are many diverse locations and geographies within Belize, but Ambergris Caye is the only one that combines the advantages of being on a Caribbean island within site of the barrier reef, with many amenities/activities that one would expect from a larger town.

# WHY AMBERGRIS CAYE?



Although primarily a laid-back beach town, you can:

- Enjoy a mocha latte at the local outdoor hangout
- Buy a nice bottle of wine in one of several specialty liquor/wine shops
- Surf the internet on a high speed DSL line
- Choose from a variety of excellent and diverse restaurants
- Take a yoga or Pilates class on the beach
- Treat oneself to a massage or a luxurious spa treatment

When compared to other similar Caribbean islands, the prices for properties on Ambergris Caye, and in San Pedro Town, are still relatively inexpensive. As demonstrated by the two articles referred to previously, since the early 2000s this well kept secret has been “discovered” and Ambergris Caye has become an increasingly popular location for North American expats to live and invest. Despite the 2008 mortgage crisis in the U.S., properties under \$400K have continued to sell briskly in Ambergris Caye and San Pedro Town at a time when the sale of high end real estate has cooled. For those who want to live the Caribbean-island lifestyle while remaining close to the activity of a town center, living in or near San Pedro Town is the perfect solution. .

There are few remaining properties available for development near the town. Baymen Garden fills a unique market niche, providing a reasonably priced modern community with exceptional amenities, and that is within walking distance of downtown San Pedro. There is a window of opportunity to purchase before prices for real estate escalates again. Undeveloped beach front property in San Pedro in particular has become scarce, consistently putting pricing pressure not only on the beach properties, but also the off-beach properties.

In addition to the general beauty and lifestyle advantages of living in San Pedro Town, the Belizean government has also developed a program to attract qualified expats from other countries. Their unique program facilitates the transition for people wanting to move to Belize and take an early retirement. This Qualified Retirement Program (QRP) provides many benefits to expats who are interested in moving to Belize, even if only for a few months a year.



# ENJOY RETIREMENT IN BELIZE



## Residency and Retirement

The Belizean government implemented their Qualified Retirement Person (QRP) Program to encourage expatriates to make Belize their permanent home.

Anyone who has been approved for QRP status is entitled, upon first arriving in Belize, to import their personal possessions and an approved means of transportation without being subject to import duties and taxes.

A QRP will also be exempted from all taxes and duties on any income originating from sources outside of Belize, whether that income is earned through work or outside investments.

## Residency Requirements

The usual conditions for permanent residency in Belize require applicants to prove their continuous legal residence within the country for a period of one full year without interruption.

However, this requirement is waived for two types of people: retirees (age 45 or older) able to prove a regular source of at least \$2,000 USD in monthly income, and skilled professionals and investors with at least \$24,000 USD available to invest. These groups are entitled to apply for permanent residency immediately upon arrival, with only one month in Belize required out of every calendar year to uphold the conditions of residency.

All applications must be made at immigration headquarters in Belmopan, with a 2-3 month processing period to follow, during which time applicants should hold a current visa and secure a “temporary self-employment” work permit or proof of financial independence/reliable pension for retirees.

Qualified applicants for the QRP program must satisfy the following conditions:

- Be 45 years of age or older, or be the spouse or dependents under age 18 (under age 23 if still enrolled in university) of someone who meets the age cutoff
- Be a current citizen or permanent legal resident of the United States, Canada, or the United Kingdom.

# ENJOY RETIREMENT IN BELIZE



## Provide identifying documents

- Birth certificate.
- Marriage certificate, if applicable.
- Police record from your most recent place of residence issued within a month prior to the application, verifying the absence of a criminal record.
- Sealed, notarized copy of every passport page, including blank pages.
- Proof of income (bank or pension statement) with evidence of \$2,000 monthly income or \$24,000 in hard assets.
- Medical certificate of good health; must declare HIV-negative status.
- Eight passport-sized color photos (four facing forward, four in profile) of the applicant and any dependents claimed.
- Non-refundable \$100 application; \$500 “program fee” PLUS \$350 for each dependent.

## Advantages of the QRP

You pay no Belizean tax on your income, whether earned or passive, so you won’t be taxed twice on money you’re bringing into the country. This means you can still work, as long as you work from Belize without also generating income within the country.

Today, with new telephone and internet technology, it’s easy for “retirees” to direct their foreign business activities and operations from within Belize and still maintain tax-free status.

- As a QRP, you can import your household goods tax-free up to a total exemption amount of \$15K.
- You can also bring in a vehicle tax-free, which can be a car, light aircraft, or boat. In fact, every five years you can import a new vehicle tax-free as long as you sell the original vehicle outside of Belize.
- In many countries, you have to make a significant financial commitment in order to qualify for a program that provides financial incentives for living in the country. In Belize, you must simply prove a monthly income of at least \$2K.
- While as a QRP you have permanent residency in Belize, for purposes related to international financial services, you’re considered a non-resident. That means that you can take advantage of all the offshore banking advantages of Belize while living there “onshore.”



# WHY ECI DEVELOPMENT?



ECI accelerates the sales pace, retail price, and Return on Investment (ROI) to shareholders by building resort communities with the infrastructure and amenities expected by the North American consumer. ECI and its partners have invested over \$26M to date in acquisitions, infrastructure, construction, amenities, and services. ECI showcases tangible examples and finished products. The differential between hard cost and actual sales prices of land with infrastructure is significant, thus providing a strong ROI to shareholders..

ECI is a diversified investment, both geographically and by business type. Gran Pacifica Phase I showcases 45 completed residences with many more under construction. Current facilities include: golf course, clubhouse, condominiums, bar, restaurant, and swimming pool. Existing facilities in Belize include: beachfront resort with 20 suites, gardens resort with 54 condominiums, beach bar, two restaurants, fitness club, tennis court, and two swimming pools. The Costa Rica business unit is passing through environmental permitting. Acquisitions of assets in the tropical highlands of Ecuador and Argentina are being actively pursued.

Ownership includes a telecommunication and cable TV provider, water, sewerage, rental management, and security companies.

A powerful A-team is in place and has proved its skill over the last 20 years, by dealing effectively with the many challenges facing projects of this scale. ECI's CEO, President, and COO are development professionals with a combined experience of over 70 years in the industry. In addition to specific developmental talent, the ECI team includes a former White House policy advisor and Ambassador to the region, the architect of three Marriott hotels and the Four Seasons in Costa Rica, the land planning firm that was Walt Disney's choice for master planning when looking to build a town, and a cadre of influential Latin Americans.

# WHY ECI DEVELOPMENT?



Desirability drives demand, and demand drives price. ECI builds traditional neighborhoods like the community built by the Walt Disney Celebration, outside Orlando FL, and those in WaterColor, Kentlands, and Rosemary Beach. Master planning along these principles produces yields that are three to five times higher than traditional planning concepts, while delivering the charm of a village setting to consumers. Boomers want services, infrastructure, amenities, and community. ECI is one of a select few companies delivering this in Latin America. By differentiating ourselves as a leader in quality community layout, we have created a final product that is highly desirable and attractive to the vast Baby Boomer market.

ECI's market is large and growing. Currently, 613,000 U.S. retirees live overseas. Many more North Americans are considering living or owning property in Latin America, a number that today exceeds 4,500,000. Baby Boomer retirement will largely drive this market over the next 20 years, and the trend is only in its infancy. Bank financing for clients buying in ECI communities is available. This is rare in the region. Right now an average of 11,500 Baby Boomers retire each day. As more retirees look to the tropics for an affordable, enhanced retirement lifestyle, phenomenal growth in these already large numbers is likely to occur.



# THANK YOU!



Thanks for reading!  
We look forward to  
seeing you in Belize.

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