

Belize



Location

Belize is located in the Northern Hemisphere, within Central America.

Belize is bounded on the North by Mexico, South and West by Guatemala, and the beautiful Caribbean Sea washes its 174 mile coastline to the East.

Geographically we're located between 15° 52' 9" and 18° 29' 55" North Latitude, and 87° 28" and 89° 13' 67" West Longitude with an area of 8,866 sq. miles including 266 sq. miles of islands.

History

Numerous ruins indicate that for hundreds of years Belize was heavily populated by around one million Maya, whose relatively advanced civilization reached its height between AD. 250 and 900. Today a small population still exists in Belize, predominantly in Toledo, the southern-most district.

The first reference to European settlement in the colony was in 1638. British logwood cutters, known as the Baymen, were the first Europeans to settle in the area. The Baymen were dependent on slave labor for their logwood operations. Logwood was used to produce purple and red dyes.

These early settlements were subjected to attacks from neighboring Spanish settlements for the next 150 years. It was not until 1763 that Spain, in the Treaty of Paris, allowed British settlers to engage in the logwood industry. But Spanish attacks continued until a decisive victory was won by settlers, with British naval support, in the Battle of St. George's Caye in 1798. After that, British control over the settlement gradually increased.

Constitutional advances came in 1834 with the emancipation of slaves. In 1871 British Honduras was formally declared a British Colony and the Crown Colony System of Government implemented.

In 1954 came the introduction of Universal Adult Suffrage and an elected majority in the legislature. The Ministerial System was adopted in 1961, leading to Self Government in 1964. In 1973 Belize changed its name from British Honduras to Belize.

Belize achieved full independence on September 21, 1981. Belize is now a member of the Commonwealth, the United Nations, OAS and the Association of Caribbean States.

Culture

Belize is a country of various cultures, languages, and ethnic groups. Approximately 270,000 people in Belize consist of Creole, Garifuna, Mestizo, Spanish, Maya, English, Mennonite, Lebanese, Chinese, and East Indian. Due to racial harmony and religious tolerance, all of these different elements have mixed and blended successfully, and Belize has gained a widespread reputation for its friendly peoples.

One of the most prominent ethnic groups are the Creoles, which formed 30% of the population in 2001. Creoles are descendants of the intermingling of the early British settlers with African slaves. More than 40% of the population is Mestizo. They are descendants of mixed blood Mexicans and Yucatec Mayans who fled from the Yucatan in the mid 1800's. Another 6.6% of Belize's population are the Garifuna. The Garifuna have their own language and culture. The Yucatec, Mopan, and Kekchi are three Amerindian groups which also make up Belize's population. The Chinese, with a population of 6,000 have made distinct communities, as well as the East Indians and the Mennonites.

English remains the most common language spoken followed closely by Creole, but Spanish is becoming more widely spoken. The Garifuna, Mayas, and Mennonites each speak their own language.

Economy

The economical development of Belize depends mainly on agriculture and tourism. The trade in agricultural industry is a major factor of progress of the economy in Belize. There is huge demand of bananas, citrus, cocoa, sugarcane, lobster and fish in the present day scenario. The farmers have even started cultivation of shrimp, tilapia fish and other staple fruits like papayas and cashews. The discovery of petroleum deposits in the Cayo District and in the Toledo District has opened venues for mining and manufacturing capabilities in Belize.

Language Description

English is the official language of Belize, although Spanish, Creole, Garifuna and Mayan are widely spoken throughout the country.

Passport Requirements

A valid passport is necessary for entry into Belize. A 30 day visitors permit will be issued to you upon arrival. Citizens of the British Commonwealth (India excepted), the United States, Canada, Mexico, Costa Rica, and the European community do not require visas for travel to Belize. All other citizens should contact the nearest Belizean Consulate or embassy for more information.

Departure Tax - A US\$35.00 departure tax (cash) per person is required when leaving the Belize Int'l Airport. Visitors leaving by the northern border with Mexico or the western border with Guatemala pay US\$ 18.75 in US or Belizean currency.

Banks

Banks are open Monday-Thursday 8 am – 1 pm; Friday 8 am – 4:30 pm. There are four commercial banks. All four cash travelers checks, give cash advances on Visa or Master cards and have wire transfer services: *Belize Bank, First Caribbean International Bank, Atlantic Bank*, and the Canadian-based, *Bank of Nova Scotia*.

Currency

The Belize Dollar (BZ\$) has a fixed rate of exchange of BZ \$2 to US \$1. Most hotels, resorts, restaurants, and tour operators will accept U.S. currency, traveler's checks, or credit cards. When using your credit cards in Belize, most establishments will add a 5% service charge to your bill. Always make sure that you understand which dollar rate is being quoted. Is it Belize Dollars or U.S. Dollars?

What to Wear

Climate is subtropical with annual average temperature of 80 degrees F. Dress accordingly. You'll mostly wear casual, tropical weight clothing, jeans, shorts and short-sleeved shirts or t-shirts.

Electricity

Electricity is the same as in the United States, 120volts 60 Hz single phase.

Getting Around Belize

Rental Cars, Busses, Boats, Planes and Taxis which are available 24hrs

For more information on Belize visit our website at www.travelbelize.org