

Belize 2019

Travel Information Packet



Belize Facts

CAPITAL: Belmopan

CURRENCY: Belize dollar

PRIME MINISTER: Dean Barrow

QUEEN: Elizabeth II

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE(s): English

GOVERNMENT: Parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy

POPULATION: 367,000



Belize is a democracy and constitutional monarchy under a parliamentary system. Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain is the head of state of Belize. Belmopan is the political capital, while Belize City is the largest city. Belize is located in Central America, bordered to the north by Mexico, to the south and west by Guatemala and to the east by the Caribbean Sea.

Money: Belize Dollar

The Belize Dollar is the currency of Belize. Visitors are free to use US dollars in Belize. Be careful to note whether the price you are being quoted is in American dollar or in Belize dollar as most restaurants, hotels and stores quote in American dollar.



ONE UNITED STATES DOLLAR IS EQUIVALENT TO ROUGHLY 2 BELIZE DOLLARS.

\$1 USD IS ROUGHLY 2 BELIZE DOLLARS

\$5 USD IS ROUGHLY 10 BELIZE DOLLARS

\$10 USD ROUGHLY 20 BELIZE DOLLARS

\$20 USD IS ROUGHLY 40 BELIZE DOLLARS

History

The first recorded history of Belize was by the Ancient Mayas around 1500 B.C.E. Belize was once a major part of the Mayan Empire in addition to the commonly known Mayan cities in Mexico and Tikal, Guatemala. Belize consisted of major rivers and coastal trade routes that connected many cities used for trading and ceremonial purposes in Mexico and Guatemala. Caracol, a Maya ruin located in Western Belize is a significant ceremonial city that in A.D. 562, defeated Tikal in battle. Many other sites around Belize including Xunantunich and Lamanai revealed also to be trading and ceremonial points of interests with ruins and artifacts. The Mayas were talented architects, building massive pyramids, temples and palaces. They even had their own writing and calendar. At the peak of the Mayan development, it is estimated that as many as two million Maya may have inhabited in the region that we know today as Belize. Around 900 A.D., the Mayan civilization took a rapid decline possibly due to famine, warfare and deforestation.

In 1502, Christopher Columbus sailed past Belize coast, but never anchored or set foot on shore due to the confrontation of the remaining Maya. He did however name the Bay of Honduras. The Spanish led various attacks and attempts to gain the territory of Belize, but were unsuccessful.

In the mid-1600s, the first European settlement was established along the coast of Belize. The British were loggers in search of mahogany to use for shipbuilding and other types of wood. The Loggers were also known as “Baymen” after the Bay of Honduras. They remained both faithful British while seeking settlement on the new found land.

Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, the Spanish continued to launch attacks on the Baymen settlements in Belize attempting to gain control, once again. The early settlements were destroyed, but once the Spanish fled, the Baymen would return. As the Spanish increased their attacks with greater intensity and force, the Baymen looked to Britain for support and assistance. In 1763, Britain and Spanish signed the Treaty of Paris, granting Britain official rights to log, but Spain maintained sovereignty.

Spain followed their attacks on the Belizean settlement until 1798 when the Baymen won a grand military victory of a large Spanish fleet off the shores of St. George's Caye. This battle specifically ended all Spanish involvement and it

In 1862, Belize was declared as the colony of *British Honduras*. The British discouraged agriculture as the forests were used for hardwood and dye-wood. The country remained unexplored and undeveloped. Belize was completely dependent of its mother country of Britain.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Britain used British Honduras as a means of slave labor. African slaves came to work on the land and black Caribs, also known as Garífunas, migrated from the bay islands of Honduras. The Garífunas established their own villages and language on the southern coast. The Abolition Act of 1833 abolished slavery throughout the entire British Empire.

In 1973, the country's name was official changed to Belize and on September 21, 1981, Belize gained its true independence. It is possible the name Belize originated from the Mayan word *belix* meaning "muddy water" or *belikin*, "land facing the sea". Belize is Central America's newest nation.

In the election of 1998, the People's United Party (PUP) won the majority of the seats on the House of Representatives and Said Musa became Prime Minister.

Government

The Politics of Belize takes place in a framework of a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy, whereby Queen Elizabeth II as the head of state and is represented by the Governor-General. The Prime Minister is Dean Oliver Barrow who was sworn in February 8, 2008. He is the leader of the United Democratic Party (UDP). The Prime Minister and cabinet have executive power. Legislative power is vested in both the government and parliament.



Since 1974 the country's politics have been primarily dominated by Barrow's center-right United Democratic Party as well as the center-left People's United Party. The legal system of Belize is modelled on the common law of England, but is undergoing evolution following the Caribbean Community heads of government decision in 2001 determining that the region should transfer from the UK's Judicial Committee of the Privy Council to the Caribbean

Court of Justice. Belize is a participating member within multiple international organizations such as the United Nations, Commonwealth of Nations, and the World Trade Organization. Most diplomatic embassies, including the United States, are located in the capital city of Belmopan. The original capital was Belize City, however in 1961 a hurricane destroyed the city and a new capital was built in Belmopan; although Belize City remains the country's most populous city and the commercial and cultural center.

The primary military force of Belize is the Belize Defense Force (BDF) which is responsible for maintaining sovereignty. The BDF, the Belize National Coast Guard, and the Immigration Department constitute a department of the Ministry of Defense and Immigration. As of 2012, the Belizean defense sector was budgeted \$17 million, accounting for 1.08% of the country's gross domestic product.

Economy

Belize's small, private enterprising economy is mostly rooted in agriculture and other agro-based industry. Sugar remains the primary crop - accounting for nearly 50% of all exports – while the banana industry remains the largest employer within the economy. Merchandising and tourism also contribute substantially to the Belizean economy, and a recent uptick in the construction industry may continue to grow. Belize is known to contain a number of economically significant minerals, but none in large enough quantities to warrant mining operations.



The government currently faces important challenges in economic stability due to inefficiencies in tax collection as well as an inability to reign in government spending. Belize has five major commercial banks; and since the 1940s a complex system of credit unions has acted as a resource for economic development within the country.

In terms of tourism, Belize is approaching an important crossroads. Belize is a beautiful tourist destination; its Central American climate offers a warm getaway and beautiful beach destinations, and a unique culture provides new learning experience. Belize's natural attractions are noteworthy for many outdoor activities. The Belize Barrier Reef offers a wealth of options for scuba diving, snorkeling, and fishing. Also, over 450 offshore Cays provide a myriad of opportunities for island and jungle adventures and a chance to experience the flora and fauna. Additionally, Belize is home to the largest cave system in Central America. In response to this critical demand, Belize has made tourism its second development priority after agriculture.



However, also because of its location, Belize is growing in notoriety on the global stage for attracting drug traffickers and money launderers. The reason for this is a

level of anonymity and privacy among the 5 commercial banks, as well as a loophole which allows nonresidents to establish an offshore account. Additionally, the Belizean currency is pegged to the American dollar, making for a powerful currency conversion.

Culture

Demographics

The population of Belize is estimated to be 367,000 as of 2016. In total, the fertility rate for woman was measured to be 3.6 children in 2009. Also in that year the birth rate was recorded to be 27.33 births/1,000 population and the death rate was recorded as 5.8 deaths/1,000 population. Since 1980, Belize has experienced drastic shifts in ethno-demographics due to large movements of two of the largest ethnic groups, Creole and Mestizo. The ratio between Creoles/Mestizo used to measure at 58/48, and is now 26/53. The reason for this is large migrations of Creoles to the United States and a rising birth rate and immigration rate from El Salvador among Mestizos.

Ethnic Groups

The Maya: Likely the oldest-native ethnic group to Belize, the Maya are thought to have inhabited the Yucatan region since the second Millennium BC. Today, there are three Maya groups: the Yucatec, the Mopan, and the Q'eqchi'. The Maya speak their own respective native languages and are typically also fluent in Spanish, English, and Belizean Kriol.

Creoles: Also known as the Kriols, they make up 21% of the Belizean population. Creoles are descendants of both slave owners and slaves brought to Belize to support the logging industry, and typically have heritage to West and Central Africa. Although historically the language of Kriol was only spoken by former slaves, the language has now become a key pillar to the identity of Belize and is spoken by about 45% of the population.

Mestizos: The Mestizo are a culture of mixed Spanish and Maya descent. They are the largest ethnic group in Belize and make up approximately one half of the

population. Mestizo culture places a heavy emphasis on faith, and their towns are centered on a main square with a Catholic Church that dominates social life. Their primary language is Spanish, but they are usually always fluent in English and Belizean Kriol as well.

German-Speaking Mennonites: Approximately 4% of the population of Belize consists of German-speaking farmers and craftsmen of German and Russian descent. These groups typically speak the German dialect of Plautdietsch and use Standard German for reading and writing the bible. They mostly emigrated from Mexico in the late 1950s and usually are fluent in Spanish as well.

World Health Organization Statistics - Belize

Statistics

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|---|----------|
| Total Population, (2016)..... | 367, 000 |
| Gross National Income per Capita (PPP international \$, 2013)..... | 8,160 |
| Life Expectancy at Birth M/F (years, 2016)..... | 68/73 |
| Probability of dying between 15 and 60 years m/f (per 1000 population, 2016)..... | 225/132 |
| Total expenditure on health per capita (Intl \$, 2014)..... | 489 |
| Total expenditure on health as % of GDP (2014)..... | 5.8 |

General Travel Considerations

GENERAL EXPECTATIONS

- Remember that you are a guest in a foreign country, and your American rights do not necessarily apply. Be aware of different laws and customs.
- Be flexible; recognize that despite careful planning the situation on the ground can change quickly, adapt to changes as they occur.
- Be professional; you are representing Project C.U.R.E. as well as the U.S.; do not speak or act in a way which reflects poorly on this organization.

SURVIVAL TIPS

- Always carry your passport with you. Have a photocopy of both your passport and plane ticket in a place apart from the original documents. Leave a passport copy with someone at home.
- Carry with you the daily itinerary, and the list of contact names and phone numbers.
- Be cautious of how much money you carry, when and where you remove it to mitigate the chances of theft or loss. People may be watching!

GENERAL HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

- Contaminated food and drink are a major source of illness while traveling. The best way to avoid falling ill is by paying careful attention to your choice of food and beverage.
- As a general rule, if the food is well cooked and hot it is okay to eat. Drink water that has been boiled or purified with iodine, or that comes from a sealed bottle only. Other beverages that are generally safe to drink include hot beverages such as coffee or tea, and carbonated beverages from a sealed can or bottle.
- The best ways to avoid becoming ill are washing your hands with soap and water or use antibacterial gel regularly. Ensure you drink plenty of non-caffeinated, non-alcoholic beverages and get plenty of rest.
- Carry emergency diarrhea medication such as Cipro, which also works on cholera.
- The small sachets of water sold on the street can be consumed, but bottled water is preferable.

CLOTHING

- Dress conservatively. Shorts and jeans are acceptable for non-work hours, and extremely hot weather. SCRUBS AND CLOSED TOED SHOES FOR WORK. One casual business outfit (slacks and a collared shirt or sundress) may be advisable in case of a more formal occasion. All colors of clothing are acceptable, but lighter colors are best.
- Leave your gold and silver jewelry at home.
- Pack light, do not travel with valuables.

- Be certain to bring comfortable, closed toed walking shoes. Tevas, Keenes, Crocs, or waterproof footwear are appropriate. Bring a pair of shower flip-flops. Do not go barefoot; many parasites and infections can be contracted through contact with soil.
- Be prepared for inclement weather. Research the seasonal weather patterns for the country where you will be traveling.

INSECTS

- Insects are responsible for spreading numerous diseases including malaria, zika, and dengue. DEET is the most effective insect repellent against most biting insects.
- Use preventative medications and vaccines recommended by a travel medicine clinic.
- Avoid scented soaps, cologne, perfume, lotions, etc. that can attract insects.
- Use special caution around dusk and dawn when many insects are most active; wear shoes, socks, long pants, and long sleeve shirts if weather permits.

DAILY CARRYING CASE

- Bottle of drinking water
- Personal snacks
- Camera
- Pen or pencil and notepad
- Sunscreen, lip balm, antibacterial hand sanitizer, insect repellent and eye drops.
- Tissues and toilet paper. Bring toilet paper, because it is rarely available.
- Hat, umbrella, light jacket and other appropriate clothing or equipment for inclement weather.

ACCOMMODATIONS

- Cold showers are fairly common; in some clinical facilities they may only have a bathhouse with a dipper and bucket.

- Whether a guesthouse or a hotel, accommodations will always be safe and clean.
- Breakfast, lunch, dinner, and bottled water are included in your program costs. The dining facilities will vary by location. All other snacks or food items are your responsibility. Alcoholic beverages are not included in your program cost.
- All rooms will be dorm style single beds and unless otherwise specified you will have roommates.

MEDICINES

- If you plan to bring prescription drugs, be sure they have a pharmacy label and pack them in your carry-on luggage.
- Participants are always advised to carry a small personal first aid kit. Suggestions include Imodium, a z-pack, antibiotic ointment, Band-Aids, aspirin, and antihistamines or decongestants.
- Be sure to bring sunscreen and bug spray.

INTERNET/CELL PHONE/PDA ACCESS

Prior to your departure, the Clinic department will ask for the email addresses of those you wish to be notified of your safe arrival. The team leader will send word to the Clinics department once you arrive safely in your host country, and the Clinics department will then notify the individuals you indicated.

Internet access varies widely from country to country, but the Clinics department works to ensure that participants will have some access to the internet during their trip.

General Cultural Considerations

It can be difficult to leave the comforts of home and immerse yourself in a foreign environment. It is normal for travelers in developing countries to experience culture shock. Unexpected surprises and circumstances contribute to culture shock, and for this reason, preparation is essential. Volunteers can minimize their

frustration by knowing what to expect before they arrive at their destination. The information provided in this packet is meant to help with just that.

INITIAL SHOCK

- Common symptoms of culture shock are:
- Frustration
- Paranoia
- Criticism of local people and customs
- Oversensitivity and overreaction to minor difficulties
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Loss of sense of humor

ADJUSTMENT

Gradually, as you orient yourself, you regain confidence. As this happens, your perspective becomes more balanced; you are less critical and more willing to integrate yourself into the culture of the country you are visiting.

EMOTIONAL ROLLER-COASTER

It can be shocking to experience poverty for the first time. Positive ways to cope with these feelings are to recognize that you are working to help the community and to discuss your feelings with your team leader and other group members. Regardless of your background, you are a foreigner and most individuals you come in contact with will assume you are wealthy. People may ask you for favors or money, as they may view you as the solution to their health ailments and their poverty. When working in the clinic, patients will likely assume you have clout with the medical providers. Be careful not to promise any assistance you cannot provide during your stay, and never give cash to patients or their families.

TIPS FOR COPING

- Travel with a spirit of humility and a desire to meet local people.
- Take care of yourself—eat well, exercise and get sufficient sleep. • Do not take anything too seriously.
- Do not let others irritate you—you have come a long way to learn, to enjoy the experience.

- Cultivate the habit of listening and observing rather than seeing and hearing.
- Be aware of other people's feelings and try to prevent behaving in a way that others may perceive as offensive. Spend time each day reflecting on your experiences.

TIME

In the US, making others wait is usually considered disrespectful and rude. However, most other countries do not have the same attitude towards time and punctuality. While you are abroad, it is your responsibility to be ready for the day at the time appointed by the in-country host, and be aware of how your actions may be delaying or hurrying the group. Although you are expected to be punctual, you are also expected to be prepared to wait patiently for others, especially individuals from your host country. This is a function of a culture with a more relaxed attitude toward timeliness and schedules; do not be insulted.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Many of the people you encounter live in rural villages and will speak or understand English and most people are illiterate. The local staff may speak English and translators will be provided as necessary.

SOCIAL ETIQUETTE

Often friendly and relaxed in character, Belizeans always greet each other with eye contact even if they are strangers. Belize is also a generally casual country however remains conservative with dress and very revealing clothing may be frowned upon. Men shake hands with one another until they know each other well at which they greet with a more traditional hug or back slapping; women pat each other on the right forearm or shoulder. At meeting functions, wait until you are invited before using the person's first name. Eye contact is usually used. Gift giving is customary if invited to a Belizean home. If given a gift, the gift is opened immediately and it is expected the recipient of the gift reacts enthusiastically after opening the gift.

TRUST

Recognize that when you first arrive at the clinic site, you will be a stranger to the local staff and community. You must work to earn the trust and confidence of those around you, and prove your competence and trustworthiness. It is

important to demonstrate your dedication and commitment to hard work and empathy towards the community.

SAFETY

As in most developing countries, be aware of your valuables and the potential for pickpocketing. Violent crime is not common, but poverty can push people to do desperate things. If something does get stolen, contact the police. Typically, however, the locals will know who was the perpetrator and your items will be returned.

Do not walk alone at night, or into unknown areas. Life typically slows down when the sun sets.

RE-ENTRY HOME

Before you leave

- Gather the contact information of friends you would like to stay in touch with.
- Spend time reflecting on meaningful aspects of your trip: What did you learn?

When you come home:

- Be ready to experience boredom, isolation, disorientation and annoyance.
- Keep in touch with other team participants. Develop friendships with people that understand experiences of travelling to developing countries.
- Keep up to date with current events in your host country. Anything you do to maintain your connection with the world at large will solidify the significance of your trip.
- Remember that you can maximize your impact by inspiring and sharing your experience with others.

Participant Expectations

Project C.U.R.E. has been successful as an organization involved in the business of taking health and hope to the needy of the world. In this pursuit, Project C.U.R.E. carefully follows the strategies and methods of any good business while maintaining a fine balance between business considerations and an attitude of humanitarian kindness.

PLEASE OBSERVE THE FOLLOWING EXPECTATIONS:

- Project C.U.R.E. and the participants are donating supplies and equipment, as well as gifts to the hosts. Tipping will be taken care of by Project C.U.R.E.
- Project C.U.R.E.'s presence in a country should bring importance and influence to the in country host and facility. The opportunity to compliment the host as the reason for Project C.U.R.E.'s presence may be in front of peers and officials during discussions, meetings, hospital/clinic visitations or meeting with people of the media.

INCLUDED IN TRIP COSTS

Trip costs include in-country transportation, accommodations, translators, 3 daily meals, clean water and some activities as determined by the trip leader.

- Every effort is made to have all team participants travel together from the U.S. to the clinic country.
- Each participant is permitted to take 1 checked bag and 1 carry-on bag. IMPORTANT: Because participants will be carrying Project C.U.R.E. supplies, please only plan on packing one overhead carry-on item for your own personal items.
- Rooms are shared by two or more people of the same sex. Room assignments are determined by the Host or Team Leader. Private rooms may be requested for married couples.
- Culligan bottled water from a jug is provided every day and included in the trip costs. Alcohol is not included and will be billed separately and paid for by the individual.
- Any changes in air travel after the tickets are purchased may have fees charged by the airline. These charges shall be paid by the participant.

- Trip costs begin when the team arrive at the destination and terminate when the departing flight is boarded.

PROJECT C.U.R.E. PARTICIPANTS MUST ALWAYS:

- Display an attitude of availability and respect.
- Be flexible. A flexible attitude is the 'name of the game' and may involve graciously accepting itinerary changes, accommodation difficulties, surprise interviews, public speaking engagements, long hours, early mornings, late nights, bumpy rides, and many other unexpected events.
- Be professional in appearance, in conduct, in attitude and in the delivery of information. The image of the team will set a tone for others participating with the clinic efforts.
- Follow a professional dress code. Scrubs and Project C.U.R.E. T-Shirts are all appropriate.

TEAM EXPECTATIONS

- Clarify any questions about procedures at the host facility with the Trip Leader.
- At no time will a participant leave the group without the knowledge of the in country host or team leader.
- Provide support and encouragement to one another and staff at the host facility. Never promise or pledge specific treatment or obligate Project C.U.R.E. in any way.
- Never give the locals money or promise things. It sets unrealistic expectations for future trip participants and encourages dependencies.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

- While in-country working with severely underserved populations, it is possible to become focused on an individual situation. Always remember that there are hundreds of locations that can benefit from the medical assistance and political influence of Project C.U.R.E.

- Participants may never expect money or goods in exchange for favors or assistance in bypassing the standard needs assessment and container shipment procedure of Project C.U.R.E.

Safety

From the U.S. Department of State

For the latest security information, Americans traveling abroad should monitor the Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs' website at <http://travel.state.gov>, where the current travel warnings and travel alerts, as well as the worldwide caution, can be found.



Up to date information on safety and security can also be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll free in the U.S. and Canada, or for callers outside the U.S. and Canada, a regular toll-line at 1-202-501-4444. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday-Friday.

The Department of State urges American citizens to take responsibility for their own personal security while traveling overseas. For general information about appropriate measures travelers can take to protect themselves, see the Department of State's pamphlet "A Safe Trip Abroad," on the website.

The loss or theft of a U.S. passport abroad should be reported immediately to the local police and the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. If you are the victim of a crime while overseas, in addition to reporting to local police, please contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate for assistance.

U.S. citizens should carry a copy of their U.S. passport with them at all times. In the larger urban areas, ATM machines are usually available at major banks. However, travelers should exercise caution when using ATM, debit, and credit cards to avoid theft or fraud.

Travelers should bring sufficient cash for their trip if they will be spending time outside of the large cities.