



# Belize

📍 501 / POP 312,700

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## Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Rumfish (p268)
- ➔ Nahil Mayab (p247)
- ➔ Benny's Kitchen (p260)
- ➔ Ko-Ox Han-Nah (p257)
- ➔ Habaneros (p239)

## Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Coconut Row Guesthouse (p265)
- ➔ Cool M Farm (p259)
- ➔ Sea Dreams Hotel (p237)
- ➔ Howler Monkey Resort (p245)

## Why Go?

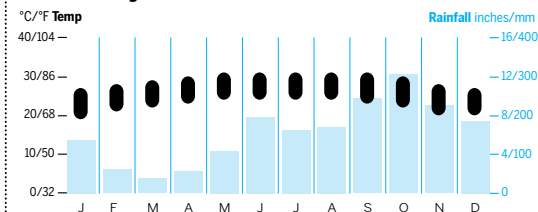
Sitting smack dab between Spanish-speaking Central America and the Caribbean (geographically and culturally), Central America's youngest nation definitely dances to its own beat. Belize's 240 miles of coastline and uncountable islands offer amazing swimming and beachcombing, and its barrier reef (the northern hemisphere's largest) is a diver's paradise. Belize's jungles are dotted with ancient structures built in the days when Belize was but a small part of the greater Maya kingdom, offering much for the intrepid to explore.

Culturally, Belize is surprisingly diverse. Though officially an English-speaking nation, expect to hear Spanish, Kriol, Garifuna and Maya, with perhaps a bit of Cantonese and Mennonite German thrown in for good measure.

Though among the pricier destinations in Central America, for cuisine, diversity and culture, Belize still offers more than enough bang for your buck to make it worth the trip. So what's not to love?

## When to Go

### Belize City



### Mid-Dec–Apr

Higher prices and drier weather; ideal for beachside days, diving and wildlife spotting.

### May–Nov

Discounts abound for those willing to brave the heat and heavy rains.

### Sep

National holidays spark two festive weeks of music, dancing and parades.

## AT A GLANCE

**Currency** Belize dollars (BZ\$); US dollars (US\$) accepted everywhere

**Languages** English, Spanish, Kriol, Garifuna

**Money** ATMs are widely available

**Visas** Generally not required for stays of less than 30 days

**Time** GMT minus six hours

## Fast Facts

- **Area** 8875 sq miles (22,966 sq km) – slightly larger than Wales or the US state of Massachusetts
- **Capital** Belmopan
- **Emergency** ☎ 911

## Set Your Budget

- **Budget hotel** in Belize City US\$25
- **Bottle of beer** US\$2
- **Set lunch** US\$5
- **Three-hour bus ride** US\$6

## Resources

- **Belize Tourism Board** ([www.travelbelize.org](http://www.travelbelize.org))
- **Belize Bus & Travel Guide** (<http://belizebus.wordpress.com/>)
- **Belize by Naturalight** ([www.belize.net](http://www.belize.net))

## Connections

The Mexican border town of Chetumal has good connections into Belize, both overland into Corozal and by boat to Ambergris and Caye Caulker. The other popular entry point is Benque Viejo del Carmen on the Guatemalan border on the road from Tikal. A southern road from the Toledo district into Guatemala is currently being built and may be finished in 2014. For more info, see Survival Guide on p281.

## FIRST TIME IN BELIZE

### One Week

Starting from Belmopan or Belize City, make a beeline for **San Ignacio** on the western border. Start by visiting the ruins of **Xunantunich**, then explore more of the Cayo region; jungle activities abound. With a few days left, head to **Caye Caulker** (perhaps with a quick trip to the always-worth-it Belize Zoo) to spend a few days swimming, snorkeling, eating great seafood or just lazing in a hammock.

### Two Weeks

From Caye Caulker, travel to **Corozal** to discover some of the town's subtler charms, before heading deeper into nature. If birds are your thing, head to **Crooked Tree**; if it's a deeper jungle experience you're after, check out the **Community Baboon Sanctuary**. Stop at Marie Sharp's Factory for a quick hot-sauce tour before heading to **Dangriga** for a taste of genuine Garifuna culture.

Dangriga is the jump-off point for Belize's central Cayes, including **South Water, Tobacco** and **Glover's Reef**. If you want to keep on the terrestrial tip, continue south to **Hopkins** or **Placencia** for a few days on the beach.

When you're fully chilled out, make the trek south to **Punta Gorda** to get the latest information on Maya village homestays and guesthouses. If drumming interests you, visit Emmeth Young's Maroon Creole Drum School. Next, head to **San Pedro Columbia** and use it as a base to explore nearby Lubaantun, then head further still to the small Maya villages of the region, stopping for a hike and a swim at beautiful **Río Blanco National Park**.

## Essential Food & Drink

Rice and beans prevail on Belizean menus and plates. They're usually served with chicken or beef (and sometimes more exotic items like gibbon; a type of rodent found in South and Central America) – plus some spices and condiments, such as coconut milk.

Seafood abounds everywhere on the coast. Lobster – in season (June to February) – is always excellent, and conch fritters are a must-try. And of course, no visit to Dangriga or Hopkins would be complete without tasting Hudut, a beloved Garifuna dish.