



Belize

501 / POP 370,300

Includes ➔

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Nerie's II Restaurant (p235)
- ➔ Farmers Market, San Ignacio (p263)
- ➔ Mojo Lounge & Bartique (p274)
- ➔ Cocina Sabor (p251)
- ➔ Habaneros (p242)

Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Sea Dreams Hotel (p241)
- ➔ Tobacco Caye Paradise (p270)
- ➔ Funky Dodo (p271)
- ➔ Crooked Tree Lodge (p251)
- ➔ Ak'bol Yoga Retreat (p246)

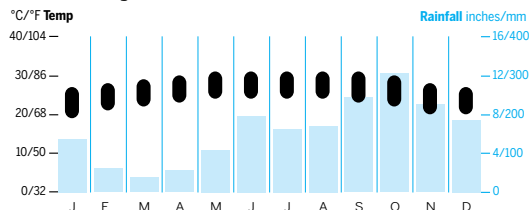
Why Go?

Tiny Belize doesn't quite fit the mould of Latin America or the Caribbean, but proudly considers itself both. English, rather than Spanish, is the official language, and Central America's youngest nation dances to its own beat with a diverse and laid-back culture that encompasses Garifuna, Maya, Creole and Mestizo influences, as well as Mennonite and expatriate communities. With 240 miles of Caribbean coastline, endless island cays and the barrier reef (the northern hemisphere's largest), diving, snorkeling, swimming and slacking is world class. Inland, Belize's thick jungles are dotted with ancient Maya structures, along with incredible caves, wildlife-filled sanctuaries and adventure activities.

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.

When to Go

Belize City



Mid-Dec-Apr
Higher prices and drier weather; ideal for beach, diving and wildlife.

May-Nov Discounts abound for those willing to brave the heat and rains.

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

Connections

The Mexican border town of Chetumal has good connections into Belize, both overland into Corozal and by boat into 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 almost complete and the new crossing may open in 2016. For more detailed information, see Survival Guide p285.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Starting at the western border (from Guatemala), visit Xunantunich before heading into San Ignacio. From there, your choices for exploration within the Cayo region are limited only by time and budget, and jungle activities abound. Caracol and ATM cave are highlights. With a few days left, head to Caye Caulker or San Pedro to spend a few days swimming, snorkeling, eating great seafood or just lazing in a hammock.

Two Weeks

Head in through Corozal (from Mexico) before heading deeper into nature at Crooked Tree or the Community Baboon Sanctuary. The views along the Hummingbird Hwy make the trip from north to south well worth it.

Dangriga, a centre for Garifuna culture, is the jumping-off point for Belize's central Cayes, including Tobacco and Glover's Reef. If you want to keep on the terrestrial tip, continue south to either Hopkins or Placencia for a few days on the beach. When you're beached out, make the trek south to Punta Gorda to get the latest information on Maya Village guesthouses and learn Garifuna drumming from the masters. Next, head to the Maya villages of the Deep South – Big Falls, San Pedro Columbia and Blue Creek – to explore ruins and hike or swim at beautiful Río Blanco National Park.

Essential Food & Drink

Rice and beans prevail on Belizean menus and plates. They're usually served with other ingredients – chicken and beef (and sometimes more exotic items like *gibnut*, a type of rodent found in South and Central America) are the usual suspects – plus some spices and condiments, such as coconut milk.

But Belizean cuisine is so much more than this ubiquitous rice-based dish. Seafood abounds everywhere on the coast. Lobster – in season (June to February) – is always excellent, and conch fritters are a must-try. Expect to find plenty of Mexican dishes like *salbutes*, *garnaches* and *cevi-che*. And of course, no visit to Dangriga or Hopkins would be complete without tasting hudut, a beloved Garifuna dish.

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

Area 8875 sq miles (22,966 sq km)

Capital Belmopan

Emergency ☎ 911

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	BZ\$1.49
Canada	C\$1	BZ\$1.57
Europe	€1	BZ\$2.27
Guatemala	Q1	BZ\$0.26
Japan	¥100	BZ\$1.90
Mexico	M\$1	BZ\$0.11
New Zealand	NZ\$1	BZ\$1.41
UK	UK£1	BZ\$2.85
USA	US\$1	BZ\$2.01

Set Your Budget

- **Budget hotel** US\$30
- **Bottle of beer** US\$2
- **Set lunch** US\$5
- **Three-hour bus ride** US\$6

Resources

- **Belizean Journeys** (www.belizeanjourneys.com)
- **Belize Tourism Board** (www.travelbelize.org)
- **Belize Forums** (www.belizeforum.com/belize)