

U.S. Country Commercial Guides



BELIZE 2020

Table of Contents

<i>Doing Business in Belize</i> _____	5
Market Overview _____	5
Market Challenges _____	6
Market Opportunities _____	6
Market Entry Strategy _____	7
<i>Leading Sectors for U.S. Exports and Investment</i> _____	8
Agriculture and Agro-processing _____	8
Travel and Tourism _____	9
Energy _____	10
Information and Communications Technology _____	11
Offshore Outsourcing _____	11
<i>Customs, Regulations and Standards</i> _____	12
Trade Barriers _____	12
Import Tariffs _____	12
Import Requirements and Documentation _____	12
Labeling and Marking Requirements _____	13
U.S. Export Controls _____	13
Temporary Entry _____	14
Prohibited and Restricted Imports _____	14
Customs Regulations _____	14
Standards for Trade _____	15
Trade Agreements _____	16
Licensing Requirements for Professional Services _____	17
<i>Selling US Products and Services</i> _____	18
Distribution & Sales Channels _____	18
eCommerce _____	20
Selling Factors & Techniques _____	20
Trade Financing _____	23
Protecting Intellectual Property _____	23
Selling to the Public Sector _____	24
<i>Business Travel</i> _____	26
<i>Investment Climate Statement (ICS)</i> _____	29
<i>Political Environment</i> _____	30

INTERNATIONAL COPYRIGHT, U.S. & FOREIGN COMMERCIAL SERVICE AND U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 2020. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED OUTSIDE OF THE UNITED STATES.

Legal Disclaimer:

The US&FCS makes every reasonable effort to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information in this Guide, a resource-for U.S. businesses to use in the exercise of their business judgment. U.S. businesses should conduct their own due diligence before relying on this information. When utilizing the information provided, the U.S. business is responsible for complying with all applicable laws and regulations of the United States, including the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA). References and links to third parties and their content are provided for the convenience of readers, and are not exhaustive lists of such resources. The US&FCS is not responsible for the availability of any third-party or its content whether found on an external site or otherwise; nor does US&FCS endorse the third-parties or endorse, warrant, or guarantee the products, services, or information described or offered in any third-party content. Please be aware that when following a link to an external site, you are then subject to the privacy and security policies and protections of the new site.

Doing Business in Belize

Market Overview

Belize covers 8,867 square miles and has an estimated population of 419,199 inhabitants (July 2020 estimate). The country has an open, private sector-led economy based primarily on tourism, agriculture, and services. The Statistical Institute of Belize (SIB) has reported that Gross Domestic Product during the first half of 2020 decreased to \$494.5 million, a decline of 14.7 percent when compared to the same period in 2019. The decrease in economic activity was largely due to the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which devastated the country's leading economic sectors.

Pre-COVID-19, tourism was the most important economic sector, as the largest contributor to GDP and FDI, and the leading foreign exchange earner. The COVID-19 pandemic hit the tourism sector first and hardest. Nationwide restrictions on land, sea, and air travel imposed in March 2020 have brought the sector to a standstill. For the first half of 2020, tourism earnings collapsed, as overnight and cruise tourism plummeted by 56.8 percent and 51 percent respectively, when compared to the same period in 2019.

The agriculture and agro-productive sectors rank second most important in economic performance. Belize experienced significant decreases in earnings across all major commodities for the first half of 2020 directly due to loss of export markets related to COVID-19. Unfavorable prices in export markets and poor production due to disease and drought conditions also decreased yields and earnings from commodities and livestock. Export earnings fell during the first half of the year to \$96.35 million or down 8 percent as all major commodities, except bananas and molasses, saw decreased revenues. The main agricultural exports by income were sugar and molasses (36.5 percent), bananas (25.9 percent), citrus (9.7 percent), and marine products (7.8 percent).

As a consumer country that relies heavily on imports, both Belize's export and import volumes fell for the first half of 2020 due to COVID-19. While the country continues to have a large trade deficit, imports fell more sharply than exports. The net effect is that while the trade deficit situation improved, Belize's market now experiences shortages in items formerly imported from the United States. Belize's gross imports for the period totaled \$407.85 million, down \$86.75 million or 17.5 percent for the same period in 2019. Machinery and transportation equipment, trade goods destined for the Commercial Free Zone together along with food and live animals, as well as manufactured goods accounted for 72.8 percent of all imports.

The United States remained Belize's lead trading partner for 2020. It was also Belize's largest importing partner, accounting for \$167.4 million or 42.2 percent of overall imports during the first half of the year. It is Belize's second largest export destination after the United Kingdom, with \$30.9 million or 28 percent of exports over the same period. Other major trading partners for imports included China, Mexico and other Central American countries; while other major trading partners for exports included the United Kingdom, the European Union, and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). For more statistical data, visit www.sib.org

Belize is an attractive market for U.S. exports, as it is an open economy that is very much dependent on U.S. imports. It is also in close proximity to the United States, which makes it accessible via air, land, and sea routes. Belize is the only predominantly English-speaking country in Central America. Compared to its Central American neighbors, Belize has a more skilled labor force and a higher cost of living and has a strong appetite for American consumer products.

Belize has a history of stable government, characterized by peaceful, democratic elections. The country has seen peaceful transitions of power between its two political parties. It has a strong tradition of civilian control of its relatively small military and security forces. The political parties are center-left and center-right, and hold many of the same policies regarding trade, economics, and development. The next national election is scheduled for November 2020.

Market Challenges

Belize is one of the smallest consumer markets in the Central America and Caribbean regions and is not as competitive as its Central American neighbors. Belize's high cost of inputs drives an increased cost of goods which has downstream impacts on market value and pricing of domestic goods. The relatively high cost of doing business is in large part due to the high cost of inputs like utilities, fuel and telecommunication services. Prices per U.S. gallon of premium, regular, and diesel were \$4.68, \$4.31, and \$4.20 respectively, effective August 2020. Electricity rates are particularly high. In 2017, the Government increased General Sales Tax (12.5%) payable on residential electricity consumption exceeding \$50, where previously only consumption exceeding \$100 was payable. As at January 2020, the average rate of electricity stood at 22c per kilowatt-hour; higher than the U.S. average which was 13.28 cents per kilowatt- hour in September 2020.

Imported products are subject to a multitude of tariffs such as Import Duties; Cost, Insurance, plus Freight (CIF Value); Revenue Replacement Duties (if applicable); General Sales Tax; and Environmental Tax. Import duties generally range from zero to 45 percent. Luxury items like SUV vehicles, alcohol, cosmetics, or items that compete with domestic industries may range from 70 to 120 percent. Where applicable, Environmental Tax is 3 percent on imports, excluding some medicines and food items. Automobiles are charged the Environmental Tax at a rate of 5 percent. Most goods are subject to the 12.5 percent General Sales Tax. For more information visit, <http://www.customs.gov.bz>

The financial system continues to be categorized as stable but fragile. A lack of correspondent banking relationships, high borrowing rates, and lack of financing mechanisms available to business all factor into the fragility of the financial sector. Access to credit remains constrained because of relatively high borrowing rates. The annualized weighted average interest rates for June 2020 were 8.44 percent on loans and 2.22 percent on deposits, respectively. Additionally, the country does not yet have an export-import bank able to facilitate transactions between exporters and importers, limiting the ability of domestic producers and businesses to access financing from potential U.S. suppliers. Government is seeking to fill this gap and to provide stimulus to pandemic-affected businesses by providing grants and loans to local businesses – especially Micro-, Small-, and Medium (MSM) Enterprises. Additionally, domestic banks lending to the private sector increased during the first half of the year by \$18.2 million to \$1.1 billion with disbursements for tourism, agriculture production, merchandise trade and manufacturing.

Lengthy bureaucratic delays and corruption serve as disincentives to foreign investments. Corruption is endemic within government institutions and at the political level. The courts are independent and impartial, but foreigners remain disadvantaged during legal proceedings, which are often delayed for years, and then slow to resolve. While local courts are empowered to recognize and enforce foreign arbitral awards against the government, judgments are generally challenged up to the Caribbean Court of Justice, the country's final appellate court. Investors are advised to perform due diligence when planning investments, as there have been highly publicized cases of fraud related to land title and other commercial ventures.

Market Opportunities

Belize's location offers some advantages to U.S. businesses, including proximity to the United States, links with Central America and the Caribbean, easy air transportation, and short shipping routes to the United States. Additionally, Belize uses English as its official language, enabling U.S. businesses to conduct transactions without the aid of a translator.

The Belize Trade and Investment Development Service (BELTRAIDE) is responsible for promoting investment in Belize's priority sectors. Priority sectors for investment include agriculture, agro-processing, aquaculture, logistics and light manufacturing, food processing and packaging (particularly non-plastic and biodegradable), tourism and tourism-related industries, offshore outsourcing (BPOs), and renewable energy. It also maintains statistics and information on establishing new businesses in Belize and manages the Government of Belize's investment concessions and incentives programs. BELTRAIDE has a Belize

Investment Portfolio to better match and fast track investment priorities through public-private partnerships or investor-to-investor opportunities. For further information, visit <http://www.belizeinvest.org.bz>.

Prior to COVID19, tourism was Belize's most important economic industry, as its proximity to the United States, English speaking population, and tropical climate attracted 1.5 million tourists annually. While the industry remains closed to the lucrative international travelers, it is open to the vastly smaller domestic market with projections the country's international airport will re-open October 1, 2020. Industry stakeholders are implementing more stringent health and safety standards to prepare for a reopening to international tourism in a new, uncertain COVID-19 environment. Business and investment opportunities are available to support post-COVID-19 realities, as well as in other areas related to tourism infrastructure and support services required in the hospitality sector, auto rentals, and food and beverage supply.

A large percentage of Belize's population speaks English, Spanish, or a combination of both, thus creating an emerging market for offshore outsourcing. The country's available arable land is well suited for investments in agriculture, agri-business, and energy, though investors should be aware of applicable government land use policies (given the fragility of Belize's environment and dependency on eco-tourism). The country currently produces primary products including sugar, citrus, bananas, beans, rice, corn, and cacao. In a post-COVID-19 environment, value-added agri-business investments are needed to build a more resilient sector through expanding opportunities areas related to storing agriculture and agri –processed commodities, affordable food packaging and preservation, and improved technologies to support agricultural yields, as for example irrigation, non-toxic pest control, and disease management. Opportunities exist in sustainable energy particularly in biomass, hydro, solar, electric vehicles, and waste-to-energy technologies.

The Government continues to expend significant resources in road infrastructure development and in rebuilding the economy through support to the tourism and agriculture sectors. Many public works and economic recovery projects are being financed through grants from donors or borrowing from the regional and multilateral development banks.

Market Entry Strategy

To start a new business, American investors can establish a Belizean limited liability company under Chapter 250 of the Laws of Belize. To set up a new company or to own shares in a Belizean company, non-Belizean citizens must seek permission from the Central Bank of Belize. After forming a company, owners must acquire trade licenses from the local city or municipal town council and the company must register for the requisite business and general sales taxes.

One potential way for American exporters to penetrate the Belize market is to seek a local importer/wholesaler to act as an agent/distributor in Belize. A typical distribution chain for an American-made product involves the U.S. manufacturer or distributor, the local importer or wholesaler (who may act as the distributor), the retailer, and finally the buyer/consumer.

In some instances, American exporters have regional distributors, generally located throughout Central America. Belizean companies usually prefer do business directly with the American-based company because Belize is close to the United States, is English-speaking, and wants to build deeper relationships directly with the parent company without added costs that come from middle distributors.

Belize's small population and territorial area mean there is very little differentiation in consumer markets geographically. Belize's acceptance of numerous cultures, including Mayan, Garifuna, Latin American, and European, means that there is little market segmentation along cultural lines as well.

Leading Sectors for U.S. Exports and Investment

Agriculture and Agro-processing

Overview

Agriculture and agribusiness are an integral part of Belize's economy and continue to be the base of the productive sector, providing sources of income and livelihoods for large numbers of workers. This sector also contributes to the overall food security of the country as locally grown fruit and vegetables are consumed domestically.

Agriculture and agribusiness have thrived in Belize due to adequate rainfall and a relatively stable year-round subtropical climate. Sugar, citrus, and banana dominate this sector while non-traditional sectors include the production of cacao, corn, hot pepper sauces, processed jams, jellies, extracts, and pastes.

Agricultural Machinery

Value-added agri-business investments are needed to build a more resilient sector through expanding opportunities areas related to irrigation, storing agriculture and agri-processed commodities, affordable food packaging and preservation. Farms in Belize generally lack irrigation systems or modern agricultural equipment, as a result efficiency and yield per acre could improve significantly if these were available. Food packaging, preservation, and any value-added investments are needed to promote food security and enhance revenues for producers.

Disease prevention and natural disaster mitigation are top concerns for Belize. Both the citrus and shrimp farming industries continue to battle against crop-specific diseases. Because of citrus greening, the citrus industry continues to experience a decline in production while shrimp farming is rebounding from a bacterial disease that has stalled production since 2015.

Opportunities

Agri-Business opportunities include the production of raw produce in the traditional agriculture, organic agriculture and aquaculture sectors; value-added agribusiness and livestock; biofuels including power generation, ethanol, and bio-diesel. Opportunities in this sector exist in agricultural machinery and equipment, modernization systems and the incorporation of sustainable technology in agricultural practices, processes and equipment e.g. improved irrigation, fertilization, organic production, as well as better disease and pest management. The sale of production of inputs also provide opportunities to US businesses as Belize's agricultural sector depends largely on imported inputs e.g. fertilizer and packaging materials and machinery largely sourced from Central America. Agriculture related opportunities also exist in value added investments and trade to advance packaging and preservation methods; improved production and processing processes; product marketing and branding; and storage and export handling.

Resources

- Belize Ministry of Agriculture www.agriculture.gov.bz
- Belize Agricultural Health Authority <http://baha.org.bz>
- Belize Bureau of Standards www.bbs.gov.bz
- Belize Trade and Investment Development Service www.belizeinvest.org.bz
- Government of Belize Procurement Portal www.procurement.gov.bz

Travel and Tourism

Overview

Over the past decade, Belize has grown into a prime destination for American tourists and retirees. Prior to COVID-19, tourism reflected robust growth prospects as the top economic sector, major contributor to Gross Domestic Product, and foreign exchange revenue earner. There are several tourism-related opportunities for investment and trade, including in ecotourism, adventure, nature, cruise, and other nautical tourism related activities.

Leading Sub-sectors

As an English speaking destination in close proximity to the United States, Belize is a draw for many U.S. tourists and retirees. Cultural and nature-based tourism that promotes sand and sea, Mayan culture, leisure, and adventure tourism are some of the leading subsectors of interest to American businesses and investors. Belize is also increasingly recognized for its second-home buyers' market, along with other countries in Central America including Panama and Costa Rica.

Most of the country's tourism industry caters to a "boutique-style" experience, often focusing on adventure and recreational or "eco-tourism" activities. Opportunities exist in sub sectors supporting the tourism industry including equipment and supplies for the hospitality sector (e.g. by hotels and restaurants), general merchandising; printing, marketing and promotional materials and supplies; "green" food packaging; construction equipment and supplies. As a result of COVID-19, the industry is also keenly aware of the need to introduce innovative and more stringent health and safety measures to responsibly address tourists concerns.

Opportunities

In a post-COVID-19 environment, tourism will remain a very important industry for Belize as well as related economic subsectors. For example, the auto rental and (water) taxis sectors rely on tourists and the local farmers, poultry and livestock producers as well fishermen depend on local restaurants where tourists consume fresh produce.

Opportunities will continue to open up for sectors directly and indirectly related to the tourism industry. These opportunities extend to ecotourism and adventure tourism, developing nature, trail and caving systems; beach resorts; cruise tourism facilities including shopping centers, restaurants, cafes and bars; auto rental services; natural parks and adventure services (e.g. canoeing, horseback riding, zip lining, etc.); nautical tourism including cruise tendering services, diving services, marinas, ports and services to attract tourists in vessels (yachts, sail boats, and charter boats).

As global tourism recovers, Belize intends for its industry to evolve to meet consumer demands. The industry is already implementing health and safety standards in an effort to satisfy tourist demands. An increasing eco-mindset and need for green infrastructure is also leading to opportunities for new technologies in renewable energy, waste management, and alternatives to single-use plastics.

Resources

- Belize Tourism Board (BTB) <http://www.belizetourismboard.org/>; <http://www.travelbelize.org/>
- Belize Tourism Industry Association <http://www.btia.org/>
- BTB Retirement Incentives <http://www.belizeretirement.org/>
- Belize Hotel Association <http://www.belizehotels.org/>
- BELTRAIDE <http://www.belizeinvest.org.bz>.
- Government of Belize Procurement Portal www.procurement.gov.bz

Energy

Overview

Belize is known as an eco-friendly tourism market, which also complements the policies aimed at sustainable energy projects. Over the last 20 years, Belize has invested in domestically produced energy to strengthen and stabilize its energy sector. Investments in hydropower and more recently in biomass, solar and LPG have opened up the opportunities for greater energy independence.

Solar, Energy Efficiency, Liquefied Petroleum Gas

Leading energy sub-sectors in Belize include expanding efforts on biomass, small scale solar and liquefied petroleum gas, as well as creating new opportunities in electric vehicles, large scale solar and waste to energy.

Opportunities

Solar Energy in Belize is currently limited to off-grid use primarily by residential consumers and hotels and resorts located in remote areas of the countries. Government announced in September 2019 an intent to sign a power purchasing agreement for a 30-megawatt solar power energy facility. On a smaller scale, the Government has also made effort at installing solar mini-grids and solar powered streetlamps in rural communities disconnected from the national grid.

The Government along with the Belize Electricity Limited intends to undertake a pilot project to introduce electric vehicles. This initiative will look at opportunities to transition the transportation sector from fossil fuels to electric vehicles on the smaller islands.

The National Gas Company Limited recently launched a public private partnership for the importation, bulk storage, and wholesale of LPG in Belize. The main marine terminal was built for a capacity of 1.5 million gallons of LPG and included 2 regional distribution depots in the country.

Resources

- Belize Electricity Limited <http://www.bel.com.bz>
- Belize Trade and Investment Development Service www.belizeinvest.org.bz
- Government of Belize www.belize.gov.bz
- Belize Ministry of Finance <http://www.mof.gov.bz>
- Government of Belize Procurement Portal www.procurement.gov.bz

Information and Communications Technology

Offshore Outsourcing

Offshore outsourcing is a leading subsector of the Information and Communication Technology sector. The offshore outsourcing subsector – including smaller subsectors such as customer service, legal processing, billing processing, and technical support – continue as opportunities for expansion by U.S. companies. This includes offshore customer service centers, online software management services, information technology outsourcing (ITO), knowledge process outsourcing (KPO) and legal process outsourcing. The country’s geographic co-location in both Central American and the Caribbean has resulted in a largely bilingual labor force, fluent in English and Spanish. This provides a wide baseline for recruiting skilled labor into the sector, which currently employs more than 3,000 persons with an annual growth of 18 percent. The proximity to the United States and ability to conduct business in the same time zone also makes Belize an attractive destination for offshore outsourcing.

Opportunities

Offshore outsourcing centers are located across the country and generally benefit from fiscal and other government incentives. Additionally, the Government through the Belize Trade and Investment Development Service (BELTRAIDE) continues to support the national strategy for the sector, improved industry infrastructure and labor force training but more extensive investment and cross training is needed in this industry.

Resources

- Belize Trade and Investment Development Service www.belizeinvest.org.bz
- Government of Belize www.belize.gov.bz
- Government of Belize Procurement Portal www.procurement.gov.bz

Customs, Regulations and Standards

Trade Barriers

The Government utilizes an Import Licensing Regime that serves as a non-tariff barrier to protect the domestic market. The Belize Bureau of Standards (<http://www.bbs.gov.bz/>) encompasses the Supplies Control Unit, which has responsibility for Belize's import licensing regime. The process of applying for an import license is now fully automated. After registering for the first time with the Supplies Control Unit, applications can be submitted online. The process has greatly reduced transaction costs, and improved efficiency and timeliness.

In order to protect certain domestic industries, the government maintains a list of products that require import licenses. This list includes live animals, meat and edible offal, dairy produce, edible vegetables, certain roots and tubers, edible fruits, rice, corn, cereals, flour, oil seeds, sugar, citrus fruit, fruit juices, beverage spirits and vinegar, prepared animal fodder, mineral fuels, oil and oil products, bituminous substances, mineral waxes, wood and wood articles. For more information, visit Belize Bureau of Standards (BBS) at <http://www.bbs.gov.bz/>.

Import Tariffs

Tariffs and collection of customs duties and taxes are administered by the Belize Customs and Excise Department. This Department accounts for approximately 50 percent of the Government's total annual recurrent revenue. Belize's tariff schedule is based on Caribbean Community's (CARICOM) Common External Tariff (CET). In Belize, customs duties are applied according to the rates set out in the Customs Tariff and Trade Classification. The two main duties applied to imported goods and products are the Import Duty and Revenue Replacement Duty (RRD).

Import Duties range between zero and 45 percent with the average rate applied to commodities at 20 percent. Zero-rated goods include various food items and medicines; while 45 percent is applicable to certain automobiles and other goods, such as fresh peppers, pepper sauces, live animals, and boats. Import duties on industrial products average at a rate of 20 percent, but may be higher for products of national interest and protected for Belizean investment. Duties are calculated on the CIF Value of goods (Cost, Insurance, plus Freight). A detailed list of items included can be found on <http://www.customs.gov.bz>.

Imports from CARICOM countries are exempt from import duties but Revenue Replacement Duty (RRD) may be applicable to some commodities originating from CARICOM countries. The RRD rates are applied between 10 percent and 50 percent with the majority averaging 40 percent.

Other taxes on imports include General Sales Tax (GST) and Environmental Tax. GST is applied at a rate of 12.5 percent based on the aggregate of the customs value and other duties. Environmental Tax is charged at a rate of 3 percent on all imports, excluding some medicines and food items; however automobiles are charged at the rate of 2 percent to 5 percent depending on the type of vehicle. For more information with details on rates and eligibility, visit Department of GST at <http://www.gst.gov.bz/> and the Ministry of Finance <http://www.mof.gov.bz> for Environmental Tax.

Import Requirements and Documentation

All importers are required to submit original commercial invoices to the Customs Department at the point of importation.

The Belize Agricultural Health Authority (BAHA) is a statutory body governed by the Ministry of Agriculture and is responsible for issuing sanitary and phyto-sanitary certificates for exports. Import permits from BAHA (<http://baha.org.bz>) are required for certain foodstuffs, live animals, plant and plant materials, and veterinary vaccines. BAHA also requires phyto-sanitary and zoo-sanitary certificates, health-risk analysis documentation, and certificates of origin for animals and certain plant materials.

Labeling and Marking Requirements

The Belize Bureau of Standards (<http://www.bbs.gov.bz>) is mandated to establish and monitor standards requirements for labeling, packaging, metrology, and consumer protection. All locally manufactured goods and imported goods must adhere to some minimum standards for products to be legally traded and sold on the Belize market.

There are three technical regulations concerning the labeling of food: general principles, pre-packaged foods, and brewery products, all of which have been developed through CARICOM's standards process. Labeling requirements on all processed food products must be fulfilled in English and details are to include: product name, description, manufacturer's name and address, country of origin, storage instructions, net weight/volume, quantity, list of contents, nutritional information, date of production, expiration date, and identification lot. Pre-packaged processed food products labeled in English in accordance with the laws or standards in force in Canada, CARICOM, the European Union, and the United States are deemed to comply with Belizean labeling standards. Other technical regulations related to labeling are provided for in product specific legislation including labeling requirements for some dairy products; as well as certain alcohol and tobacco products. Labeling of cosmetics and pharmaceutical products is regulated by the Ministry of Health (<https://health.gov.bz/www/>).

The Belize Bureau of Standards (BBS) website <http://www.bbs.gov.bz> contains legislation and documents describing the nature of information and specifications required for products to be labeled, packaged, and sold legally in the marketplace. Enforcement of standards is generally lax as the BBS's ability to verify compliance with standards is limited. Where possible, conformity checks are carried out after imports have cleared customs and directly at local distribution or consumer stores.

U.S. Export Controls

The United States imposes export controls to protect national security interests and promote foreign policy objectives related to dual-use goods through implementation of the Export Administration Regulations (EAR). The Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) is comprised of two elements: Export Administration (EA), which is responsible for processing license applications, counselling exporters, and drafting and publishing changes to the [Export Administration Regulations](#); and Export Enforcement (EE), which is responsible for the enforcement of the EAR. BIS works closely with U.S. embassies, foreign governments, industry, and trade associations to ensure that exports from the United States are secure and comply with the EAR. BIS officials conduct site visits, known as End-Use Checks (EUCs), globally with end-users, consignees, and/or other parties to transactions involving items subject to the EAR to verify compliance.

An EUC is an on-site verification of a non-U.S. party to a transaction to determine whether the party is a reliable recipient of U.S. items. EUCs are conducted as part of BIS's licensing process, as well as its compliance program, to determine if items were exported in accordance with a valid BIS authorization or otherwise consistent with the EAR. Specifically, an EUC verifies the *bona fides* of transactions subject to the EAR, to include: confirming the legitimacy and reliability of the end use and end user; monitoring compliance with license conditions; and ensuring items are used, re-exported or transferred (in-country) in accordance with the EAR. These checks might be completed prior to the export of items pursuant to a BIS export license in the form of a Pre-License Check (PLC), or following an export from the U.S. during a Post-Shipment Verification (PSV).

BIS officials rely on EUCs to safeguard items subject to the EAR from diversion to unauthorized end uses/users. The verification of a foreign party's reliability facilitates future trade, including pursuant to BIS license reviews. If BIS is unable to verify the reliability of the company or is prevented from accomplishing an EUC, the company may receive, for example, more regulatory scrutiny during license application reviews or be designated on BIS's Unverified List or Entity List, as applicable.

BIS has developed a list of "red flags", or warning signs, and compiled "Know Your Customer" guidance intended to aid exporters in identifying possible violations of the EAR. Both of these resources are publicly available, and their dissemination to industry members is highly encouraged to help promote EAR compliance.

BIS also provides a variety of training sessions to U.S. exporters throughout the year. These sessions range from one to two-day seminars that focus on the basics of exporting to coverage of more advanced, industry specific topics. Interested parties can check This is a best prospect industry sector for this country. Includes a market overview and trade data [list of upcoming seminars and webinars](#) or reference BIS provided [online training](#).

BIS and the EAR regulate transactions involving the export of “dual-use” U.S. goods, services, and technologies. For advice and regulatory requirements, exporters should consult the other U.S. Government agencies which regulate more specialized items. For example, the U.S. Department of State’s Directorate of Defense Trade Controls has authority over defense articles and services, or munitions. A list of other agencies involved in export control can be found on the [BIS website](#) or in Supplement No. 3 to Part 730 of the EAR.

The EAR is available on the [BIS website](#) and on the [e-CFR](#) (Electronic Code of Federal Regulations) and is updated as needed. The [Consolidated Screening List](#) (CSL) is a list of parties for which the United States Government maintains restrictions on certain exports, reexports or transfers of items. The CSL consolidates eleven export screening lists of the Departments of Commerce, State and the Treasury into a single data feed as an aid to industry in conducting electronic screens of parties to regulated transactions. Exporters are encouraged to classify their items prior to export, as well as consult the CSL to determine if any parties to the transaction may be subject to specific license requirements.

Temporary Entry

The Belize Customs Department allows temporary entry or in-transit entry of certain items into Belize. Through a bond process, the importer deposits a percentage of the value of the imported goods and is allowed a specified timeframe to either re-export the goods or pay applicable duties on the goods. If the goods are re-exported or are imported under a duty exemption incentive, then the importer’s deposit funds are reimbursed. However, if the goods remain in the country and the importer does not benefit from duty exemption incentives, then full duties become payable.

Products brought in temporarily or in-transit generally enter duty-free zones, providing the products are not modified or transformed while in Belize. If, however, the importer later decides to modify or sell the product locally, all necessary duties must be paid at the Customs Department (<http://www.customs.gov.bz>).

Prohibited and Restricted Imports

Certain goods are restricted for import into Belize based on a licensing and permit regime. The tariff applied to products originating from CARICOM member states may be different from the tariff applied to products originating from other countries. Likewise, there may also be quantity restrictions on certain products.

The list of restricted items includes peanut butter, jam, jellies, pasta, wheat flour, rice, peppers and pepper sauces, beer, alcohol, spirits, carbonated beverages, cigarettes, products made of wood, pharmaceutical medicines, pesticides, telecommunication equipment, certain gases and chemicals deemed harmful to the environment and fuel. Beans and rice, like many other locally produced agricultural products, may not be imported if there is a surplus on the domestic market.

Customs Regulations

The Customs and Excise Duties Act provides the legal framework by which the Belize Customs Department assesses, collects, and enforces the collection of Import Duties, Revenue Replacement Duties, and Excise Duties. For more specific information, visit the Customs website www.customs.gov.bz. The Belize Customs Department generally uses original commercial invoices and product catalogs to determine the value of goods coming into the country. Duties are charged on the CIF value of goods.

The Valuation Unit of the Customs Department uses the U.S. National Automobile Dealers Association (N.A.D.A.) publication, commonly known as the Blue Book, to value vehicles and automobiles being imported into Belize.

The Customs and Excise may be contacted at

Customs House, Port Loyola, P.O. Box 146, Belize City

Tel: +(501)-223-7092 / 223-7093

Fax: +(501)-223-7091

Website www.customs.gov.bz

Email: cusnet@btl.net

Standards for Trade

Overview

The Belize Bureau of Standards (BBS) is mandated to establish and monitor standards requirements for labeling, packaging, metrology, and consumer protection. All locally manufactured goods and imported goods must adhere to some minimum standards for products to be legally traded and sold on the Belize market. A catalogue of standards currently administered by the Belize Bureau of Standards along with a standards work plan is available on their website (<http://www.bbs.gov.bz>). The BBS generally consults with local stakeholders prior to having particular standards enacted into domestic law and implemented. As part of the consultation process, comments may be submitted by email or via their website.

Standards

As a member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Belize generally uses regional standards developed by the CARICOM Regional Organization for Standards and Quality (CROSQ). Alternatively the BBS may also seek to adopt international standards as members of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the International Standards Organization (ISO), the Pan American Standards Commission (COPANT), and the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). The BBS also participates in the International Electrotechnical Commission Affiliate Program, and as a member of CARICOM, in the Inter-American Metrology System.

Testing, Inspection and Certification

Generally, most products enter the market freely. The BBS is certified in ISO 9001:2008 for organizational quality management systems and is now pursuing accreditation in ISO/IEC 17025:2005 for testing and calibration as it seeks to provide internationally recognized calibration and testing services.

The Belize Agricultural Health Authority (BAHA) is responsible for food safety, quarantine services, and plant and animal health inspections to facilitate trade and commerce. It assesses, monitors, and manages the issuance and approvals of import permits for phyto-sanitary and zoo-sanitary certificates. These permits are issued when importers and exporters seek to trade meats, animals (including livestock), plants, seeds, and seedlings of plants.

BAHA also assists with the establishment and implementation of certification programs, including: Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP), Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), Standard Sanitary Operating Procedures (SSOP), and conducts Risk Analysis and Inspection for food safety purposes. For more information on certifications and programs, visit <http://baha.org.bz/>.

There are no accredited testing laboratories in Belize. However, BAHA and the Citrus Research and Education Institute (CREI), a private laboratory facility, are both seeking international accreditation.

Publication of Technical Regulations

The BBS publishes notifications on new requirements for product standards in the Belize Gazette, allowing the general public to submit comments on the proposed changes in a timely manner.

Additionally, as a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), Belize is also required under the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) to report to the WTO all proposed technical regulations that could affect trade with other Member countries.

Members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) are required under the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) to notify to the WTO proposed technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures that could affect trade. **Notify U.S.** (www.nist.gov/notifyus) is a free, web-based e-mail registration service that captures and makes available for review and comment key information on draft regulations and conformity assessment procedures. Users receive customized e-mail alerts when new notifications are added by selected country or countries and industry sector(s) of interest and can also request full texts of regulations. This service and its associated web site are managed and operated by the USA WTO TBT Inquiry Point housed within the National Institute of Standards and Technology, part of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Contact Information

Director, Belize Bureau of Standards, Ministry of Works Compound, Power Lane, Belmopan City, Belize, Tel: 011-501-822-0446, Fax: 011-501-822-2571, E-mail: bbs@btl.net, Website: www.bbs.gov.bz.

Managing Director, Belize Agricultural Health Authority, Corner of Hummingbird Highway and Forest Drive, Belmopan City, Cayo District, Belize. Tel: 011-501-822-0197 or 011-501-822-0271. E-mail: baha@btl.net & admin@baha.org.bz Website: <http://baha.org.bz>

Trade Agreements

As a CARICOM member, Belize's foreign, economic and trade policies vis-a-vis non-members are coordinated regionally (www.caricom.org). The country's import tariffs are also largely defined by CARICOM's Common External Tariff.

Belize is also a party to several other treaties because of its CARICOM membership. A primary example is the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between CARIFORUM and the European Union (EU). In the wake of Brexit, these countries also signed a CARIFORUM – United Kingdom Economic Partnership Agreement in March 2019. The latter agreement is expected to come into effect by January 2021 or soon after the UK leaves the EU. Belize, as a CARICOM member state, is also a party to five other bilateral trade agreements with Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Venezuela.

Outside of CARICOM, Belize is a member of the Central American Integration System (SICA) at a political level, but is not a part of the Secretariat of Central American Economic Integration (SIECA) that supports economic integration of Central America. The country also has a Partial Scope Agreement with Guatemala, and is seeking to conclude an Economic Cooperation Agreement with Taiwan.

Belize is a member of the WTO and adheres to the organization's agreements and reporting system. The Belize Bureau of Standards (BBS) is the national standards body responsible for preparing, promoting, and implementing standards for goods, services, and processes. The BBS operates in accordance with the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade and the CARICOM Regional Organization for Standards and Quality. Belize is also a member of the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), and Codex Alimentarius.

Belize does not have a Free Trade Agreement with the United States nor with Canada, but is a qualifying country under the U.S. Generalized System of Preference (GSP), the U.S. - Caribbean Basin Trade Partnership Act (CBTPA) and the Caribbean – Canada Trade agreement (CARIBCAN).

Licensing Requirements for Professional Services

There are few professional associations in Belize and licensing requirements are generally set by the professional associations.

- Belize Coalition of Service Providers: www.bdsp.org.bz
- The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Belize: www.icab.bz
- Association of Real Estate Brokers of Belize: www.arebb.com
- Belize Bar Association: www.belizebar.bz
- Customs Brokers Association of Belize: www.customsbrokers.bz
- Belize Tourism Industry Association: www.btia.org
- Belize Hotel Association: <https://www.belizehotels.org>
- Belize Medical and Dental Association: www.health.gov.bz

Selling US Products and Services

Distribution & Sales Channels

Overview

A typical distribution channel for an American-made product involves (1) the local importer, who is also generally the wholesaler and the distributor, (2) the retailer, and (3) the buyer/consumer.

Despite COVID-19, trade in goods continues unimpeded. Cargo imported from neighboring Central America and Mexico enters Belize through the two official land ports of entry located at the country's western border with Guatemala and northern border with Mexico. Goods imported from North America, the Caribbean, and Europe can enter the country via ship through either Port of Belize Ltd. (in Belize City) or the Port of Big Creek (in the Stann Creek District). Together these two ports handle around 90 percent of import shipments and a similar portion of exports. Cargo ships typically depart Europe for Miami/Houston, then Belize, and on to Central and South America. To a lesser extent, the airlines also air freight cargo through the Philip Goldson International Airport.

As the commercial hub, the Port of Belize Ltd. receives imports mostly for dry goods, merchandise, machinery, automobiles, consumer goods, and fuel. It features a 1,000-foot pier for ships to load and unload cargo. For additional details, please visit www.portofbelize.com

The Port of Big Creek, located to the south in Independence Village, is the second largest port and handles bulk and break-bulk cargo. It features three full service berths allowing for direct docking of cargo ships alongside the mainland. This port accommodates large ships for the transport of citrus, bananas, fertilizers, grain, sugar and other agricultural produce, as well as crude oil, and liquefied petroleum gas. For additional details, please visit www.bigcreekgroup.com.

Three smaller other marine ports also handle cargo; Puma Energy Bahamas S. A. for fuel importation, WitConcrete for sugar exportation and Commerce Bight which is not currently operational. Three marine passenger ports process international travelers and cruise tourists but have been closed since March due to COVID-19. These are Fort Street Tourism Village, Harvest Caye and the Saca Chispas, please visit www.portauthority.bz.

Using an Agent or Distributor

Many U.S. exporters of consumer products will find that an agent/distributor arrangement is the most convenient, practical, and cost-effective mechanism for sales in Belize. Local distributors tend to have local market knowledge and access to local distribution networks. The use of an agent or distributor is not legally required.

Initially, a U.S. exporter generally contacts the potential distributor and conducts his due diligence on the local distributor and market potential for the U.S. product or service.

To find a suitable agent or distributor, owners and investors may find it necessary to visit the country to meet directly and assess strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. Good resources for investors are the Commercial Section of the U.S. Embassy in Belize (BelmopanCommercialInquiries@state.gov) and the regional U.S. Export Assistance Centers (USEACs) located in the United States. For a complete list of USEACs please visit <https://www.export.gov/locations>

Establishing an Office

Belizean laws allow businesses to be established in several forms: private companies, joint ventures and cooperatives, partnerships, sole proprietorships, trust funds, public investment companies, and international business companies (IBCs). The Companies Act stipulates the legal requirements to incorporate a limited liability company in Belize. Although not necessary, aspiring business owners usually hire an attorney to prepare and submit the necessary company documents for incorporation. (For a list of attorneys visit <https://bz.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/attorneys/>).

Owners submit an application to register a company to the Belize Companies and Corporate Affairs Registry and usually processing and approval takes seven business days. Fees vary depending on the number of shares issued by the company. For additional details, contact the Belize Companies and Corporate Affairs Registry via email at info@belizecompaniesregistry.gov.bz.

The National Assembly passed the International Business Companies (Amendment) Act in December 2018. This allows for both residents and non-residents to take part in the regime. Additionally, International Business Companies are now liable for both income tax and stamp duty and are required to file annual returns. The International Business Companies Registry is responsible for managing all International Business Company registrations. Fees vary depending on the number of shares issued by the company. Their website, <http://www.ibcbelize.com>, provides a comprehensive list of all authorized registered agents capable of incorporating IBCs.

The International Financial Services Commission (IFSC) has the mandate to promote and develop Belize as an international financial services center and to regulate the international financial services. For additional details, contact the IFSC via email at info@ifsc.gov.bz; website: <http://www.ifsc.gov.bz/>

Franchising

Although Belizeans are generally familiar with popular U.S. brands, franchising is not common. Franchising extends to a few well-known brand names, including Radisson, Best Western, Ramada, Marriot and Hilton in the hotel and hospitality industry, Coca-Cola in the beverage industry, Mail Boxes Etc. in the postal service, DHL and FedEx in express delivery services, and Avis, Budget, and Hertz in the auto rental business. Century 21, Re/Max, and Sotheby International Realty are also well-known real estate franchises operating in Belize.

Direct Marketing

Direct marketing in Belize by U.S. companies is rare. Normally, companies hire a local agent or representative to perform the local marketing functions.

Joint Ventures/Licensing

The government generally encourages joint ventures when investing in Belize; however, it is not mandatory. Foreign investors are allowed full ownership of companies and property in Belize. The legal requirements for joint ventures are provided for under the Co-operative Societies Act.

Express Delivery

Despite COVID-19 lockdown and closure of local business, express delivery services have continued to operate internationally and within the country. DHL and FedEx operate in Belize and are very reliable. Both offer delivery services within 2-3 working days. Deliveries are routed via Miami through American Airlines, Amerijet, or Avianca flights. The Belize Post Office in partnership with the U.S. Postal Service also provides Express Mail Services (EMS). Deliveries normally take four to five business days. Local companies also offer express delivery services across the country, generally same day delivery.

All express service providers facilitate the payment of customs duties and tariffs. For DHL and FedEx, customers pay a service charge in addition to the customs duties. For the Post Office, a customs officer is based at the Belize City Post Office and is responsible for assessing the duties payable. In other local offices, the post office personnel act as agents for customs.

Customs charges are assessed in line with Customs Department procedures accounting for import duties, revenue replacement duties, general sales tax, and environmental tax, where applicable. See the Chapter on Trade Regulations, Customs and Standards.

Due Diligence

Whether a U.S. investor or company plans to invest in a business, sell, or buy property in Belize, it is always advisable that they seek background information on their local partner, conduct title searches on real estate or property, and conduct due diligence before completing the business transaction.

The U.S. investor may want to seek the services of a local accountant or attorney who may be able to assist with obtaining background information and/or conducting a property title search.

It is also beneficial to cross-check the legitimacy of local companies in the Belize Companies Registry, to ensure they are legally registered to operate in Belize.

Where possible, an in-country visit and direct meetings is advisable to gather sufficient information on facilities, infrastructure, and adequacy of potential agents, distributors, retailers, or wholesalers.

Good resources for investors are the Commercial Section of the U.S. Embassy in Belize (BelmopanCommercialInquiries@state.gov) and the regional U.S. Export Assistance Centers (USEACs) located in the United States. For a complete list of USEACs please visit <https://www.export.gov/locations>.

eCommerce

Assessment of Current Buyer Behavior in Market

Ecommerce sales channels are now being developed in Belize. The eCommerce environment is favorable given the high rate of internet and social media penetration in the country. Approximately 60 percent of the population has mobile connectivity with access to broadband 3G or 4G coverage. Social media, particularly Facebook, is widely used as an eCommerce platform. Other social media like LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter are used to a lesser extent. Additionally, Belize On (<https://belizeon.bz/>) was launched in 2019 as the country's first eCommerce platform.

Government support to online businesses is limited to setting up the legal and financial infrastructure to facilitate electronic transactions. A financial inclusion survey undertaken by the Central Bank of Belize in 2019 showed that approximately 65.5 percent of residents have access to a financial account. The same report found that only 18.1 percent of adults paid bills or made purchases with a debit or credit card.

Local eCommerce Sales Rules & Regulations

Consumer goods are the most popular products purchased online from the U.S. and the rest of the world. A key advantage to purchasing online from the United States is the close proximity to the American market, reliable modes of transportation, and delivery of goods.

Because of its proximity to the United States, online purchases from the United States are commonplace with little to no barriers. Foreign online purchases are charged stamp duties and foreign exchange. This is regulated by the Central Bank and charged to customer's credit card at the time the online purchase.

There are no existing policies on digital/ ecommerce that would impact US online business.

Local eCommerce Business Service Provider Ecosystem

There is no in-country events focused on eCommerce such as business to business conferences.

Selling Factors & Techniques

Overview

Most major importers and wholesalers employ local agents who sell and deliver the product to the retailer. Personal contact with the clientele is always recommended. However, in times of COVID-19, businesses have resorted to social media and mobile advertising. As an English speaking country, it is recommended that advertising materials

be in English. Additionally, all goods for sale in Belize must meet the requirements set by the Belize Bureau of Standards (<http://www.bbs.gov.bz/>).

Trade Promotion and Advertising

There are two annual trade show events held in Belize. The largest, the National Agriculture and Trade Show is organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and is normally held over a weekend in April.

The Expo Belize Market Place trade show is organized by the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the largest private sector organization in the country. The Expo is a two-day event usually held in September. The U.S. Embassy typically has a booth at the Expo where U.S. companies are welcome to participate.

Business advertising in Belize is done mainly through radio, newspapers, magazines, television, social media, and billboards. The following are links to the major local newspapers and television stations:

Newspapers

- Amandala: <http://www.amandala.com.bz>
- The Reporter: <http://www.reporter.bz>
- The Guardian: <http://www.guardian.bz>
- The Belize Times: <http://belizetimes.biz>

Television Stations

- Channel Five: <http://www.channel5belize.com>
- Channel Seven: <http://www.7newsbelize.com>
- Love TV: <http://lovefm.com>
- Plus TV: <http://plustvbelize.com/>
- PG TV: <http://pgtvbelize.com>

Pricing

Certain items, including basic foodstuffs (rice, beans, sugar, bread, and flour), and butane gas are subject to government price controls (Supplies Control (Amendment) Regulations).

The standard rate of the General Sales Tax (GST) has been 12.5 percent since 2010. It is a consumption tax applicable on all commodities. Staple food items such as rice, beans, corn, fresh meat, flour, sugar, eggs, bread, and tortilla are zero-rated for GST, while water, school fees, house rent, insurance, medicine, and hotel rooms are considered exempt goods and services. GST is also applicable on goods and services including internet data service, government contracts, goods and services, as well as to Business Processing Outsourcing companies. For a full listing of zero-rated and exempt goods visit the Department of General Sales Tax website at <http://www.gst.gov.bz>.

Imported products are subject to tariffs such as Import Duties, Cost, Insurance, plus Freight (CIF Value), Revenue Replacement Duties (if applicable), General Sales Tax, and Environmental Tax. Import Duties generally range from zero to 45 percent. A zero percent is applicable to some food items, books and educational material and medicines. Rates of up to 45 percent apply to items such as vehicles, fresh peppers, pepper sauces, live animals, and boats. Many general household products (e.g. grocery and clothing) carry an average import duty rate between 10-20 percent. Items considered luxury commodities, like SUV vehicles, alcohol, cosmetics, or items that compete with domestic industries may range from 70-120 percent. Thereafter Cost, Insurance, plus Freight (CIF Value) is applied as well the 12.5 percent General Sales Tax. An Environmental Tax of 3 percent is also applicable on all imports, excluding some medicines and food items; however, automobiles are charged the Environmental Tax at a rate of 5 percent. For more information, visit www.customs.gov.bz for details on tariff rates and other duties.

The above cost factors should be accounted in establishing appropriate pricing mechanisms in traded products.

Sales Service/Customer Support

Belize generally lacks adequate customer support and after-sales service sectors. After-sales services are limited to business establishments dealing with electronic equipment, such as photocopiers, typewriters, computers, air conditioners, cellular phones, and vehicles.

Local Professional Services

The following references are links to associations in Belize that may be a source of professional information and/or services:

- The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Belize www.icab.bz
- Association of Professional Engineers of Belize www.apebbelize.org
- Association of Professional Architects of Belize www.architectsofbelize.com
- Belize Association of Planners www.belizeplanners.org
- Belize Medical and Dental Association belmedden@gmail.com
- Belize Nurses and Midwives Council www.nursesandmidwivescouncil.com
- Belize National Association of Realtors www.belizenar.org
- Association of Real Estate Brokers of Belize www.arebb.com
- Belize Poultry Association www.belizepoultry.com
- Belize Livestock Association www.belizelivestock.org

Principal Business Associations

The principal private sector business association is the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI, www.belize.org). It has a membership of almost three hundred businesses from a wide cross-section of the agricultural, productive, service and industrial sectors. Since membership is not based on nationality, American businesspersons and businesses are accepted members. The organization seeks to promote the commercial interest of its members through networking and advocating for policy with the Government of Belize.

The Belize Tourism Industry Association (www.btia.org) is the largest tourism-based organization. As an umbrella organization its membership includes smaller tourism associations and other stakeholders from across the industry including tour guides, tour operators, hotels and hospitality, and cruise service providers. Since membership is not based on nationality, American businesspersons and businesses are accepted members.

The Belize Hotel Association (www.belizehotels.org) is comprised by primarily by accommodation providers including hotels, resorts, lodges, condominiums, educational facilities operating in the hospitality industry. Since membership is not based on nationality, American businesspersons and businesses are accepted members.

The Belize Coalition of Service Providers (www.bccsp.org.bz) is an alliance of service sector organizations and associations. BCSP's mandate is to lobby for economic development and trade-in-services issues that impact the services sector. Since membership is not based on nationality, American businesspersons and businesses are accepted members.

Limitations on Selling U.S. Products and Services

Generally, Belize has no restrictions on foreign ownership, control, or participation in companies. Nevertheless, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) wishing to benefit from certain incentives offered by BELTRAIDE, as well as those wishing to establish themselves as tours operators, need to have 51 percent local ownership.

Trade Financing

Methods of Payment

Letters of Credit are the most common form of payment arrangement used by importers in Belize. Local collection agencies operate nationwide and may operate on behalf of the utility companies, town and city councils, and for property tax collection. There are no credit rating agencies in country but efforts are being made to enact legislation related to credit reporting and to establish the financial infrastructure for credit bureaus and a collateral registry.

The Central Bank of Belize (www.centralbank.org.bz) continues to roll out the Automated Payment and Securities Settlement System (APSSS), a system that connects financial institutions in a local network to banks and other authorized institutions to make electronic payments anywhere in Belize.

Non-cash payment instruments include checks, debit cards, credit cards, and direct credits. Three main electronic payment mechanisms are used in Belize, including the POS and ATM networks that facilitate payments by debit card and credit cards; direct credit facilities to make bulk payments such as salaries and pension; and online bill payment facilities. MasterCard and Visa are widely accepted and to a lesser extent American Express.

Persons seeking to open a bank account must comply with Central Bank regulations, which differ based on residency status and whether the individual is seeking to establish a local bank account or a foreign currency account.

For more information about the methods of payment or other trade finance options, please read the Trade Finance Guide available at <https://www.trade.gov/trade-finance-guide-quick-reference-us-exporters>.

Banking Systems

Generally, there are no restrictions on foreigners opening bank accounts in Belize. However, persons seeking to open a bank account must comply with Central Bank regulations, which differ based on residency status and whether the individual is seeking to establish a local bank account or a foreign currency account. Foreign banks and branches are allowed to operate in the country with all banks subject to Central Bank measures and regulations. All banks have regained correspondent banking relations since 2015. These relationships are still tenuous, with delays in transactions, and fewer services offered at higher costs.

Foreign Exchange Controls

The Government of Belize has established currency controls, and foreign investors seeking to convert, transfer, or repatriate funds must comply with Central Bank regulations. Foreign investments must be registered at the Central Bank to facilitate inflows and outflows of foreign currency. Foreign investors must register their inflow of funds to obtain an “Approved Status” for their investment and generally are approved for repatriation of funds thereafter. The Central Bank does, however, reserve the right to request evidence supporting applications for repatriation.

COVID-19 has resulted severe economic challenges to all productive sectors. This has resulted in foreign exchange shortages in the financial systems. Since March 2020, banks have placed limitations on customers’ ability to make credit card purchases and businesses have complained of limited access to foreign exchange to make foreign purchases.

U.S. Banks & Local Correspondent Banks

There are no U.S. banks operating in the market and EXIM bank does not currently have any country specific programs.

Protecting Intellectual Property

Belize is not listed in the most recent USTR’s annual Special 301 Report. It is a member of the World Trade Organization and the World Intellectual Property Organization and as such is party to numerous intellectual property agreements. Nonetheless, counterfeit goods including pirated clothes, cigarettes, CDs, and DVDs are sold throughout the country as well as in the duty free zones. Local authorities detained two 40-foot containers in November 2019

that contained counterfeit NIKE products destined for a Free Zone in the Belize. In an effort to halt IPR infringements, HBO Latin America concluded negotiations with cable operators in March 2019, outlining the terms for local cable providers to legally access the company's entertainment content.

In any foreign market, companies should consider several general principles for effective protection of their intellectual property. For background, link to our article on Protecting Intellectual Property and Stopfakes.gov, or contact ITA's Office of Intellectual Property Rights Director, Stevan Mitchell at Stevan.Mitchell@trade.gov.

Belize's IP Attaché

Cynthia Henderson

U.S. Embassy Mexico City

Paseo de la Reforma 305

Colonia Cuauhtémoc 06500

06500 Mexico D.F

(52) (55) 5080- 2189

Cynthia.henderson@trade.gov

Selling to the Public Sector

Selling to the Government

Belize is not a party to the WTO Agreement on Government Procurement nor is it a party to any U.S. Free Trade Agreement.

The policies and procedures for government procurement are outlined in Belize Stores Orders and Financial Orders issued by the Ministry of Finance. The legal framework and guidelines related to government procurement are available at <http://procurement.gov.bz/>. Despite legislative and regulatory measures, many businesses complain that both major political parties can and do practice partisanship bias that affects receiving licenses, winning government contracts, and the granting of government land to private owners.

Government procurement opportunities exist in a wide array of areas, namely road infrastructure, education, healthcare, environment and consultancies. Belize is part of a Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Public Procurement Notice Board where local procurement above \$30,000 are automatically posted (www.cppnb.caricom.org). As the United States remains Belize's leading trading partner, suppliers of U.S. products and services generally have little difficulty selling to the Government of Belize.

U.S. companies bidding on Government tenders may also qualify for U.S. Government advocacy. A unit of the U.S. Commerce Department's International Trade Administration, the Advocacy Center coordinates U.S. Government interagency advocacy efforts on behalf of U.S. exporters bidding on public sector contracts with international governments and government agencies. The Advocacy Center works closely with our network of the U.S. Commercial Service worldwide and inter-agency partners to ensure that exporters of U.S. products and services have the best possible chance of winning government contracts. Advocacy assistance can take many forms but often involves the U.S. Embassy or other U.S. Government agencies expressing support for the U.S. bidders directly to the foreign government. Consult [Advocacy Center](#) for Foreign Government Contracts and for additional information.

Financing of Projects

Financing projects are generally aimed at alleviating poverty and improving good governance, public health, education, tourism, solid waste management, and major infrastructure for buildings, roads and ports. International development agencies, such as the Caribbean Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the World Bank provide funds for development projects in Belize. The European Union and the Department of

International Development (DFID), OPEC Fund are other key sources of funds for developmental assistance. The Republic of China-Taiwan and Venezuela remain the largest bilateral creditors.

Many governments finance public works projects through borrowing from the Multilateral Development Banks (MDB). A helpful guide for working with the MDBs is the [Guide to Doing Business with the Multilateral Development Banks](#). The Commercial Service maintains Commercial Liaison Offices in each of the main Multilateral Development Banks, including the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the African Development Bank and the World Bank. These institutions lend billions of dollars to developing countries on projects aimed at accelerating economic growth and social development by reducing poverty and inequality, improving health and education, and advancing infrastructure development. The U.S. Commercial Service Liaison Offices in these banks help American businesses learn how to get involved in bank-funded projects and advocate on their behalf to win bids. Learn more by contacting the [Advocacy Liaison for World Bank](#); [Advocacy Liaison Website for Inter-American Development Bank \(IDB\)](#) or [Advocacy Liaison Website for European Bank for Reconstruction and Development](#)

- [World Bank](#)
- [Inter-American Development Bank](#)
- [European Bank for Reconstruction and Development](#)

Business Travel

Business Customs

Foreign businesspeople should not expect to find their Belizean counterparts in suit and tie, but rather business casual for the conduct of official business. Appointments are preferred and punctuality is encouraged and appreciated in business settings. For more information on visiting Belize, its customs, attire, recreational activities, and maps, please visit www.travelbelize.org.

Travel Advisory

Detailed and updated travel information on Belize is available through the U.S. Department of State Consular Information Sheet at <https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/belize.html>.

Due to COVID-19, Belize's land and air borders have been closed for the transit of persons since March 2020. Repatriation of nationals through flights and over land borders have been ongoing via diplomatic efforts. International air travel via the Philip Goldson International Airport is scheduled to reopen October 1, 2020.

Visa requirements

All U.S. citizens must have a U.S. passport valid for the duration of their visit to Belize. U.S. citizens do not need visas for tourist visits of up to thirty days, but they must have onward or return air tickets and proof of sufficient funds to maintain themselves while in Belize.

Visitors for purposes other than tourism, or who wish to stay longer than 30 days, must obtain visas from the Government of Belize. For more information related to visas and permits, please visit the website of Belize's Department of Immigration and Nationality Services, <http://ins.gov.bz/>.

U.S. Companies that require travel of foreign businesspersons to the United States are advised that security evaluations are handled via an interagency process. Visa applicants should go to the following link(s): [State Department Visa Website](#).

Currency

The Belize dollar is pegged at \$2 Belize = \$1 USD. The U.S. dollar is readily accepted at most places of business. Traveler's checks and credit card payments are also accepted but often require valid identification to be presented. ATMs are also available across the country to facilitate local currency cash transactions in.

Telecommunications/Electronics

The telecommunications service providers in Belize charge some of the highest rates in the region. Land line telephone and internet service is relatively good. Voices over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services are available as well. However, the cost of internet in Belize is higher than other Caribbean nations.

Cellular phone service is available country wide. However, poor reception can be experienced travelling through the hills on the Hummingbird and Southern highways, as well as through heavily forested and rural areas. Mobile internet is available on cellular phones. In addition, several hotels offer free wireless internet, while others charge a fee.

The voltage in Belize is 110 V and the plugs used are B or G.

Transportation

International air transportation connections are relatively good between the United States and Belize City, with connecting flights to Atlanta, Charlotte, Dallas, and Newark. Direct flights are generally available to Houston, and Miami. Copa also offers flights to Panama via El Salvador. Due to COVID-19, Belize's land and air borders have been closed for the transit of persons since March 2020. Repatriation of nationals through flights and over land borders have remained ongoing via diplomatic efforts. International air travel via the Philip Goldson International Airport is scheduled to reopen October 1, 2020.

Despite COVID-19, trade in goods continue unimpeded. Marine ports in Belize City and Big Creek in southern Belize handle regularly scheduled commercial cargo from the United States and the UK. The Belize City port suffers from inefficiencies such as having only one berth and frequent tension with stevedores and others. There are two private cruise ship port facilities, one in Belize City and another on Harvest Caye in Southern Belize. For additional details, please see “Distribution and Sales Channels” above.

Traveling by road in Belize can be challenging. Belize’s highways are two-lane paved roads, many with no shoulder but with pedestrian and bicycle traffic and unmarked speed bumps. Most lack adequate markings or reflectors. Even in urban areas, few streets have lane markings, leading many motorists to create as many lanes as possible in any given stretch of road. Portions of the country’s highways become very slick when wet. Reducing travelling speed during these conditions is highly recommended. There are five major highways in Belize (Philip Goldson Highway, George Price Highway, Hummingbird Highway, Southern Highway, and Coastal Highway) and a total of 4,515 km of roads, of which only 791 km are paved. Road and infrastructure improvements are currently a national priority with several major road construction, expansion, and safety projects underway.

Pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles without functioning lights can pose an increased risk of driving at night. Belize is currently implementing a Road Safety Project that will improve inter alia, road safety infrastructure; accident emergency services; road safety enforcement in the municipalities and on the highways; public education and awareness.

The least expensive way to get around in Belize is by public transportation, which is still relatively expensive for the region. Buses and vans are in poor condition, lack safety equipment, and are often slow. There are, however, several auto rental firms, including American franchises, such as Avis, Budget, Hertz, and Thrifty. Traditional taxis are available. There are no trains, ride sharing, or Uber services.

Belize has inexpensive water taxis that travel between the mainland and all major island tourist destinations. There are two major commercial domestic air transportation providers that fly within Belize, one of which also offers flights to destinations in neighboring countries.

Language

The official language is English and is widely spoken. Spanish is the second most common language in Belize. Locals often speak in Belizean Kriol, which is derived from the English language.

Health

Medical care for minor conditions is generally available in urban areas. Trauma care or advanced medical care is limited to the only public tertiary healthcare facility in the country in Belize City. Emergency services, such as ambulances, are seriously limited, even in urban areas. Serious injuries or illnesses often necessitate evacuation to another country. Americans are urged to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling to Belize to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and whether it will cover emergency expenses, such as a medical evacuation. Tourists are strongly encouraged to obtain medical insurance that would pay for medical treatment and medical evacuation before traveling to Belize.

Caution should, of course be exercised, but in general, Belize is safe for travelers in terms of general pollution and hygiene—for example most water is potable, air is free of pollution except for a few weeks in spring when crops and brush are burned to clear land.

Like other countries globally, Belize has not been spared the effects of COVID-19 and its transmission among the general population. While in Belize, tourists are cautioned to being vulnerable to vector borne diseases including dengue, chikungunya, and zika. While the risk of malaria is low in Belize, travelers to certain areas are at higher risk and may need to take extra precautions. They should also be up to date with routine vaccinations such as measles, mumps, rubella (MMR), and to get travel vaccinations for diseases such as hepatitis A and typhoid. The country

suffers from the highest rate of HIV infection in Central America. For further information please see the Center for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov.

Local time, business hours, and holidays

Belize's Standard Time is six hours behind UTC/GMT and Daylight Saving Time is not used.

Normal business hours for the private sector are from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Government offices follow the same schedule except on Fridays, when they close at 4:30 p.m. The one-hour lunch hour is strictly adhered to, but lunch meetings at restaurants were previously common. Note: COVID19-related restrictions have closed restaurants for dine-in service.

Due to COVID-19, business hours have varied based on government regulations and company's desire to open for business. It is advisable to call in advance and confirm opening hours.

Belize's holidays for 2020 are available at <https://publicholidays.bz/2020-dates/>

Temporary Entry of Materials and Personal Belongings

The Belize Customs Department allows temporary entry of certain items into Belize, providing that the items are not modified or transformed while in Belize. Businesspeople traveling with items such as laptop computers and exhibit materials generally do not have any difficulty in getting a temporary permit to bring these items into the country. For details visit www.customs.gov.bz

Investment Climate Statement (ICS)

The U.S. Department of State's Investment Climate Statements provide information on the business climates of more than 170 economies and are prepared by economic officers stationed in embassies and posts around the world. They analyze a variety of economies that are or could be markets for U.S. businesses.

Topics include Openness to Investment, Legal and Regulatory systems, Dispute Resolution, Intellectual Property Rights, Transparency, Performance Requirements, State-Owned Enterprises, Responsible Business Conduct, and Corruption.

These statements highlight persistent barriers to further U.S. investment. Addressing these barriers would expand high-quality, private sector-led investment in infrastructure, further women's economic empowerment, and facilitate a healthy business environment for the digital economy. To access the ICS, visit the U.S. Department of State's [Investment Climate Statement](#) website.

Political Environment

For background information on the political and economic environment of the country, please click on the link to the U.S. Department of State [Countries & Areas](#) website.