

U.S. Country Commercial Guides



Belize
2019

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Doing Business in Belize

Market Overview

Belize covers 8,867 square miles and has an estimated population of 398,050 inhabitants (July 2018 estimate). The country has an open, private sector led economy based primarily on tourism, agriculture, and services.

Tourism remains the nation's largest foreign exchange earner. Arrivals for 2018 registered one of the largest increases for the last decade amounting to 1,697,398 tourists. Overnight tourist stays grew to 489,261, a 14.6 % increase over the previous year. Cruise ship arrivals grew to 1,208,137 visitors, 19.9% more than the previous year. Estimates of annual tourist expenditures is US \$244.85 million and accounts for 38.1% of GDP. The sector is expected to increase further over the next several years with additional airline routes and further investments in hotels like the Hilton Curio, Autograph Collection Marriott, Four Seasons, Wyndham, and Leonardo Di Caprio's Blackadore Caye.

Despite significant decreases in earnings across all major commodities for 2018, the agriculture and agro-productive sectors rank second most important in economic performance. In 2018, this sector continued to face challenges including diseases that reduced production of citrus fruits and shrimp as well as diminished prices for sugar in the European market. Belize's gross exports for 2018 amounted to \$200 million, down 10.5% from \$222.8 million in 2017. The main exports were sugar and molasses (30%), bananas (18.5%), citrus (15.7%), marine products (10.7%), and crude petroleum (6.3%).

As a consumer country that relies heavily on imports, Belize's trade imbalance continues to grow. Belize's gross imports for 2018 totaled \$957.7 million, up from 2017's \$913.2 million. Together machinery & transportation equipment, fuels and lubricants, manufactured goods, food and chemicals account for roughly 60% of all imports into Belize.

For 2018, the United States remained Belize's lead trading partner. The United States remained the Belize's largest importing partner, accounting for 42.5% of overall imports. On the other hand, it is Belize's second largest export destination after the United Kingdom, with 23% of exports or \$45.3 million. Other major trading partners for imports included China, Central America, and Mexico; other major trading partners for exports included the United Kingdom, other European Union countries, and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). For more information visit www.sib.org.

U.S. companies should consider exporting to Belize, 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, terrestrial, and shipping routes. It is the only English speaking country in Central America, has a relatively skilled labor force, and a higher cost of living than neighboring Central American countries with a strong appetite for American consumer products.

Belize continues to have peaceful, democratic elections. On November 4, 2015, the United Democratic Party led by Prime Minister Dean Barrow became the first party since Belize's independence in 1981 to win three consecutive terms in office. Barrow's party won 19 of the 31 electoral divisions with overall voter turnout of approximately 73%. The next national election is scheduled for late 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. The relatively high cost of doing business is in large part due to the high cost of inputs like utilities, fuel and telecommunication services. As of January 2018, prices per U.S. gallon of premium, regular, and diesel were \$5.45, \$5.10, and \$5.15 respectively. The country has not been able to take advantage of electronic commerce, as many of its institutions lack the ability to conduct online operations or process online registrations. Electricity rates are prohibitively 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. In December 2018, the Public Utilities Commission approved an increase of the Mean Electricity Rates (MER) to 21c per kilowatt-hour.

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%. Luxury items like SUV vehicles, alcohol, cosmetics, or items that compete with domestic industries may range from 70 to 120%. Where applicable, Environmental Tax is 3% on imports, excluding some medicines and food items. Automobiles are charged the Environmental Tax at a rate of 5%. Most goods are subject to the 12.5% General Sales Tax. For more information visit <http://www.customs.gov.bz>.

The financial system continues to be categorized as stable but fragile in terms of maintenance of correspondent banking relationships, high borrowing rates, and lack of financing mechanisms available to business. While all banks have current correspondent banking relations, there is still uncertainty with regard to the longevity of those relationships, delay in transactions, and fewer services offered by the correspondent banks at higher costs. Accessing credit remains constrained because of relatively high borrowing rates. The 12-month weighted average interest rates for 2018 were 9.1% on loans and 1.2% on deposits, respectively. Additionally, the country does not yet have an export-import bank able to facilitate transactions of exporters and importers, limiting the ability of domestic producers and businesses to access financing from potential U.S. suppliers.

Complaints of lengthy bureaucratic delays and corruption serve as disincentives to foreign investments. While local courts are empowered to recognize and enforce foreign arbitral awards against the government, judgements 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 land title fraud.

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, strong cultural influences from North America, English as the official language, and easy air transportation and short distance shipping routes to the United States.

The Belize Trade and Investment Development Service (BELTRAIDE) is responsible for promoting investment in Belize's priority sectors. It also maintains statistics and information on establishing new businesses in Belize and manages the Government of Belize's investment concessions and incentives programs. 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, business process outsourcing (BPOs), and renewable energy. BELTRAIDE also 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>.

Tourism remains atop the list of industries of economic importance for Belize as its proximity to the United States, English speaking population, and tropical climate continue to attract tourists in droves. Entrepreneurs consistently seek ways to improve tourism product delivery, tourist safety, and the uniqueness of Belize's tourism product. This reality allows for further investment opportunities in tourism infrastructure and support services, including cruise terminals, hotels, auto rentals, Wi-Fi access, and food 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 and agri-business, 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 beans, rice, citrus, sugar, bananas, corn, and cacao. Value-added agri-business investments are a much needed avenue for agricultural and aquaculture development. The country lacks affordable food packaging and preservation options. Opportunities exist in sustainable energy particularly in biomass, hydro, solar, and waste-to-energy technologies.

The Government continues to expend significant resources in road infrastructure development, particularly in those areas that support the tourism and agriculture sectors. Many public works projects are financed through grant or borrowing from the regional and multilateral development banks and donors.

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, trade licenses must be acquired from the local city or municipal town council.

A 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.

Political Environment

Political Environment

For background information on the political and economic environment of the country, please click on the link below to the U.S. Department of State <https://www.state.gov/countries-areas/belize/>.

Selling U.S. Products & Services

Using an Agent to Sell U.S. Products and Services

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 superior market knowledge and distribution networks. The use of an agent or distributor is not legally required.

Initially, a U.S. exporter generally contacts the potential distributor and gathers as much information as possible regarding years in operation and other product lines distributed. Due diligence is recommended regarding the potential distributor and on market potential for the U.S. product or service.

To find a suitable agent or distributor, an in-country visit may be required 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 throughout the country. For a complete list of USEACs visit <https://www.export.gov/locations>

Establishing a Local 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. All non-residents must obtain prior permission from the Central Bank of Belize for the right to own shares in a Belizean company. Although not necessary, an attorney is usually hired to prepare and submit the necessary Articles and Memorandum of Association. (For a list of attorneys visit <https://bz.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/attorneys/>).

An application to register a company is submitted to the Companies Registry and usually takes seven business days to be processed and approved. 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 International Business Companies (Amendment) Act was passed in December 2018 and 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 required to file annual returns. The International Business Companies Registry is responsible for managing all International Business Company registrations. Their website, <http://www.ibcbelize.com>, provides a comprehensive list of all authorized registered agents capable of incorporating IBCs. Fees vary depending on the number of shares issued by the company.

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 remains rare. Franchising extends to a few well-known brand names, including Radisson, Best Western, and Ramada in the hospitality industry, Coca-Cola in the drink 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, a local agent or representative is hired 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.

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 Agreements. However, 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.

The policies and procedures for government procurement are outlined in Belize Stores Orders and Financial Orders issued by the Ministry of Finance. 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.

Many governments finance public works projects through borrowing from the Multilateral Development Banks. Please refer to "Project Financing" Section in "Trade and Project Financing" for more information.

Distribution & Sales Channels

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 finally (3) the buyer/consumer.

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. (Belize City) or the Port of Big Creek (Stann Creek district). Together these two ports handle around 90% 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. The airlines also air freight into the country but to a lesser extent.

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 petroleum fuel. For additional details, please visit www.bigcreekgroup.com.

There are two other marine ports handling cargo (Puma Energy and WitConcrete) and four marine passenger ports (Fort Street Tourism Village in Belize City, Punta Gorda, Saca Chispas in Ambergris Caye, and Harvest Caye (which opened operations in November 2016).

Express Delivery

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

Selling Factors & Techniques

Most major importers and wholesalers employ local commission agents who sell and deliver the product to the retailer. Personal contact with the clientele is always recommended. 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 (BBS). For detailed information visit <http://www.bbs.gov.bz/>.

eCommerce

Ecommerce sales channels are not well developed in Belize. However, there is a high rate of approximately 60% internet and social media penetration. Most of the population has mobile connectivity with access to broadband 3G or 4G coverage. Additionally, approximately 60% of the population has active social media accounts. Facebook is by far the most widely used social media platform. Other social media like LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter are used to a far lesser extent. Only a small portion of the population (approximately 11%) reportedly has access to a credit card with only 4.8% making online purchases or paying bills online.

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.

Trade Promotion & Advertising

There are two large 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 in Belize typically has a booth at the Expo where U.S. companies are welcome to participate. For more information, please e-mail BelmopanCommercialInquiries@state.gov.

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 (2012 Supplies Control (Amendment) Regulations).

In April 2010, the General Sales Tax (GST) was raised to 12.5%. The tax 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. 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%. The zero is applicable to some food items, books and educational material and medicines. Rates of up to 45% 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%. Items considered luxury commodities, like SUV vehicles, alcohol, cosmetics, or items that compete with domestic industries may range from 70-120%. Thereafter Cost, Insurance, plus Freight (CIF Value) is applied as well the 12.5% General Sales Tax. In 2016, the Government of Belize increased the Environmental Tax from 2% to 3% on all imports, excluding some medicines and food items; however, automobiles are charged the Environmental Tax at a rate of 5%. For more information visit www.customs.gov.bz for details on tariff rates and eligibility. In 2017, the government initiated new tax measures that applied GST on goods and services previously exempted including internet data service, government contracts, goods and services, as well as applicable to Business Processing Outsourcing companies.

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 in Belize are limited to business establishments dealing with electronic equipment, such as photocopiers, typewriters, computers, air conditioners, cellular phones, cars, and trucks.

Protecting Intellectual Property

Belize is not listed in the most recent USTR's annual Special 301 Report. Nonetheless, counterfeit goods including pirated clothes, cigarettes, CDs, and DVDs are sold throughout the country as well as in the duty free zones. 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. Belize acceded to six major Intellectual Property treaties in 2018 that will provide enhanced protection to copyright owners, with added impact on live performers, music producers and broadcasters.

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](#) for more resources.

Belize's IP Attaché

Claudia Rojas

U.S. Embassy Mexico City

Paseo de la Reforma

305 Colonia Cuauhtemoc 06500

Mexico D.F

(52) (55) 5080- 2000

claudia.rojas@trade.gov

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.

At times, an in-country visit and direct meetings may be required to gather sufficient information on facilities, infrastructure, and adequacy of potential agents, distributors, retailers, or wholesalers.

Local Professional Services

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

- Belize Coalition of Service Providers www.bcsp.org.bz
- The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Belize: www.icab.bz
- The Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry: www.belize.org
- The Belize Tourism Industry Association: www.btia.org
- Belize Hotel Association: www.belizehotels.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 local businesses from a wide cross-section of the agricultural, productive, service and industrial sectors. It accepts Belizean and American members and seeks to promote the commercial interest of its members through networking and advocating for policy with the Government of Belize.

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 sized 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% local ownership. Additionally, the importation of certain goods is subject to import permit and import licenses. Please see below, "Customs, Regulations and Standards"

Web Resources

- Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry: <http://www.belize.org>
- Belize Tourism Industry Association: <http://www.btia.org>
- Belize Customs and Excise Department: <http://www.customs.gov.bz>
- Belize Trade and Investment Development Service: <http://www.belizeinvest.org.bz>
- Belize Coalition of Service Providers: <http://bcsp.org.bz/>
- The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Belize: <http://www.icab.bz>
- Belize Intellectual Property Office: <http://www.belipo.bz>

Leading Sectors for U.S. Exports and Investments

Travel and Tourism

Over the past decade, Belize has grown into a prime destination for American tourists and retirees. Tourism continues to reflect robust growth prospects. It contributes approximately 38.1% (\$244.85 million) of GDP and is the country's top foreign exchange and revenue earner. There are several tourism-related opportunities for investment and trade, including in ecotourism, adventure, nature, cruise, and other nautical tourism related activities.

Since 2015, several new tourist routes have opened up, making major destinations in the United States, Canada, and Latin America more accessible and affordable. These include Southwest Airlines routes to Houston, Denver, and more recently, Fort Lauderdale; West Jet Airlines to Toronto; COPA Airlines to Panama; and AeroMexico to Mexico City. In 2016, Norwegian Cruise Line opened its long-awaited cruise port complete with island resorts and shopping as an upscale island destination in Southern Belize. Well known hotel brands have also announced expansion projects into Belize, including Hilton, Wyndham, Marriott, and the Four Seasons.

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, 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 cater 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. Medical tourism is also emerging as a nascent subsector.

Opportunities

Tourism is a very important industry for Belize, with numerous other related economic subsectors. For example, the auto rental and (water) taxis sectors rely on tourists and the farmers and fishermen depend on local restaurants where tourists consume fresh produce.

Several opportunities for investment and trade exist that are 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 Belize becomes more accessible and attractive to international tourists, tourism sub-subsectors are also evolving to meet consumer demands. An increase in cruise ship arrivals is already translating to additional cruise disembarkation facilities. Recently expanded flight connections will mean an increase in construction to meet room capacity demands. Improved standards for accommodations, tourism related services e.g. zip lining will require newer consumer goods and technologies. An increasing eco-mindset and need for infrastructure

to support the tourist areas is also leading to increasing opportunities in renewable energy, waste management, and alternatives to single-use plastic.

Web Resources

- Belize Tourism Board (BTB): <http://www.belize tourismboard.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>.

Agriculture and Agro-processing

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 primarily 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 sub-tropical climate. Sugar, citrus, and banana dominate this sector. Non-traditional sectors include the production of cacao, corn, hot pepper sauces, processed jams, jellies, extracts, and pastes.

Leading Sub-Sectors

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. Some groups are moving toward more efficient farming methods. As these improvements spread, improvements to infrastructure to cope with higher production and exports will become necessary.

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

Food packaging, preservation, and any value-added investments are needed to promote food security and enhance revenues for producers. Belize also needs a modern laboratory to test and validate the nutritional contents of processed food stuffs, fruits, vegetables, sauces, and other by-products for product labels. Currently, producers in Belize send their products to other countries in the Caribbean or in Central America to be tested for nutritional value and contents. This process drives up the cost of bringing products to market and limits the number of producers that can afford such services.

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 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.

Web 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

Offshore Outsourcing

The offshore outsourcing sector is identified as a key sector with continued growth opportunities including in offshore customer service centers, online software management services, information technology outsourcing (ITO), knowledge process outsourcing (KPO) and legal process outsourcing, to name a few. The country's geographic location in both the Central American and Caribbean regions has resulted in a largely bilingual labor force 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%. 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.

Web Resources

- Belize Trade and Investment Development Service: www.belizeinvest.org.bz

Energy

Belize is known as an eco-friendly tourism destination with abundant natural resources and the potential for a variety of sustainable energy projects. Over the last 20 years, Belize has explored more local energy resources to strengthen and stabilize its energy sector. Investments in hydropower and more recently in biomass have opened up the opportunities for greater energy independence. Today, about 35% of the country's total energy supply is generated from indigenous renewable sources. Nonetheless energy costs remain high and untapped opportunities in solar, bio- fuels and waste to energy are becoming more attractive.

Web 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>

Customs, Regulations & Standards

Trade Barriers

In addition to the tariff barriers listed above, the Government also utilizes an Import Licensing Regime to protect the domestic market.

The Belize Bureau of Standards 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, cereals, flour, oil seeds, sugar, 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 Tariff

Tariffs and collection of customs duties and taxes are administered by the Belize Customs and Excise Department. This Department accounts for approximately 50% 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 0 and 45 % with the average rate applied to commodities at 20%. Zero-rated goods include various food items and medicines; while 45% 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%, 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>.

Revenue Replacement Duty (RRD) is not applicable to goods originating from CARICOM countries and locally produced goods and is installed as a cost recovery mechanism for the Government. Rates are applied between 5 and 50% with the majority averaging 20%.

Other taxes on imports include GST and Environmental Tax. GST is applied at a flat rate of 12.5%. Environmental Tax is charged at a rate of 3% on all imports, excluding some medicines and food items; however automobiles are charged at the rate of 2 to 5% 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 & 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/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 labelling 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 labelled 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 labelling standards. Other technical regulations related to labelling are provided for in product specific legislation including labelling requirements for some dairy products; as well as certain alcohol and tobacco products. Labelling of cosmetics and pharmaceutical products is regulated by the Ministry of Health.

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. It should be noted that 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

U.S. export certification is required to export firearms and ammunitions to Belize. This certification can be obtained from the U.S. Department of State and/or the U.S. Department of Commerce.

The U.S. government export controls that companies need to abide by when exporting are included on the the [Consolidated Screening List Search Engine](#) on export.gov [Consolidated Screening](#).

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 & 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, and fuel. Beans and rice, like many other locally produced agricultural products, may not be imported if there is a surplus of these products 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 (<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. A catalogue of Standards currently administered by the Belize Bureau of Standards is also available on their website.

Belize is a member of the CARICOM Regional Organization for Standards and Quality (CROSQ), 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 Programme, and as a member of CARICOM, in the Inter-American Metrology System.

Standards

The Belize Bureau of Standards is the only organization that develops and implements standards in Belize. It develops unique standards and implements regional and multilateral standards.

Testing, Inspection and Certification

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.

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.

Publication of Technical Regulations

The Belize Bureau of Standards 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, member countries of the World Trade Organization (WTO) are 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.

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 & bahasps@btl.net, Website: <http://baha.org.bz>

Political/Economic Officer, Political/Economic Section, U.S. Embassy – Floral Park Road, Belmopan City, Belize, Tel: 011-501-822-4011, Fax: 011-501-822-4012, E-mail: BelmopanCommercialInquiries@state.gov, Website: <https://bz.usembassy.gov>

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.

Trade Agreements

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

Belize is also a member of 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.

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. The BBS 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.bcsp.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 Medical and Dental Association: www.health.gov.bz
- Music Industry Association of Belize: www.nichbelize.org

Web Resources

- Belize Agricultural Health Authority: <http://baha.org.bz/>
- Belize Bureau of Standards: <http://www.bbs.gov.bz>
- Supplies and Control Unit: www.scuapplication.gov.bz
- Belize Department of General Sales Tax: <http://www.gst.gov.bz>
- Belize Customs and Excise Department: <http://www.customs.gov.bz/>
- Belize Ministry of Finance: <http://www.mof.gov.bz>
- Belize Coalition of Service Providers: www.bcsp.org.bz
- The Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry: <http://www.belize.org>
- Belize Tourism Board: www.belizetourismboard.org
- Caribbean Community Official Website: <http://www.caricom.org>
- Central American Integration System (SICA): www.sica.int
- Central American Economic Integration System (SIECA): www.sieca.int
- Organization of American States – Foreign Trade Information System: <http://www.sice.oas.org>
- U.S. Embassy, Belize: <https://bz.usembassy.gov/>
- International Trade Administration, Enforcement and Compliance: <http://trade.gov/enforcement/>

Investment Climate Statement

The U.S. Department of State's Investment Climate Statement, prepared annually by U.S. embassies and diplomatic missions abroad, provide country – specific information and assessments of the investment climate in foreign markets. Topics include: market barriers, business risk, legal and regulatory system, dispute resolution, corruption, political violence, labor issues, and intellectual property rights. The statements are available in two ways:

- Visit the U.S. Department of State's Investment Climate Statement website, <https://state.gov/reports/2019-investment-climate-statements/belize>
- Download the [Country Commercial Guide](#), (the Investment Climate Statement is Chapter 6)

Trade & Project Financing

Methods of Payment

Letters of Credit are the most common form of payment arrangement used by importers in Belize. There are no credit rating agencies operating in country. Local collection agencies operate nationwide and may operate on behalf of the utility companies, town and city councils, and for property tax collection.

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 quickly, safely, and securely anywhere in Belize. This national payment system links financial institutions payments and securities settlements systems and allows for:

- Automated Clearing House (ACH) for processing of retail (small value) transactions,
- Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) for large value transactions
- Securities Settlement System (SSS), and updated legal and regulatory framework.

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 additional information on this topic, including content of relevance to U.S. investments, please visit Department of State [Investment Climate Statements](#).

Banking Systems

For additional information on this topic, including content of relevance to U.S. investments, please visit Department of State [Investment Climate Statements](#).

Foreign Exchange Controls

For additional information on this topic, including content of relevance to U.S. investments, please visit Department of State [Investment Climate Statements](#).

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.

Project Financing

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. Financing projects have generally been aimed at alleviating poverty and improving good governance, public health, education, tourism, solid waste management, and major infrastructure for buildings, roads and ports.

Multilateral Development Banks

Financing Web Resources

The Commercial Service maintains Commercial Liaison Offices in each of the main Multilateral Development Banks, including the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank. These institutions lend billions of dollars in 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 Commercial Liaison Offices help American businesses learn how to get involved in bank-funded projects, and advocate on behalf of American bidders. Learn more by contacting the:

Commercial Liaison Office to the [Inter-American Development Bank](#)

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>.

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 a list of fees applicable during visits, please go to the following link:

<http://www.travelbelize.org>

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 cash transactions.

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 limited primarily to urban areas. 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 direct flights to Atlanta, Charlotte, Dallas, El Salvador, Houston, Newark, and Florida. Since late 2015, Southwest airlines and Copa commenced direct flights to Belize from Houston, Fort Lauderdale, and Panama respectively. AeroMexico opened a direct route to Mexico City in 2018.

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, and 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, even in Belize City; it is extremely limited or unavailable in rural areas. 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.

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 are also advised to be up to date with routine vaccinations such as measles, mumps, rubella, 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 stringently adhered to, but lunch meetings at restaurants are common.

Belize's holidays for 2019 are:

- January 1 New Year's Day
- March 11 National Heroes and Benefactors Day (in lieu of Saturday, March 9)
- April 19 Good Friday
- April 20 Holy Saturday
- April 22 Easter Monday
- May 1 Labor Day
- May 27 Sovereign's Day/ Commonwealth Day (in lieu of Friday, May 24)

- September 10 St. George's Caye Day (National Day)
- September 23 Independence Day (in lieu of Saturday, September 21)
- October 14 Pan American Day(in lieu of Saturday, October 12)
- November 19 Garifuna Settlement Day
- December 25 Christmas Day
- December 26 Boxing Day

Temporary Entry of Materials or 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.

Travel Related Web Resources

- Belize Tourism Board – Travel Guide: www.travelbelize.org
- State Department Visa Website: http://travel.state.gov/visa/a_zindex/a_zindex_2911.html
- State Department Bureau of Consular Affairs:
http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1055.html
- United States Embassy – Belize: <https://bz.usembassy.gov>
- Belize Customs and Excise Department: www.customs.gov.bz
- Center for Disease Control: www.cdc.gov