An adventurer's paradise, Belize is a peaceful, English-speaking country just two hours away from 3 major U.S. Gateways. Getting to Belize is easy with several airlines offering scheduled daily flights. With a diversity of adventure opportunities unmatched by any other country, the Belizean people have protected over 40% of the country as parks and natural reserves.

Belize is located on the Caribbean coast, nestled between Mexico and Guatemala and offers an intriguing mix of tropical forests rich with wildlife, majestic mountains, mysterious Maya temples, and diving and fishing experiences beyond comparison. In a single day, one can go from tropical forest to the longest barrier reef in the Western Hemisphere.

Belize is a great place for a family vacation regardless of the ages of family members. With diverse activities available on one vacation, it is usually possible to satisfy the individual needs of most members of a group. What's more, most Belize hotel accommodations and tour operators have specially designed packages for family travel whether it be a family with babies and young children, or teenagers; travel with a parent, or the family reunion that combines several generations.

Best of all, the people are as warm and friendly as the climate.

Belize is located in the Northern Hemisphere, within Central America.

Where is Belize? Belize is bounded on the North by Mexico, South and West by Guatemala, and the beautiful Caribbean Sea washes its 174 mile coastline to the East.

Geographically we're located between 15° 52' 9" and 18° 29' 55" North Latitude, and 87° 28"

A Brief History of Belize

The history of Belize can be divided in four major periods. Following is a very brief synopsis of these periods.

Belize, Central America - http://www.belize.com
The Maya

Archaeologists estimate that at their peak, 1 to 2 million Mayas lived within the borders of present day Belize. Mighty Maya cities such as Caracol, Xunantunich and Lamanai, dotted the landscape, with small agricultural communities farming the land between. The Maya civilization is divided into the Pre-Classic (1000 BC to AD 300), the Classic (AD 300 to 900) when the civilization reached its height of development, and the Post-Classic (AD 1000 to 1500) when the civilization fell apart.

European Presence After The Maya

Christopher Columbus sailed along the coast of Central America in 1502, and named the Bay of Honduras which borders the southern part of the barrier reef.

The first European settlers in Belize were English Puritans, setting up trading posts along the coast of Belize. But we must never forget that they came after the Maya, whose wonderful civilization and the treasures they left here is what attracts most visitors to Belize. Various bands of ship-wrecked sailors, buccaneers, and pirates established permanent bases in Belize, stealing from the Spanish galleons carrying treasure of gold, silver, and hardwoods from Central America to Europe.

This band of rugged individuals took to calling themselves "Baymen" after the Bay of Honduras. Spain continually attempted to expel these British buccaneers from then Spanish territory, but finally signed treaties in 1763 and 1786 allowing the British to continue to harvest timber in exchange for protection against pirates preying on the Spanish galleons.

Colonial Period

During the 1840's, Great Britain declared Belize to be the colony of British Honduras. Development of Belize became more organized and multiethnic through a series of cultural changes. Hispanics from the Yucatan settled in Corozal and Orange Walk, British Honduras in 1847 following the outbreak of the Guerra De Las Castas in Mexico, joining relatives and Maya Indians who had been settled here since 1519. The European settlers began to marry freed slaves forming the Creoles. In Southern Belize, the Kekchi and Mopan Maya sought refuge in the hills of the Maya Mountains. A small band of Confederate Civil War veterans settled in what is now Punta Gorda, Toledo. And from the Bay Islands of Honduras, the Garifuna people migrated and settled along the coast of Belize.

Early Twentieth Century To Present
By the early 1900's, Belize had grown to nearly 40,000 inhabitants. (The Belize Population today is much bigger but still quite small compared to other countries!) But a destructive 1931 hurricane destroyed Belize City and by the 1930's, the economy was so poor that the residents began to call for independence. By 1954 voting rights were extended to all adults, and by 1961, England agreed to begin the process of setting Belize free.

In 1973, the colony's name was changed from British Honduras to Belize and on September 21, 1981, Belize's Independence was declared.

Tourist Activities

For the outdoor enthusiast and adventure traveler, Belize presents unlimited opportunities to participate in a wide range of sightseeing, cultural, and outdoor activities. Areas such as the Placencia Peninsula offer a wide range of beach, reef and tropical rainforest experiences all in one package. You might say that Belize is the outdoors. Listed below are some popular activities in Belize.

Scuba And Snorkeling

"...Belize is one of the western Caribbean's premiere dive destinations..." - Skin Diver magazine

This statement could be amended to say premiere diving destination in the world. Indeed, Belize's barrier reef has been named a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Water visibility commonly reaches 100 + feet; water temperature hovers around 80 degrees Fahrenheit; and the barrier reef makes for calm water most of the year.

Windsurfing

With 174 miles of protected coastline, Belize is the perfect place to enjoy the cutting-edge water sports of windsurfing, parasailing, kiteboarding, jet skiing, and aqua biking. Belize is at the forefront of the latest trends as new action sports appear on the scene.

For water enthusiasts, the Cayes have it all. Flat water created by the reef and the constant onshore/side-shore winds that provide an ideal location for the beginner to try a first lesson or take a course. Runs of 10 miles plus are possible on either tack; perfect for practicing waterstarts and carve gybes. The water below is so clear that you can see fish and stingrays and it is not unusual to see dolphins as you pass. For more experienced windsurfers, there are several wave sites, and of course, access to the swells of the big blue.

Clear waters average a comfortable 75 to 84 °F while favorable winds blow February through June. During these months the trade winds run at 12 to 20 knots and above, 70 % of the time.
Throughout the rest of the year, expect winds around 6 knots. The mean annual temperature of Belize is 80 °F.

**Fishing**

Belize is a mecca for those interested in fishing. All kinds of sport fishing - spin, fly, trolling - can be experienced all year long, and the abundance of game fish guarantees excellent sport.

The estuaries, inlets and mouths to the many rivers are known for their tarpon, snook and jack. The lagoons and flats are known for the bonefish, permit and barracuda. The coral reefs support grouper, snapper, jack and barracuda while the deeper waters off the drop off are home to sailfish, marlin, bonito and pompano.

Fishing is great all along the coast of Belize, from the Port Honduras and Punta Icacos lagoon of Toledo to Rocky Point on Ambergris Caye. Any of the many rivers which empty into the Caribbean along Belize's coasts can guarantee a daily catch.

**Birding**

The species and variety of birds of Belize visible to viewers varies, and is contingent on the natural habitat in which a person is looking. With 66% of the country still forested, Belize is home to more than 600 identified species of birds, with an average of five new species discovered each year. As viewers often spot 50 species in a single outing, be sure to keep your eyes open and your binoculars in hand. Whether on a remote island, along the coast, on a jungle walk, or in the backyard of a hotel, visitors are bound to encounter spectacular plumage, stirring calls, and the steady drumming of a hummingbird's wings.

Belize's national parks provide excellent locations to observe birds. Of special interest would be:

- Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary (Stann Creek District)
- Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary (Belize District)
- Mountain Pine Ridge (Cayo District)
- Five Blues Lake National Park (Cayo District)
- Mayflower Bocawina National Park (Stann Creek District)
- St. Hermans Blue Hole National Park (Cayo District)

**Caving**

Belize is an ideal location for the formation of caves. With limestone throughout much of the interior and a seasonal and a wet climate, caves are a common feature in the landscape of Belize.

Caving can be a dangerous sport; it is advisable to consult a trustworthy resource before exploring any cave on your own. Because of their isolated
location, many caves in Belize have not been thoroughly explored.

Caves that are safe and easy to visit include:

Che Chem Ha Cave – Cayo, Rio Frio Cave - Mountain Pine Ridge, St. Herman's Cave - Hummingbird Highway, Barton Creek Cave – Cayo, Blue Creek Cave – Toledo, Ben Loman's Cave - Manatee Lagoon, Actun Tunichil Muknal Cave - Cayo

Though there are thousands of caves in Belize, many are closed to public exploration so as to protect their archaeological significance.

**Getting Around Belize**

Travel within Belize is safe, fast, and reliable. Planes and buses transport passengers throughout the country daily and a number of agencies have vehicles available for rent. Details regarding these travel options throughout Belize are outlined below.

**Public Transport**

The least expensive way to get around Belize on a day to day basis is by bus. Incidentally, this is also the cheapest way to get to Belize. As buses are the primary mode of transportation for most Belizeans, routes run on regular schedules and will stop to pick up or drop off passengers at most any location along the way. Every bus operates with a driver and a conductor. Luggage and bags are handled by the conductor.

He or she will also come to passengers while the bus is in transit to collect the fare. As bus “stations” move about and schedules shift slightly through the year, visitors will find these logistical details answered most accurately by any taxi driver or most any person on the street.

Belize City and the City of Belmopan (capital of Belize) serve as central hubs for bus transportation. While buses travel to and from each town and district several times daily, many of the more remote villages see only one bus out and one bus in each day.

**Driving Around Belize**

Many locations within Belize cannot be accessed without the use of a private vehicle. Whether in a taxi, tour van, or in a personal rental, the freedom of four wheels will add significantly to what visitors are able to see while driving around Belize. If you choose to rent a car, travel in a sturdy
four-wheel drive vehicle and follow a map to find the Maya sites or other destinations you are looking for.

*Belize Map* Above Shows Belize with its location in Central America, and its six districts.

We invite you to come and enjoy the many aspects of Belize that make our country truly unique. Our artisans are excited to share their intricate crafts. Our chefs want you to taste their freshly prepared traditional dishes of delicious *Belizean Cuisine* – be sure to try the national dish Rice and Beans. Our dancers and musicians are eager to perform especially for you.

So whether it is for our reefs, forests, history or culture, Belize welcomes you to explore! Visit us again and again for countless vacation experiences and a lifetime of memories.

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**Belize, Central America -** [http://www.belize.com](http://www.belize.com)