



Travel Facts

Dancing in Hopkins



GETTING THERE

Many international airlines now service Belize on a daily basis, thus most people come in through the quaint Phillip SW Goldson International Airport (BZE). Four major US airlines and local carriers all use this airport, which is 9 miles (16km) out of town and you fly in over the lowland plain along the coast. Most airlines connect in the US through Houston, Dallas, Miami and Los Angeles.

To hop around from caye to caye, connecting flights are available at the international airport and also the Municipal Airport (TZA), which has flights almost on the hour to most of Belize's major towns and resorts. Tropic Air and Maya Air are the main local carriers. It

is worth noting that if you are trying to connect in the late afternoon, the local flights only go in and out in the daylight hours, so you could get stuck in Belize City overnight if you cut it too close or your international flight comes in late. Schedule accordingly.

For divers, it is best to pre-arrange a package with a hotel and dive shop. This will include transfers and usually airport pickup as well, and cuts down on the headaches of making travel arrangements and assures a confirmed seat.

GETTING AROUND

The first thing that greets the visitor to Belize, once past the smooth process at Customs and Immigration, is porters demanding you not take your luggage cart outside to the cab area. If you're not quick, they'll grab your bags and carry them the few steps outside to a cab, insisting on a fee of US\$2 a bag 'or more if you wish'. No hotels send courtesy vans to meet guests. Expect US\$25 for the cab ride into town.

Many tours and travel options can be arranged through the hotels and various agencies. The local cab drivers are an entrepreneurial bunch and charge reasonable rates to sites of interest around town. Most will give you a business card and take you on personalized tours at the going rate, which can be a fun way to see things if you get the right driver/guide. Taxis are found in the city and some of the larger towns. Many aren't adverse to working long hours and can take you out to dinner after a day of diving or greet you at the municipal airport for a ride to your hotel.

Many of the cayes are small and walking is the quickest way to explore.

Some resorts also have complimentary pedal bikes or charge reasonable rates.



ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Both adults and children require valid passports beyond the length of stay and a return ticket or some proof of exit transport from Belize.

Citizens of the US, European Union, UK Commonwealth and most Caribbean countries do not require visas if they have a passport and return ticket. Most other nationalities require a visa. The length of stay normally granted is one month, after which visitors must get an extension.

British embassies frequently handle Belize's diplomatic affairs. There is a US Embassy in Belize City.

TIME

Belize is in zone GMT-6, the same as the US Central Standard time zone. Belize does not change time for Daylight Saving.

MONEY

The Belizean Dollar (BZ\$) is the country's official currency but most travelers use US dollars which are fixed to the BZ\$ at a rate of roughly BZ\$2 to US\$1. This is pretty much the norm but varies a bit at hotels and banks. Most tourist-oriented businesses accept major credit cards traveler's checks and cash. There are ATMs around the city but many are only for local Belize banks. It is best to have some cash for purchases on the cayes and in the local shops in Belize City and the smaller towns in the country.

TAX

Sales tax ('value-added tax') runs at 8% and there's a 9% hotel tax on rooms, meals and drinks.

The airport departure tax for international departures is US\$35. A lesser tax applies to local flights, which is usually part of the ticket price. Roughly 12% of it goes to conservation projects.

ELECTRICITY

All electricity in Belize and Central America is 110 volts AC (60 Hz). Sockets have two parallel blades, or the parallel blades and a round ground pin. Those with 240-volt chargers or appliances will need a converter or transformer as well as a travel adapter. Live boards and a few hotels and dive shops have both power source receptacles.

WEIGHTS & MEASURES

Both imperial and metric weight and measure systems are used. For divers, depths are registered in feet and weights in both pounds and kilos. See our quick conversion scale on the back inside cover.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Email outlets and Internet cafes are becoming increasingly prevalent. Many hotels have computer centers and business centers, and a few even have wireless daily packages. Email and Internet providers have recently upgraded servers and service is reasonably fast and reliable.

For phone calls, international calls are usually easily made from most hotel rooms. The Belize country dialing code is 501 for those calling in.

DigiCell Temporary Cellular service is available to tourist and visitors who want short-term cellular service. For instance, a customer can rent a Digi-



Cell phone from BTL or bring their own GSM 1900 band phone and purchase a PrePaid Sim pack from any DigiCell distributor countrywide. Rental of DigiCell phone is available only at BTL's Airport Customer Services Center.

POSTAL

Postcards can be mailed from the local post office or your hotel gift shop or front desk. Local word is that the postal service is not overly reliable or fast for anything bigger than a postcard. Rely on FedEx or DHL if you are sending anything valuable or something that needs a timely delivery. The post office located in downtown Belize offers EMS mailing, which is fairly fast, trackable and reliable. You will have to pay for some small EMS preparation charges and also find a box to post your items in as the post office doesn't sell shipping materials.

Private postal businesses advertise packing and shipping services, but don't sell new boxes for shipping. If you do it yourself, you have to dig one up.

Shell & Coral Products

The taking of shells, corals and natural artifacts is largely prohibited in Belize. Still, items using shells and marine creatures, like black coral, can be found. These can often be seen in the form of products like bracelets and earrings. Please discourage the creation of these products by not purchasing such items and letting store-owners know that you disapprove of seeing these items on the shelves.

If you are offered a wildlife product or natural item for sale, ask questions about the product's origin. If the vendor seems poorly informed, think twice about purchasing the item, otherwise, your purchase could encourage continued illegal trade in wildlife, and be confiscated on your return home.

When in doubt, don't buy and don't take. Leave it. Officials are quick to point out that anyone violating Belize's marine environment ordinances is subject to prosecution and fines. If in doubt, leave without.



ACCOMMODATION

There are hotels for every budget and desire – from secluded beach or mountain retreats owned by filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola to modest homestays with local folks. If you have pricey equipment with you, it is usually best to seek out the more upscale hotels to avoid security problems.

Average Room Prices

Low	US\$1-45
Mid	US\$45-120
High	US\$120-300
Deluxe	US\$300+

DINING & FOOD

Mayan and Creole recipes abound and many seafood dishes are featured in the local cuisine. Local dishes include rice and beans concoctions, cow foot soup, Caribbean flavors like grilled lobster with melted butter, fancy *flautas*, and a diced ceviche.

Nightfall also offers bar life in Belize City or along San Pedro's shoreline with tasty appetizers and exotic rum drinks. The smaller villages also have nice eateries, usually within a hotel.

Average Meal Prices

Low	US\$5-10
Mid	US\$15-25
High	US\$25-55

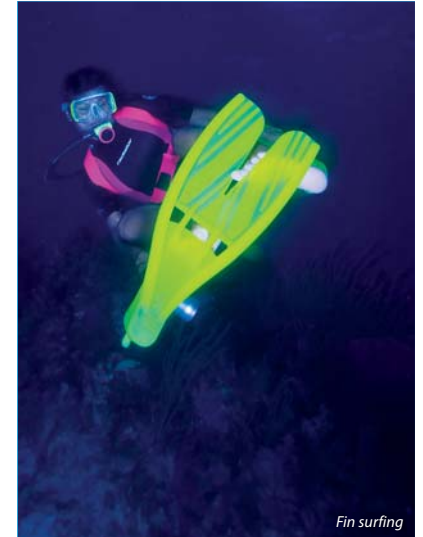
SHOPPING

Belize has lots to offer so take the time to look around for some uniquely Belizean souvenirs. The gift shops around Belize offer the usual fare of T-shirts and embroidered ball caps. There are some great local crafts as well, including colorful jungle paintings. Woven baskets are found in the Maya sections of the country as well as hand-embroidered ponchos and blankets. Some impressive carvings of marine creatures

really appeal to divers. Mahogany and stunning ziricote wood is used. These can be found in handicraft stores and from beachside vendors.

Papagayo Gift Shop in the Biltmore Hotel in Belize City has a tempting selection of customized jewelry, post cards and Belize books.

Rum and edibles made with rum are also big sellers.



Fin surfing

ACTIVITIES & ATTRACTIONS

There are plenty of things to do in Belize besides dive. Belize boasts an intricate network of trails – most with abundant wildlife – presenting a range of physical challenges, from easy to rigorous. Trails can be found in national parks, resorts, private lands, archaeological sites – even underground.

Birding is especially rewarding here as is visiting the historical sites. Oddly, some of the best bird watching takes place in and around Belize City. The mangroves, beaches, rivers, streams and plain attract over 200 species to the area alone, many migratory. The forests are also full of colorful and endemic birds.



There are also river adventures. Until just a few decades ago, Belize's waterways were its primary means of transportation. Today, they still provide a powerful way of experiencing Belize. The Belize River is the main waterway, entering the nation from Guatemala and winding 175 miles east through Belize City.

Caving is an art form here. Many of Belize's caves house truly ancient Mayan artifacts. Others boast tremendous caverns with splendid crystal formations. Some caves have rivers that run through them, and others have entrances only sport divers can tackle (that's another book!).

Extreme adventure enthusiasts also choose to travel to Belize for its excellent rock climbing. Both novice and expert rock climbers can scale the outside of Maya caves and repel back to the ground. Instruction and gear is available.

SAFETY

While the country is considered generally quite safe, Belize actually has a high rate of violent crime, with a murder rate six times that of the US. Much is confined to Belize City, but armed robbery (and, to a lesser extent, sexual attacks) on tourists are increasingly common in the Mountain Pine Ridge area and

around the ruins near the Guatemala border.

Modern-day coastal trafficking in drugs and weapons continues here, so night-time travel is best approached with caution, if at all. When traveling by taxi, hire only cars with official green license plates that have only the driver and no one else aboard.

Tourism folks, especially in the city, are working on the crime and safety image. A tourism police force now patrols the heavily touristed areas and the regular cops are also more visible than in the past. Use common sense. Don't flash the big bucks, get too inebriated or leave your SLR camera sitting around, and you'll be fine.

TOURIST OFFICE

The Belize Tourism Board (BTB; ☎ 1-800-624-0686; PO Box 325, Belize City, Belize) is located at Lower Flat, New Horizon Building, 3½ Miles Northern Highway, Belize City.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Reef Fish Identification: Florida Caribbean Bahamas by Paul Humann and Ned DeLoach (New World Publications).

Reef Coral Identification and Reef Creature Identification by Paul Humann and Ned DeLoach (New World Publications).



Listings



Belize City at sunset

The dive operators in Belize are working to create a unified standard and high level of training for divemasters and boat captains. Personalized service is also coming to the fore. Thus, the chances of getting a poor or unsafe service are much less than they were a decade ago, but it's still your hard-earned holiday time and money. Get satisfactory answers about the operation you are planning to dive with, including the type of equipment, boat, and its maintenance, the divemasters, insurance coverage, cost of diving, ratio of divemasters and divers in the water, details of the travel agent you are booking with and any other details that may be important.

Check the Internet as well. Most of the better dive operators have websites with extensive information about their businesses and Belize diving in their section of the country. Send plenty of emails.

Belize's recent boom in tourism and the popularity of scuba diving means there are also a few shoestring operations where proper training and equipment maintenance is a secondary concern. For your own safety, peace of mind, value for money and quality of holiday, it pays to be a wise consumer in Belize and anywhere else in the diving world. Usually you get what you pay for. If a deal may seem too good to be true, it probably is.

AMBERGRIS CAYE

Gaz Cooper's Dive Belize

San Pedro, AC
 ☎ 011-501-226-3202
www.divebelize.com

Aqua Dives Belize Ltd

Barrier Reef Drive, San Pedro, AC
 ☎ 011-501-226-3415/3222/3882
www.aquadives.com

Amigos Del Mar

Beach Front, San Pedro, AC
 ☎ 011-501-226-2706
www.ambergris.com/amigosdive/index.html

Hustler's Tours

Beach Front, San Pedro, AC
 ☎ 011-501-226-2279/2538
www.ambergriscaye.com/hustler

Blue Hole Dive Center

Barrier Reef Drive, San Pedro, AC
 ☎ 011-501-226-3776
www.bluedive.com

Bottom Time Dive Shop

Beach Front, San Pedro, AC
 ☎ 011-501-226-2348
www.banyanbay.com

Coral Beach Dive Shop

Barrier Reef Drive, San Pedro, AC
 ☎ 011-501-226-2817
www.ambergriscaye.com/coralbeach

Adventures In Watersports

Barrier Reef Drive, San Pedro, AC
 ☎ /Fax: 011-501-226-3706
www.adventureswatersports.com

Excalibur Tours

59 Barrier Reef Drive, San Pedro, AC
 ☎ 011-501-226-3235
www.ambergriscaye.com/Excalibur

Serious Adventures

3 Angel Coral Street
 San Pedro, AC
 ☎ /Fax: 011-501-226-2690
 Email: serious@btl.net

Submariner Belize-Journeys

End Dive Shop
 North San Pedro, AC
 ☎ 011-501-226-4165
www.submarinerbelize.com

Paradise Dive Shop

San Pedro, AC
 ☎ 011-501-226-2797
 Email: paradive@btl.net

Patojo's Scuba Center

San Pedro, AC
 ☎ 011-501-226-2283
www.ambergriscaye.com/tides

Ramon's Village Dive Shop

Coconut Drive, San Pedro, AC
 ☎ 011-501-226-2071
www.ramons.com

Travel & Tour

San Pedro Town, AC
 ☎ 011-501-226-2031/2137
 Email: travltour@btl.net

Discovery Divers

Barrier Reef Drive, San Pedro, AC
 ☎ 011-501-226-2882/2883
 Email: discovery@btl.net

Fantasea-Victoria Dive Shop

Beach Front, San Pedro, AC
 ☎ 011-501-226-2576
www.ambergriscaye.com/Fantasea

CAYE CAULKER

Belize Diving Services

Caye Caulker, Belize District
 ☎ 011-501-22-2143
 Email: bzdiveserv@btl.net

Frenchies Diving Service

North Side, Caye Caulker
 ☎ 011-501-22-2234
 ☎ 505-898-9184
www.belizenet.com/frenchies

Caye Caulker Tours

Caye Caulker Village
 ☎ 011-501-22-2174
 Email: hicacotour@btl.net

Sea Belize

Dangriga Town, Stann Creek

☎ 011-501-5-37376

Email: jhall@btl.net

Dolphin Bay Travel

Front Street, Caye Caulker

☎ 011-501-22-2214

Email: t-travel@btl.net

OFFSHORE ISLANDS**Blue Marlin Lodge**

15 Mahogany Street, Dangriga Town

☎ 011-501-5-22243

www.bluemarlinlodge.com

Second Nature Divers

Dangriga Town, Stann Creek

☎/Fax: 011-501-5-37038

Email: divers@btl.net

PLACENCIA**Aquatic Adventures**

Placencia Village

☎ 011-501-6-23182/24005

Email: glenmar@btl.net

Islands Adventure Ltd

Dangriga Town, Stann Creek

☎/Fax: 011-501-5-23328

www.hamanasi.com

Toadal Adventure Belize

Placencia Village

☎ 011-501-6-23207

Email: debanddave@btl.net

Email: pelicanbeach@alt.net

Kitty's Place

Placencia Village

☎ 011-501-6-23227

☎ 011-501-6-23226

www.kittysplace.com

Rum Point Divers

Placencia Village

☎ 011-501-6-23239

☎ 011-501-6-23240

www.rumpoint.com

Nautical Inn

Placencia Village

☎ 011-501-6-23595

www.nauticalinnbelize.com

Singing Sands Inn

Placencia Village

☎/Fax: 011-501-6-22243

Email: ssi@btl.net

Roberts Grove Ltd

Placencia Village

☎ 011-501-6-23566

Email: frackman@btl.net

Kevin Modera Guide System

Placencia Village

☎ 011-501-6-23243

Email: info@kevinmodera.com

Serenity Resort

Placencia Village

☎ 011-501-6-23232

Email: serenity@btl.net

Serenade Island Resort Ltd

Placencia Village

☎ 011-501-6-23163

Email: serenade@btl.net

STANN CREEK**Bahia Laguna Beach Resort**

Seine Bight Village, Stann Creek

☎ 011-501-6-24081

Email: bahialaguna@btl.net

Jaguar Reef Lodge

Hopkins Village, Stann Creek Dist

☎ 011-501-6-24081

Email: jaguarreef@btl.net

International Zoological Expeditions

South Water Caye, Stann Creek Dist.

☎/Fax: 011-501-5-37076

www.ize2belize.com

Hamanasi Dive & Adventure Tours

P.O. Box 265, Dangriga, Stann Creek

☎/Fax: 011-501-5-12073/877-552-3483

www.hamanasi.com

Pelican Beach Tours

Dangriga Town, Stann Creek

☎ 011-501-5-22044

Email: pelicanbeach@alt.net

BELIZE CITY**Hugh Parkey Belize Dive Conection**

Belize City, Belize

☎ 011-501-2-34526

www.belizediving.com

Radisson Fort George Hotel

Marine Parade, Belize City

☎ 011-501-2-33333

www.radissonbelize.com

Discovery Expedition

Belize City, Belize

☎ 011-501-2-30748

Email: discovery@btl.net

OUTER CAYES**Lighthouse Reef Resort**

Lighthouse Caye, Belize

☎/Fax: 011-501-2-31205

www.scubabelize.com

Turneffe Island Lodge

Turneffe Island, Belize Dist

☎/Fax: 011-501-21-2011

Email: turneff@btl.net

Turneffe Flats

P.O. Box 1676, Belize Dist.

☎/Fax: 011-501-21-2046

Email: tflats@rapidnet.com

Glover's Reef

Dangriga Town, Stann Creek

☎ 011-501-5-12016

Email: gloves@btl.net

Serenity Resort

Placencia Village

☎ 011-501-6-23232

Email: serenity@btl.net

Serenade Island Resort Ltd

Placencia Village

☎ 011-501-6-23163

Email: serenade@btl.net

PUNTA GORDA**Sea Hunt Adventure Ltd.**

P.O. Box 107, Punta Gorda

☎/Fax: 011-501-7-22845

Email: seahunt@btl.net

Tide Tours

P.O. Box 150, Punta Gorda

☎/Fax: 011-501-7-22274

Email: tidetours@btl.net

St. George's Lodge

P.O. Box 625, Belize City

☎/Fax: 011-501-2-12121

☎ 800-678-6871

Email: sglbelize@btl.net

Saddle Caye South Ltd.

South Stann Creek

☎ 011-501-6-23434

Email: scsltd@btl.net

Manta Resort

Glover's Atoll, Stann Creek

☎ 011-501-2-31895/206-463-1943

Email: info@mantaresort.com

Blackbird Caye Resort

Seashore Drive, Buttonwood Bay

☎ 011-501-2-32764/305-969-7946

Email: dive@blackbirdresort.com

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