**Belize Facts and Culture**

* [Food and Recipes:](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Belize/recipes.htm) Rice and beans are a staple for many meals. The main meal is eaten at midday. Creoles call dinner "tea". ... [More](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Belize/recipes.htm)
* [Family:](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Belize/family.htm) Many men father a number of children by several women and many young Belizean women become single mothers. Most marriages... [More](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Belize/family.htm)
* [Fashion:](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Belize/fashion.htm) The country is a melting pot of many races and over the years the multi-racial make-up has risen through the... [More](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Belize/fashion.htm)
* [Visiting:](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Belize/visiting.htm) When one visits a home, it is polite to hail the occupants from the gate or street until they come... [More](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Belize/visiting.htm)

**Belize Facts**

Belize stats

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Capital | Belmopan |
| Government Type | parliamentary democracy and a Commonwealth realm |
| Currency | BZD |
| Population | 334,297 |
| Total Area | 8,867 Square Miles 22,966 Square Kilometers |
| Location | Central America, bordering the Caribbean Sea, between Guatemala and Mexico |
| Language | English (official), Spanish, Mayan, Garifuna (Carib), Creole |

Map of Belize



**Belize Geography**

**Terrain and geography**

Belize is located along Central America’s eastern coast, bordered to the north by Mexico, to the west and south by Guatemala and to the east by the Caribbean Sea. It measures 175 miles north to south and 69 miles across at its widest point.

The savannas of northern Belize are flat and dry compared to the rest of the country (receiving only 50 inches of rain a year). The primary source of income for the predominantly Mestizo population there is sugarcane. South and westward, the hilly inland terrain is more forested, including some remaining stands of mahogany. Next is the Mountain Pine Ridge range, with pine-covered peaks of over 3,000 feet that enjoy cool nights year-round. To the south are citrus plantations, fishing, and rainforests where the annual rainfall increases to 120 inches. The Mayan Indian and Garifuna inhabitants subsist primarily upon small-scale farming and fishing.

Much of the coastline consists of either dense growths of mangrove habitats, or broken, low-lying and narrow sandy shoreline. Belize City itself rests upon filled mangrove forest, with an elevation that is actually a foot below sea level.

The central Belize District is the most populated of six and is predominantly Creole. Economic activity centers around commerce and some light manufacturing.

Belize’s barrier reef is the second largest in the world, running some 150 miles, nearly the entire length of the coast, featuring three of the Caribbean’s four atolls. Small islands or cayes (pronounced keys) abound in the crystal-clear waters of the reefs.

**Geography - note**

only country in Central America without a coastline on the North Pacific Ocean

**Belize Geography**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Geographic Location | Central America |
| Total Area | 8,867 Square Miles 22,966 Square Kilometers |
| Land Area | 8,805 Square Miles 22,806 Square Kilometers |
| Water Area | 62 Square Miles 160 Square Kilometers |
| Land Boundaries | 321 Miles 516 Kilometers |
| Irrigated Land | 12 Square Miles 30 Square Kilometers |
| Border Countries | Guatemala 266 km, Mexico 250 km |
| Coastline | 240 Miles 386 Kilometers |
| Geographic Coordinates | 17 15 N, 88 45 W |
| Terrain | flat, swampy coastal plain; low mountains in south |
| Highest Point | 1,160 Meters |
| Highest Point Location | Victoria Peak 1,160 m |
| Lowest Point Location | Caribbean Sea 0 m |
| Natural Resources | arable land potential, timber, fish, hydropower |
| Time Zone | UTC-6 (1 hour behind Washington, DC during Standard Time) |

**Belize Weather and Climate**

**Climate and Weather**

Belize's subtropical climate is hot and humid most of the year. In Belize City, the average daily temperature is 85°F, but the daytime high is often in the 90s between May and October, with uncomfortably high humidity. Dry season runs from January through April. Heavy rains begin in June and can continue through December. Mosquito outbreaks are a perennial result. From March to November, a fairly steady breeze makes the heat in Belize City less intolerable. The coolest period is December to February, when the average daily temperature is only 75°F. During this period, night temperatures can drop into the upper 50s. Tropical storms and hurricanes can occur from June through November. In 1931 and 1961, hurricanes devastated Belize City.

**Belize Environmental Issues**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Climate | Belize's subtropical climate is hot and humid most of the year. In Belize City, the average daily temperature is 85°F, but the daytime high is often in the 90s between May and October, with uncomfortably high humidity. Dry season runs from January through April. Heavy rains begin in June and can continue through December. Mosquito outbreaks are a perennial result. From March to November, a fairly steady breeze makes the heat in Belize City less intolerable. The coolest period is December to February, when the average daily temperature is only 75°F. During this period, night temperatures can drop into the upper 50s. Tropical storms and hurricanes can occur from June through November. In 1931 and 1961, hurricanes devastated Belize City. |
| Terrain | flat, swampy coastal plain; low mountains in south |
| Natural Resources | arable land potential, timber, fish, hydropower |
| Natural Hazards | frequent, devastating hurricanes (June to November) and coastal flooding (especially in south) |
| Irrigated Land | 12 Square Miles 30 Square Kilometers |
| Environmental Issues | deforestation; water pollution from sewage, industrial effluents, agricultural runoff; solid and sewage waste disposal |
| Environment - International Agreements | party to: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Wetlands, Whaling   signed, but not ratified: none of the selected agreements |

**Belize Medical Information**

Medical care for minor ailments is generally available in urban areas. Trauma care or advanced medical treatment is limited, even in Belize City or Belmopan, and may be extremely limited or unavailable in rural and remote areas. Pharmacy services are generally good in larger towns; many medications such as antibiotics which are available only by prescription in the U.S. can be obtained over-the-counter from licensed pharmacists. However, more specialized prescription medications may be completely unavailable. U.S. citizens bringing their own prescription medications with them must ensure they carry a current doctor’s prescription for each medication.  
  
In much of the country, emergency services will be either unavailable or delayed and serious injuries or illnesses often require evacuation to another country. The Embassy strongly suggests visitors obtain traveler’s insurance and medical evacuation coverage in advance of their travel to cover unexpected medical emergencies.  
  
Dengue Fever: The Government of Belize reported that Dengue fever has quadrupled in 2013 compared to previous years. In 2012, there were cases of Dengue fever, but no deaths were reported. In 2013, over 600 suspected cases were reported, but only 20 were confirmed by laboratory. According to the WHO (World Health Organization), no hemorrhagic cases were reported. Neighboring countries are on high alert, including in Honduras where a state of emergency has been issued.

**Belize Health Information**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Health Expenditures (% of GDP) | 5.7% |
| Death Rate/1,000 population | 5.93 |
| Obesity- adult prevalence rate | 33.7% |
| Hospital Bed Density/1,000 population | 1.1 |
| Physicians Density/1,000 population | .83 |
| Infant Mortality Rate/1,000 population | 20.82 |
| Infant Mortality Rate- Female/1,000 population | 18.23 |
| Infant Mortality Rate- Male/1,000 population | 23.3 |
| Underweight - percent of children under five years | 6.2% |
| Total Fertility Rate | 3.08 |
| Contraceptive prevalance rate (female 15-49) | 55.2% |
| Maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births | 53 |
| HIV Adult Prevalence Rate | 2.3% |
| HIV Aids Deaths | 100 |
| HIV Aids People Living With | 4,800 |
| Drinking Water Source: unimproved | 0.7% |
| Drinking Water Source - percent of rural population improved | 100% |
| Drinking Water Source - percent of urban population improved | 98.4% |
| Sanitation Facility Access: unimproved | 9.5% |
| Sanitation Facility Access - percent of urban population improved | 94.2% |
| Sanitation Facitlity Access - percent of rural population improved | 87.6% |
| Major Infectious Diseases - degree of risk | high |
| Food or Waterborne Disease (s) | bacterial diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever |
| Vectorborne Disease (s) | dengue fever and malaria |

**Belize Crime**

**Crime Information**

Much of the violent crime in Belize occurs on the south side of Belize City, home to several street gangs. Belizean officials in November 2012, in an attempt to control the security situation in these areas, invoked a “declaration of crime infested areas” under the Belizean law that allows for law enforcement and security forces to conduct warrantless searches of personnel and property in these “crime ridden” areas. Organized crime beyond street gangs is primarily connected to drug trafficking or trafficking in persons. Incidents of crime remain high, including violent crimes such as armed robbery, home invasions, shootings, stabbings, murders, and rapes. The Embassy has noted an increase in crimes against tourists at resorts and on the roads and river ways. U.S. citizens are primarily the victims of opportunistic crime. There is no evidence suggesting criminals specifically target U.S. citizens, but nonetheless, foreigners have been targeted for crime due to their perceived wealth. Incidents of crime (such as theft, burglary, home invasion, purse-snatching, and pick-pocketing) increase during the winter holidays and during spring break. Several victims who resisted when confronted by criminals received serious injuries, including gunshot wounds and broken limbs. Although the majority of reported incidents occur in Belize City, particularly southern Belize City, crime may occur anywhere including in tourist destinations such as San Pedro Town (Ambergris Caye), Caye Caulker, San Ignacio, Dangriga, Corozal, and Placencia.  
  
Violent crime has risen steadily in Belize over the past several years. In 2012, Belize recorded 145 murders, setting a new record for homicides in the country, nearly 15% higher than 2011. With a population of only 312,698 according to the 2010 country census, the extremely high murder rate per capita of 46 homicides per 100,000 residents, makes Belize the sixth most dangerous country in the world, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. While the country’s per capita homicide rate is still lower than that of other Central American countries, such as Honduras and El Salvador, its year-on-year increase is of concern.  
  
The majority of homicides in 2012 occurred in the Belize district, with most in the southern portion of Belize City, an area that has become increasingly violent due to ongoing gang warfare between local groups for control of lucrative narcotics smuggling routes and sales rights. Tourists have not been targeted in this recent increase in the murder rate, but armed robberies of tourists remain a possibility at archeological sites, national parks, and other areas frequented by visitors. In recent years there has been an increase in the number of robberies, home invasions, and daytime assaults committed across Belize. It does not appear that the perpetrators have targeted tourists; the victims are mostly Belizeans who were targets of opportunity. Violent crime has remained low in the tourist areas.Though some notable murders have occurred, including the widely-publicized murder of a U.S. citizen on San Pedro, Ambergris Caye.  
  
Crime Threats: We encourage U.S. citizens to exercise caution and good situational awareness in all their travel activities. Visitors to tourist attractions should travel in groups and remain at the main plazas at Maya ruins and the central areas. Although there are armed guards stationed at many of the archeological sites, armed criminals have been known to prey on persons walking alone or in small groups from one site to another. While many victims of theft are unharmed and only robbed of personal belongings and cash, victims who resist assailants have suffered injury, sometimes serious. U.S. citizens who become victims of a robbery should report it immediately to the nearest police station and notify the Embassy.  
  
The Embassy recommends that visitors travel in groups and only during daylight hours. Avoid wearing jewelry or carrying valuable or expensive items. As a general rule, valuables should not be left unattended, including in vehicles, in hotel rooms, or on the beach. Care should be taken when carrying high value items such as cameras. Women’s handbags should be zipped and held close to the body. Men should carry wallets in their front pants pocket. Large amounts of cash should always be handled discreetly.  
  
Economic Crimes and Drugs: The reporting of financial crimes committed against patrons of tourists destinations in Belize increased in 2012. There were several reported instances of credit card fraud against patrons or resorts and other local establishments. It is believed that several credit card fraud rings are currently active in Belize.  
  
“Confidence scams” also occur in Belize, especially in resort areas. While there is no indication U.S. citizens are specifically singled out because of their nationality, tourists in general are particularly vulnerable to these crimes, resulting in visitors being pick-pocketed or robbed. More serious crimes have included armed robbery, physical assault, and being swindled out of large sums of money from fraudulent real estate and land sales or other business deals.  
  
There have been reports of fraud committed against expatriates who have attempted to purchase land in Belize. Many expats have reported being the victim of scams in which land is purchased that wasn’t available, or land was purchased that was legally owned by other parties. It has been reported that Belizean authorities have not been proactive in investigating these crimes and enacting measures to ensure that they do not occur in the future. There have also been several reports of tourists being “set up” or solicited to purchase illegal drugs. The tourist is then arrested. Most are fined and then released, but visitors should be aware that they could be sent to prison to await trial, and, if convicted, could serve their sentence in Belize, in accordance with Belize’s strict laws on illegal narcotics. Marijuana and other recreational drugs are illegal in Belize and police aggressively target drug consumers in sting operations.  
  
Drug use is common in some tourist areas, but U.S. citizens should not buy, sell, hold, or take illegal drugs under any circumstances. Belize classifies marijuana or ganja (i.e., cannabis) as an illegal drug for which a conviction of possession of even small amounts could result in heavy fines or imprisonment. Belize does not recognize the medical use of marijuana as permitted in some U.S. states, and U.S. citizens can be charged, fined, or serve time in jail for possession of an illegal substance.  
  
Don’t buy counterfeit and pirated goods, even if they are widely available. Not only are the bootleg items illegal in the United States, if you purchase them you may also be breaking local law.   
  
Firearms: Possession of a firearm or ammunition requires a license from the Government of Belize. The government recently tightened its restrictions on possession of guns and ammunition. Residents and tourists found by Belize law enforcement to be in the possession of such items without a license may be sentenced to a prison term in Belize, and several U.S. citizens are in prison for what would be considered a small amount of ammunition in the U.S.  
  
Sex Crimes: Sexual harassment and/or assault of persons traveling alone or in small groups have occurred in recent years. In recent years, there were a handful of sexual assaults on U.S. citizen women after leaving night clubs, and even during daylight hours while walking with friends and while cycling alone on isolated stretches of local highways.  
  
A lack of resources and training impedes the ability of the police to effectively investigate sex crimes and apprehend serious offenders. As a result, a number of crimes against U.S. citizens in Belize remain unresolved.

**Belize Penalties for Crime**

**Criminal Penalties**

While you are traveling in Belize, you are subject to Belize’s laws even if you are a U.S. citizen. Foreign laws and legal systems can be vastly different than our own. Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than in the United States for similar offenses. Belize law enforcement reserves the right to hold any individual for up to 48 hours to verify identity and conduct other security checks prior to a formal arrest at which time the Embassy would be given consular access to that U.S. citizen. Persons violating Belize’s laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested, or imprisoned. Penalties for possessing, using, or trafficking in illegal drugs in Belize are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines.  
  
Belize has strict laws making possession of a firearm, ammunition, or anti-ballistic body armor illegal unless a valid permit is obtained. Penalties for firearms violations are severe. U.S. gun licenses or permits have no validity in Belize. Engaging in sexual conduct with children, using or disseminating child pornography in a foreign country, including Belize, is a crime, prosecutable in the United States, under the Protect Act. U.S. law requires that all sex offenders notify U.S. law enforcement authorities of any travel outside of the U.S.  
  
Persons illegally present in Belize may face a sentence of imprisonment of up to 6 months if they are unable to pay the fine imposed by a court.  
  
The U.S. Embassy does not have the jurisdiction to resolve legal cases on behalf of U.S. citizens.  
Consular access for U.S. citizens who are detained or arrested is uniformly good. If you are arrested in Belize, the Belize arresting officials are required to notify the U.S. Embassy of your arrest. To ensure that the United States is aware of your circumstances, request that the police or prison officials notify the U.S. Embassy, Belmopan as soon as you are arrested or detained overseas.

**Belize Life Expectancy**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Life Expectancy At Birth | 68 Years |
| Life Expectancy At Birth- Female | 70 Years |
| Life Expectancy At Birth- Male | 66 Years |
| Median Age (female) | 21 Years |
| Median Age (male) | 21 Years |
| Median Age | 21 Years |

**Belize Literacy**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Predominant Language | English (official), Spanish, Mayan, Garifuna (Carib), Creole |
| Literacy Definition | age 15 and over can read and write |
| Literacy Female | 94.1% |
| Literacy Male | 94.1% |
| Literacy Total | 76.9% |

**Belize Education**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Education Expenditures - percent of GDP | 6.6% |
| Literacy - female | 94.1% |
| Literacy - male | 94.1% |
| Literacy - total population | 76.9% |
| Literacy Definition | age 15 and over can read and write |
| School Life Expectancy - female | 14 Years |
| School Life Expectancy - male | 13 Years |
| Total School Life Expectancy - (primary to tertiary) | 14 Years |

**Belize Government and Politics**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Government Executive Branch | chief of state: Queen ELIZABETH II (since 6 February 1952); represented by Governor General Sir Colville YOUNG, Sr. (since 17 November 1993)   head of government: Prime Minister Dean Oliver BARROW (since 8 February 2008); Deputy Prime Minister Gaspar VEGA (since 12 February 2008)   cabinet: Cabinet appointed by the governor general on the advice of the prime minister from the General Assembly   elections: the monarchy is hereditary; governor general appointed by the monarch; following legislative elections, the leader of the majority party or the leader of the majority coalition usually appointed prime minister by the governor general; prime minister recommends the deputy prime minister |
| Legislative Branch | bicameral National Assembly consists of the Senate (12 seats; members appointed by the governor general - 6 on the advice of the prime minister, 3 on the advice of the leader of the opposition, and 1 each on the advice of the Belize Council of Churches and Evangelical Association of Churches, the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Belize Better Business Bureau, and the National Trade Union Congress and the Civil Society Steering Committee; to serve five-year terms) and the House of Representatives (31 seats; members are elected by direct popular vote to serve five-year terms)  elections: House of Representatives - last held on 8 March 2012 (next to be held in 2017)  election results: percent of vote by party - UDP 50.4%, PUP 47.5%, other 2.8%; seats by party - UDP 17, PUP 14 |
| Judicial Branch | Supreme Court (the chief justice is appointed by the governor general on the advice of the prime minister); Court of Appeal; Privy Council in the UK; member of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ); Summary Jurisdiction Courts (criminal) and District Courts (civil jurisdiction) |
| Regions or States | 6 districts; Belize, Cayo, Corozal, Orange Walk, Stann Creek, Toledo |
| Political Parties and Leaders | National Alliance for Belizean Rights or NABR; National Reform Party or NRP [Cornelius DUECK]; People's National Party or PNP [Wil MAHEIA]; People's United Party or PUP [John BRICENO]; United Democratic Party or UDP [Dean BARROW]; Vision Inspired by the People or VIP [Paul MORGAN]; We the People Reform Movement or WTP [Hipolito BAUTISTA] |
| International Law Organization Participation | has not submitted an ICJ jurisdiction declaration; accepts ICCt jurisdiction |

**Belize Economy Data**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| GDP - Gross Domestic Product | $3,083,000,000 (USD) |
| GDP - official exchange rate | $1,637,000,000 (USD) |
| GDP - real growth rate | 2.5% |
| GDP Per Capita | $8,800.00 (USD) |
| GDP by Sector- agriculture | 13% |
| GDP by Sector- Industry | 23% |
| GDP by Sector- services | 64% |
| Population Below Poverty Line | 43% |
| Inflation Rate | 4.1% |
| Labor Force | 120,500 |
| Labor Force By Occupation- agriculture | 10.2% |
| Labor Force By Occupation- industry | 18.1% |
| Labor Force By Occupation- services | 71.7% |
| Unemployment Rate | 13.1% |
| Fiscal Year | 1 April - 31 March |
| Annual Budget | $370,500,000 (USD) |
| Budget Surplus or Deficit - percent of GDP | 3.5% |
| Taxes and other revenues - percent of GDP | 25.1% |
| Major Industries | garment production, food processing, tourism, construction |
| Industrial Growth Rate | 1.4% |
| Agriculture Products | bananas, coca, citrus, sugar; fish, cultured shrimp; lumber; garments |
| Currency Code | Belizean dollar (BZD) |
| Child Labor - % of children ages 5-14 | 40% |
| Child Labor - # of children ages 5-14 | 27,751 |
| Commercial Bank Prime Lending Rate | 11.8% |

**Belize Economy**

**Economic Overview**

In this small, essentially private enterprise economy the tourism industry is the number one foreign exchange earner followed by cane sugar, citrus, marine products, bananas, and garments. The government's expansionary monetary and fiscal policies, initiated in September 1998, led to GDP growth of 6.5% in 1999, 10.8% in 2000, 4.6% in 2001, and 3.7% in 2002. Major concerns continue to be the sizable trade deficit and foreign debt. A key short-term objective remains the reduction of poverty with the help of international donors.

**Belize Exports**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Exports | $404,000,000 (USD) |
| Major Exports | sugar, bananas, citrus, clothing, fish products, molasses, wood |
| Top Export Partners | Mexico 68.3%, US 12.6%, UK 7.1% |

**Belize Imports**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Imports | $740,000,000 (USD) |
| Major Imports | machinery and transport equipment, manufactured goods; fuels, chemicals, pharmaceuticals; food, beverages, tobacco |
| Top Import Partners | Mexico 69%, US 12%, Netherlands Antilles 2.3% |

**Belize Natural Resources**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Oil Exports- Barrels Per Day (bbl/day) | 4,345 |
| Oil Reserves- Barrels Per Day (bbl/day) | 6,700,000 |
| Oil Consumption- Barrels Per Day (bbl/day) | 7,044 |
| Electricity Production- Kilowatt Hours (kWh) | 213,500,000 |
| Electricity Consumption- Kilowatt Hours (kWh) | 198,500,000 |
| Electricity Imports- Kilowatt Hours (kWh) | 248,400,000 |

**Belize Flag**

Blue and red are the colors of the ruling and opposition parties. The 50 leaves in the wreath symbolize 1950 when the independence movement began. The two men supporting the mohogany tree represent racial diversity.

**Belize Flag Description**

blue with a narrow red stripe along the top and the bottom edges; centered is a large white disk bearing the coat of arms; the coat of arms features a shield flanked by two workers in front of a mahogany tree with the related motto SUB UMBRA FLOREO (I Flourish in the Shade) on a scroll at the bottom, all encircled by a green garland

Belize flag



**Belize National Anthem Lyrics**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Anthem Lyrics English | O. Land of the Free by the Carib Sea, Our manhood we pledge to thy liberty! No tyrants here linger, despots must flee This tranquil haven of democracy The blood of our sires which hallows the sod, Brought freedom from slavery oppression's rod, By the might of truth and the grace of God, No longer shall we be hewers of wood Arise! ye sons of the Baymen's clan, Put on your armour, clear the land! Drive back the tyrants, let despots flee - Land of the Free by the Carib Sea!  Nature has blessed thee with wealth untold, O'er mountains and valleys where prairies roll; Our fathers, the Baymen, valiant and bold Drove back the invader; this heritage hold From proud Rio Hondo to old Sarstoon, Through coral isle, over blue lagoon; Keep watch with the angels, the stars and moon; For freedom comes tomorrow's noon. |

**Belize Interesting Facts**

* About 1/3 of the country's population lives in Belize City.
* Belize is home to the second longest barrier reef in the world second only to that of Australia.

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**History of Belize**

Although Belize is located on the mainland of the Americas, the country more closely resemble the English-speaking islands of the Caribbean than their Latin American neighbors. Christopher Columbus passed near the coast, but later Spanish explorers and settlers ignored the areas because they lacked the mineral riches that brought the Spanish to the New World. The wealth would prove to be not gold but agriculture. By the end of the eighteenth century, the indigenous populations had been greatly reduced or driven to remote areas, and the coastal lands held growing populations of British or Dutch plantation owners. Plantation work was labor intensive, and initially African slaves, then other ethnic groups, were imported to work the land. As the colonies expanded economically, Britain claimed formal sovereignty, but title to each colony remained contested.

The twentieth century saw a shift in political power from the old plantocracy to a new nonwhite middle class, a rising self- consciousness among the various ethnic groups, and a slow evolution toward independence. Formal ties to Britain eventually were broken, but, like their anglophone Caribbean neighbors, Guyana and Belize today still strongly bear the mark of their colonial heritage. They retain their British institutions, their use of the English language, their economies based on agriculture, and their societies composed of a complex ethnic mix often divided along racial lines.

Unlike the great civilizations of Middle America that left monuments and records for archaeologists to decipher, the early societies in Guyana were relatively simple, nomadic cultures that left few traces. Early Spanish records and linguistic studies of the Caribbean reveal only a broad outline of pre-Columbian events. We do know that several centuries before the arrival of the Europeans, the Arawak moved north from Brazil to settle and farm the area along the northeast coast of South America before expanding farther north onto the Caribbean islands. Shortly before the arrival of the Europeans, the aggressive, warlike Carib pushed into the area and largely destroyed Arawak society.

Because of the warlike Carib and the region’s apparent lack of gold or silver, the Spanish ignored the northeastern coast of South America. Settlement by Europeans would wait until 1616, when a group of Dutch arrived to establish a trading post. The Dutch soon realized the agricultural potential of the swampy coastal land and aggressively set out to drain the coast using a vast system of seawalls, dikes and canals. What had been swampy wasteland decades before, soon turned into thriving sugar plantations.

The development of agriculture brought rapid change to the colony. Because the plantation economy needed labor, the Dutch imported African slaves for the task. The growing economy also attracted the attention of the British, and British settlers from neighboring Caribbean islands poured into the three Dutch colonies established along the coast. By the late 1700s, the new British settlers effectively controlled the colonies. Formal control by Britain would come in 1814, when most Dutch colonies were ceded to Britain after the Napoleonic wars.

In 1838 Britain completed the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire, and the problem of obtaining cheap and plentiful labor arose anew. The planters first sought to attract Portuguese, then Chinese, workers, but both groups soon left plantation work. Concerned that the decline in labor would ruin the sugar-based economy, the planters finally contracted laborers from India to work the sugar fields. Large numbers of indentured workers poured into British Guiana in the late 1800s. Although theoretically free to return after their contract period had expired, most East Indians remained, adding a new ethnic group to the colony’s mélange of Africans, Europeans, and Amerindians.

The twentieth century saw a rising consciousness among the country’s ethnic groups and a struggle for political power between the new, disenfranchised, nonwhite middle class and the old plantocracy. Economic changes gave momentum to the growing call for political changes. The country saw rice production, dominated by the Indo-Guyanese (descendants of East Indians), and bauxite mining, dominated by the Afro-Guyanese (descendants of Africans), grow in importance, whereas sugar growing, controlled by the European plantation owners, declined. The British colonial administration responded to demands for reform by establishing universal suffrage in 1950 and allowing the formation of political parties.

The People’s Progressive Party (PPP), the country’s first political party, quickly became a formidable force. The PPP was formed by two men who would dominate Guyanese politics for decades to come: Cheddi Jagan, a Marxist Indo-Guyanese, and Linden Forbes Burnham, an Afro-Guyanese with leftist political ideas. A new constitution allowing considerable self-rule was promulgated in 1953; in elections that year the PPP, headed by Jagan, won a majority of seats in the new legislature. The new administration immediately sought legislation giving the labor unions expanded power. This legislation and the administration’s leftist rhetoric frightened the British colonial authorities, who suspended the new government after only four months.

Conflict with the British was not the only problem facing the PPP. Personal rivalries between Jagan and Burnham and growing conflict between the Indo-Guyanese and the Afro-Guyanese widened into an open split. In 1957 Burnham and most of the Afro-Guyanese left the PPP and formed the rival People’s National Congress (PNC). The two parties shared left-wing ideologies; the differences between them were largely based on ethnicity.

The British promulgated a new constitution in 1957. Elections in that year and in 1961 resulted in more PPP victories. Under the new constitution, considerable power resided in the hands of the governor, who was appointed by the British. The PPP administration headed by Jagan was therefore unable to implement most of its radical policy initiatives. The Marxist rhetoric, however, intensified.

Convinced that independence under a PPP administration would result in a communist takeover, the British authorities permitted and even encouraged a destabilization campaign by the opposition PNC. Antigovernment demonstrations and riots increased and in 1963 mobs destroyed parts of Georgetown, the capital. When labor unrest paralyzed the economy, British troops were called in to restore order. In the midst of the unrest the government scheduled new elections in 1964.

Voting along ethnic lines again gave the PPP the largest number of seats in the legislature. But the rival PNC, by allying itself with a small business-oriented party, was able to form a coalition government. Jagan had to be forcibly removed as prime minister, and in December 1964 Burnham assumed the post. Under the new administration, events stabilized, and independence was set for May 26, 1966.

The independent Guyana inherited by the PNC was one of the least-populated and least-developed countries in South America. Located on the northeast coast of the continent just north of the equator, the Idaho-sized country is wedged among Venezuela, Brazil, and Suriname (former Dutch Guiana). More than 90 percent of the population lives within five or six kilometers of the sea. This coastal plain, constituting only 5 percent of the country’s total area, was originally low swampland but was transformed by the Dutch into the country’s most productive agricultural land. Inland from the coastal plain lies the white-sand belt, site of most of Guyana’s mineral wealth of bauxite, gold, and diamonds. Farther inland are the interior highlands, consisting of largely uninhabited mountains and savannahs.

Guyana’s ethnic mix at independence, still the same in 1993, consisted primarily of Indo-Guyanese--about half the population-- and Afro-Guyanese--slightly more than 40 percent of the total. Smaller numbers of Amerindians, Asians, and Europeans completed Guyana’s ethnic mélange. More than two-thirds of the population was Christian, with significant Hindu and Muslim minorities. Established by the British, the school system has resulted in high literacy rates (more than 90 percent).

The small military, the Guyana Defence Force, existed primarily as a deterrent to Venezuela’s territorial claim. Venezuela’s claim to the western three-fifths of Guyana, a dispute that dated from the colonial era, was thought to have been settled by arbitration in 1899. When later evidence showed that one of the judges had been influenced to vote against Venezuela, that country declared the arbitration settlement invalid and in the 1960s aggressively pursued its territorial claim on western Guyana. This border dispute was to flare periodically after Guyana’s independence.

The first years of PNC administration after independence saw Prime Minister Burnham vigorously establishing control over Guyana’s political and economic life. The 1968 elections were won by the PNC, despite charges of widespread fraud and coercion of voters. As the government’s control over the country’s political institutions increased, Burnham began nationalizing industries and financial institutions. In 1970 Guyana was declared a "cooperative republic," and government control of all economic activity increased. The 1973 elections were considered the most undemocratic in Guyana’s history, and by 1974 all organs of the state had become agencies of the ruling PNC.

In the late 1970s, a number of events increased opposition to the Burnham regime. The economy, which had grown immediately after independence, began to contract because of nationalization. In addition, in 1978 negative international attention was focused on Guyana when more than 900 members of the People’s Temple of Christ led by Jim Jones committed mass murder and suicide at their community in western Guyana. As opposition to the government increased, the government responded by violence against opposition members and meetings. The authoritarian nature of the Burnham government caused the loss of both foreign and domestic supporters.

A new constitution was promulgated in 1980, shifting power from the prime minister to the new post of executive president, but the political and economic situation continued to decline. Government programs had been financed by increasing the foreign debt, but in the early 1980s, most foreign banks and lending organizations refused further loans. The quality of life deteriorated: blackouts were frequent, and shortages of rice and sugar, Guyana’s two largest crops, appeared. In 1985 in the midst of this turbulence, Burnham died while undergoing throat surgery.

Vice President Hugh Desmond Hoyte became the country’s new executive president. He had two stated goals: to secure political power and revitalize the economy. Establishing political control was easy. The PNC chose Hoyte as its new leader, and in the 1985 elections the PNC claimed more than 79 percent of the vote. Economic growth, however, would require concessions to foreign lenders. Hoyte therefore began to restructure the economy. An economic recovery plan was negotiated with the belize/bz\_glos.asp#International"> International Monetary Fund (see Glossary) and the belize/bz\_glos.asp#World">World Bank (see Glossary) allowing for new loans in exchange for free-market reforms and reversal of the Burnham administration’s nationalization policies. To win favor with Western governments and financial institutions, Hoyte also moderated the previous administration’s leftist tilt in international relations.

The results of economic reform were slow to appear, but by 1990 the economy began to grow again. The last legitimate date for new elections was December 1990. Sensing, however, that the PNC might be able to win a fair election (and thus regain a measure of international respect) if the economy continued to improve, the government invoked a clause in the constitution allowing elections to be postponed a year. Seeing a chance for an honest election, a group of Guyanese civic leaders created the Elections Assistance Board (EAB) to monitor the upcoming elections. The EAB appealed to the Carter Center in Atlanta for international support in its effort.

Despite threats and intimidation, in July 1991 the EAB conducted a door-to-door survey to verify voter lists. When the lists were shown to be grossly inaccurate, the Hoyte administration, under pressure from the EAB and the international community, declared a state of emergency and agreed to postpone the elections until October 1992 and implement a series of reforms suggested by the Carter Center. The reforms included appointment of a new election commissioner and agreement that the ballots be counted at polling centers in view of poll watchers instead of being taken to government centers and army bases for tallying.

The election date was finally set for October 5, 1992. Hoyte based the PNC campaign on the improving economy, which he credited to his free-market reforms. The PPP, still headed by Jagan after forty-two years, renounced its past Marxist policies and embraced elements of a free-market economy. In a reversal of decades of racial politics, Jagan attempted to downplay the country’s ethnic polarization by naming an Afro-Guyanese, Sam Hinds, as his running mate.

Monitored by an international team of observers headed by United States former President Jimmy Carter, election results gave an alliance of the PPP, the smaller Working People’s Alliance (WPA), and the United Force (UF) 54 percent of the vote, and the PNC, 45 percent. These results translated into thirty-two seats in the National Assembly for the PPP, thirty-one seats for the PNC, and one apiece for the WPA and the UF. Foreign observers certified the elections as "free, fair, and transparent." The PNC conceded defeat on October 7 and, after twenty-eight years, stepped down from power. Following brief consultations, the PPP formed a coalition government with the WPA and the UF (named the PPP-Civic coalition) and named Jagan executive president.

Two days of rioting and looting in Georgetown and Linden in eastern Guyana followed announcement of the election results. By the time the army and police restored order, 2 demonstrators had been killed and more than 200 injured. Many analysts attributed the violence to the fear that a PPP government would mean fewer economic benefits for the Afro-Guyanese population. Former President Carter, however, stated that the violence was localized and the looting unrelated to the voting.

In a radio broadcast on October 13, Jagan outlined the direction of the new government. He stated his intention to build a political consensus that cut across ethnic lines and to continue the privatization policies of his predecessor. Analysts speculated that the new administration would have difficulty in getting measures approved by the National Assembly and would face strong opposition from the PNC-dominated military and civil service. Election observers noted also the need to lower racial tension in a society that some characterized as one of the most racially divided they had witnessed. The motto on the Guyanese coat of arms proudly proclaims "one people, one nation, one destiny." In 1993, however, this motto remained a distant goal.

The history of preindependence Belize parallels in many ways the history of Guyana. Unlike the pre-Columbian inhabitants of Guyana, however, the Maya in Belize left majestic ruins of their civilization. Remains of the earliest settlers of the area date back at least to 2500 B.C. By 250 A.D. the classic period of Maya culture had begun; this period of city-building lasted for more than 700 years. During this time, the Maya built big ceremonial centers, practiced large-scale agriculture using irrigation, and developed writing and a sophisticated calendar. Around the tenth century, evidence suggests that the great cities were abandoned, perhaps because of increased warfare among the city-states, revolt of the peasants against the priestly class, overexploitation of the environment, or a combination of these and other factors. Even though the great ceremonial centers were left to decay, the Maya continued to inhabit the region until the arrival of the Europeans.

The first European settlers in the area were not Spanish but English. Although Christopher Columbus passed through the area on his fourth voyage to the Americas in 1502, Spanish explorers and settlers ignored the region because it lacked gold. English pirates roaming the Caribbean in the seventeenth century began establishing small camps near the Belize River to cut logwood, from which a black dye was extracted. Logwood extraction proved more profitable than piracy, and the English settlements on the Caribbean coast grew.

The Spanish sent expeditions throughout the eighteenth century to dislodge the British settlers. The British were repeatedly forced to evacuate but returned shortly after each attack. Several treaties in the late 1700s recognized the British settlers’ right to extract logwood but confirmed Spanish sovereignty over the region, a concession that later would lead to a territorial dispute.

The colony continued to grow throughout the nineteenth century. Logwood extraction was replaced by mahogany cutting as the settlement’s principal economic activity, and slaves were introduced to increase production. By the time emancipation was completed in 1838, the settlement had evolved into a plantation society with a small number of European landowners and a large population of slaves from Africa.

In the nineteenth century, the colony was also a magnet for dispossessed groups throughout the region. The belize/bz\_glos.asp#Garifuna">Garifuna (see Glossary), an Afro-indigenous people descended from the Carib Indians and slaves of the Eastern Caribbean, found refuge in the area in the early 1800s. In the mid- and late 1800s, large numbers of Maya, many of whom had intermarried with or become culturally assimilated to the Spanish-speaking population of Central America, fled fighting in the Yucatán or forced labor in Guatemala and settled in the colony.

The nineteenth century also saw the development of formal government. As early as 1765, a common law system for the settlers was formalized, and a superintendent was named in 1794. A rudimentary legislature began meeting in the early 1800s, and in 1854 the British produced a constitution and formally established the colony of British Honduras in 1862. Political power in the colony remained firmly in the hands of the old settler elite, however; blacks working the plantations were disenfranchised, and smaller populations of smallholder Garifuna and Maya lived on the periphery of society.

The early 1900s were a period of political and social change. Nonwhite groups, particularly an emerging black middle class, began to agitate for the vote and political power. Mahogany production slowed, and the colony began to depend on sugar for revenue. Additional immigrants from neighboring Spanish-speaking countries drifted in and settled among the rural Maya. belize/bz\_glos.asp#Creole">Creoles (see Glossary), as the English-speaking blacks called themselves, began to participate in colonial politics.

The Great Depression of the 1930s greatly accelerated the pace of change. Mahogany exports virtually collapsed, and the colonial officials responded with measures designed primarily to protect the interests of the plantation owners. As a result, widespread labor disturbances broke out. Pressured by persistent labor unrest, the government eventually legalized trade unions in 1941. The unions soon broadened their demands to include political reform, and in 1950 the first and most durable political party, the People’s United Party (PUP), was formed with strong backing from the labor movement. Universal suffrage was granted to literate adults in 1954, and by the 1960s the colony was being prepared for independence.

The final obstacle to independence proved to be not internal problems or resistance from the colonial power, but an unresolved territorial claim over all of Belize by neighboring Guatemala. The dispute dated to treaties signed in the 1700s, in which Britain agreed to Spanish sovereignty over the region. Guatemala later claimed it had inherited Spanish sovereignty over Belize. Although negotiations over the issue had occurred periodically for more than a century, the matter of sovereignty became a particularly important issue for Guatemala in the 1960s and 1970s, when it realized Britain might grant independence to Belize.

Guatemala’s demand for annexation of Belize was largely fought in the international area. Realizing that Belize’s small defense force of 700 was no match for Guatemala’s army, the British stationed a garrison force to deter any aggression. Belize sought support for sovereignty from the United Nations, the Nonaligned Movement, the Commonwealth of Nations, and the Organization of American States. First, individual states and then the international organizations themselves came to support Belize’s cause. By 1980 Guatemala was completely without international support for its territorial claim, and the British granted Belize independence in 1981.

Belize at independence was a small country whose economy depended on one crop. Unlike many other newly emerging nations, however, Belize was underpopulated in the early 1990s. The country, approximately the size of Massachusetts, consists largely of tropical forest, flat in the north and with a low range of mountains in the south. Belize has traditionally depended on one crop (forest products in the 1700s and 1800s; sugar in the mid- 1900s) for its economic livelihood. A collapse in the price of sugar in the 1980s forced the government to diversify the economy. The growth of tourism and increased citrus and banana production in the 1990s made the economy less vulnerable to the price swings of a single commodity.

Ethnic diversity characterized Belizean society. The two largest groups were the Creoles, an English-speaking group either partly or wholly of African descent, and the Hispanic descendants of immigrants from neighboring Spanish-speaking countries or Hispanicized indigenous groups called belize/bz\_glos.asp#Mestizo">Mestizos (see Glossary). Smaller groups included the Garifuna and the various Maya peoples. The 1980 census showed the population to be about 40 percent Creole and 33 percent Mestizo. A considerable of influx of people from Central America shifted these percentages, however, so that the 1991 census showed the Mestizos to be the larger group, a change that distanced the country from the anglophone Caribbean and made it increasingly resemble its Hispanic neighbors on the isthmus of Central America.

The British legacy included a parliamentary democracy based on the British model, a government headed by the British monarch but governed by a prime minister named by the lower house of the bicameral legislature, and an independent judiciary. The constitutional safeguards for citizens’ rights were respected, and the two elections since independence had seen power alternate between the country’s two political parties with an absence of irregularities or political violence. The last election in 1989 saw George Cadle Price, leader of the PUP, regain the position of prime minister, a post he had held at the time of independence.

In 1993 Belize faced a number of challenges. The nation endeavored to meet the needs of a growing population with only limited resources. The makeup of the population itself was changing as Belizeans became more like their Central American neighbors and less like the English-speaking Caribbean. Most analysts agreed, however, that as the twentieth century drew to a close, Belize seemed well-positioned to deal successfully with the economic and social changes confronting it.

March 3, 1993

\* \* \*

In the months following completion of research and writing of this book, significant political developments occurred in Belize. On May 13, 1993, the British government, saying that it felt its military presence in Belize was no longer necessary because resolution of Guatemala’s long-standing territorial claim seemed imminent, announced that it would remove most of its troops from Belize within a year. On June 1, buoyed by overwhelming victories in by-elections for the Belize City Council and for a vacated parliamentary seat, Prime Minister George Price called for the governor general to dissolve the National Assembly on June 30 and hold general elections the following day, fifteen months before the mandate of his People’s United Party (PUP) was due to expire. The main opposition party, the United Democratic Party (UDP) headed by Manuel Esquivel, and the newly formed National Alliance for Belizean Rights headed by veteran UDP politician Philip Goldson announced they would participate in the election. The PUP was confident of victory because the economy was growing and the opposition appeared disorganized. The PUP also claimed that recently passed legislation giving Guatemala access to the Caribbean through Belizean territorial waters had finally settled the dispute with Guatemala.

Events in neighboring Guatemala, however, came to dominate the issues in the Belizean election. On June 2, the Guatemalan military removed President Jorge Serrano Elías, who had earlier accepted Belize’s right to exist and established diplomatic relations with Belize. Later in June, the Guatemalan military announced plans to impeach Serrano in absentia for his accord with Belize.

In its election campaign, the UDP seized on many Belizeans’ fears of renewed Guatemalan territorial claims, the consequence of the British troop withdrawal, and resentment by Creoles over the growing hispanicization of the country. Esquivel accused Price’s administration of making too many concessions to Guatemala to obtain a settlement to the dispute and promised to suspend the legislation granting Guatemala access to the Caribbean. The UDP also charged that the PUP had not fought hard enough to keep the British garrison in Belize and promised to reopen talks to maintain a British presence if it were brought to power. In addition, the UDP accused the PUP of having allowed too many Spanish-speaking refugees into Belize (the 1991 census revealed that for the first time there were more Mestizos than Creoles in the country) and then catering to the Spanish-speaking vote.

These campaign charges, along with attacks on the PUP as being corrupt and secretly planning to devalue the Belizean dollar, resulted in a surprise victory for the UDP on July 1. Although the PUP won a slim majority of the total votes cast, the UDP won sixteen of the twenty-nine seats in the National Assembly. The UDP victory for several seats was razor-thin (six of the seats were won with a majority of five or fewer votes) and several recounts were held. Results of the sixteen-seat victory for the UDP were confirmed, however, and on July 5, Manuel Esquivel was sworn in as Belize’s new prime minister.

**Belize History Timeline**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Belize Year in History | Belize Timeline |
| 200 | **Maya cities flourish all through Belize.** |
| 900 | **The Maya culture in Southern and Central America.** |
| 1520 | **The Spanish Conquistador, Hernan Cortez, crossed southern Belize.** The Spanish Conquistador, Hernan Cortez, crossed southern Belize. |
| 1528 | **Francisco de Montejo arrives in Belize.** The Adelanto arrives in Corozal, in northern Belize. |
| 1650 | **British buccaneers begin to settle the coast of Belize.** |
| 1655 | **The census around the cacao orchards near current day Belmopan is about 450.** The census around the cacao orchards near current day Belmopan is about 450. |
| 1660 | **Bartholomew Sharpe, a famous British pirate, makes Belize his base.** He begins to harvest logwood for sale to the United Kingdom. |
| 1717 | **Spanish force from Peten drives out Baymen** Spanish force from Peten drives out Baymen |
| 1720 | **First record of African slaves being used in Belize .** |
| 1754 | **Spanish drive out Baymen.** Spanish drive out Baymen who return within a year. |
| 1763 | **Spain signs treaties granting British subjects the privilege of wood-cutting.** Spain still retains sovereignty. |
| 1779 | **Spanish forces capture Belize.** Spanish forces capture Belize and take Baymen and slaves to Yucatan. Slaves freed after declaring loyalty to Spain. Baymen sent to Cuba. |
| 1807 | **Abolition of the slave trade.** |
| 1831 | **Equal rights are given regardless of race.** |
| 1847 | **War of the Castes** Several thousand Spanish-speaking refugees settle in northern Belize and Maya communities relocate to the north and west following the Caste War in Yucatan. |
| 1859 | **The Belize border is defined.** Britain and Guatemala sign treaty a treaty. |
| 1862 | **Belize is formally declared a British crown colony.** It is named British Honduras. |
| 1865 | **Laborers brought from the West Indian islands and China.** Most work on sugar estates for B.H. Co. |
| 1933 | **Guatemala reasserts its claim to Belize.** |
| 1950 | **Founding of the People's United Party (PUP)** |
| 1964 | **Self government is established.** A new constitution gives Belize full autonomy and introduces universal adult suffrage and a two-chamber parliament. |
| 1970 | **Belmopan replaces Belize City as capital.** |
| 1981 | **Independent Belize joins the British Commonwealth.** George Price becomes prime minister with the Queen of England as ceremonial head of state, but Guatemala refuses to recognize either. About 1,500 British troops remain to defend the country against Guatemalan territorial claims. |
| 1991 | **Guatemala recognizes Belize as sovereign.** |

**Belize Holidays and Events**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Display Date | Title |
| September | **September Celebrations** Belize City and throughout the country Go to Belize in September and you are sure to find a party. Celebrations of history, culture and patriotism lead to carnivals, parades, pageants and competitions. And lots and lots of music.  It begins with traditional music playing on every radio, getting people ready for the month long celebration. Soon every street and building and many of the people are decorated in the red, white and blue of the Belize flag.  St. George's Caye Day is the first national holiday on September 10th, commemorating the defeat of a Spanish incursion by British colonists. There are speeches and a Citizens Parade. A highlight of the day is the crowning of the Queen of the Bay who then leads the people as they dance through the streets.  Independence Day (September 21st) renews the celebration with another parade, more fireworks, more food, more costumes and of course, more music. |
| September 21st | **Independence Day** |
| December 25th | **Christmas** Christmas decorations and carols reflect American and European influences, and Santa Claus brings gifts to the children on Christmas day. Mestizos observe *Las Posadas* (the Lodgings) as in Mexico, the Garifuna follow the rituals of Jonkonnu as found in the West Indies. Nativity scenes are missing the Christ child until Christmas eve when the Christ child is placed in a manger representing his birth.  The Christmas meal consists of beans, rice, potato salad, turkey with stuffing, tortillas, fish, ham, yams, black cake (dark fruitcake) and *rompope* (eggnog with rum). |

**Belize Meals and Food**

Recipes from Belize

* [Caballero Potris (Spanish Bread Dessert) - Dessert](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Belize/recipe/caballero-potris-%28spanish-bread-dessert%29.htm)
* [Chimole - Soup](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Belize/recipe/chimole.htm)
* [Escabeche (Onion-Fish Soup) - Main Dish](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Belize/recipe/escabeche-%28onion-fish-soup%29.htm)
* [Rice and Beans - Main Dish](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Belize/recipe/rice-and-beans.htm)
* [Rice and Beans - Main Dish](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Belize/recipe/rice-and-beans.htm)
* [Steam Cake](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Belize/recipe/steam-cake.htm)
* [Tamales (Cornbread Dough Stuffed with Filling and Steamed in Wrapping) - Main Dish](http://www.countryreports.org/country/Belize/recipe/tamales-%28cornbread-dough-stuffed-with-filling-and-steamed-in-wrapping%29.htm)

**Belize Recipes and Diet**

Belize food and meal customs

**Meals**

Rice and beans are a staple for many meals. The main meal is eaten at midday. Creoles call dinner "tea".  The Creoles and Garifuna eat fish, boiled or stewed in coconut milk. The Garifuna also make cassava fritters from a paste of cooked cassava in coconut milk. *Nache* is a sweet alcoholic drink made from *crabou* fruit.  Many Belizeans drink the local rum mixed with condensed milk.

Food in Belize

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**Belize Languages**

**Languages**

English (official), Spanish, Mayan, Garifuna (Carib), Creole

**Language Translations:**

**Greetings in Creole**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Merry Christmas | Bonn e Erez Ane |
| Goodbye | Orevwa |
| Hello | alo |
| Good morning | Bonjou |
| Good afternoon (used after 11 AM) | Bonswa |
| How are you? | Komon ou ye |
| Yes | Wi |
| No | Non |
| Thanks | Mesi |
| Please | Souple |
| Excuse me | Eskize mwen |

**Days in Creole**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Sunday | dimanch |
| Monday | lendi |
| Tuesday | madi |
| Wednesday | mekredi |
| Thursday | jedi |
| Friday | vandredi |
| Saturday | samdi |

**Greetings in English**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Merry Christmas | Merry Christmas |
| Good morning | Good morning |
| Good afternoon | Good afternoon |
| Good evening | Good evening |
| Good night | Good night |
| Goodbye | Goodbye |
| How are you? | How are you? |
| I am fine | I am fine |
| Thank you | Thank you |
| Excuse me | Excuse me |
| Please | Please |
| I'm pleased to meet you | I'm pleased to meet you |
| Do you speak English? | Do you speak English? |
| Yes / No | Yes / No |
| Happy New Year! | Happy New Year! |
| Hello | Hello |
| What is your name? | What is your name? |
| Welcome | Welcome |
| Happy Birthday (Best Wishes) | Happy Birthday (Best Wishes) |
| See you Soon | See you Soon |

**Belize Clothing and Fashion**

The country is a melting pot of many races and over the years the multi-racial make-up has risen through the influx of many people of Central America, Asia, Europe and the Caribbean. In Belize, the way a person is dressed is considered a mark of taste and status.

Belizeans take pride in wearing clean, pressed clothing, particularly in the workplace.

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**Dating, Family and Children Belize**

**Family and Children**

Many men father a number of children by several women and many young Belizean women become single mothers. Most marriages are common-law. Adult children usually remain at home until they get married or have a child. In Creole villages it is common to have a female head of the house hold. Among the Garifuna, physical violence is rare. An angry person uses name-calling, cursing, gossip and mocking songs or witchcraft to gain revenge.

**Belize Gestures and Greetings**

**Greetings**

It is considered rude to greet people in Belize by their first names unless you know them well. Acceptable greetings in Belize include handshakes, pats on the back,and to show great appreciation, a kiss on the cheek.

**Gestures**

Creoles and Garinagu are especially animated. Mestizos are very reserved among people unfamiliar to them. Hand and facial gestures can vary. Staring is considered rude.

**Visiting**

When one visits a home, it is polite to hail the occupants from the gate or street until they come out. Offering a guest refreshments, usually at least a drink is considered good manners. Though not expected, it is also polite for the guest to bring the host a small gift, such as sweets.

**Cultural Attributes**

Belizeans are informal and friendly and non-confrontational. A simple nod or wave is acceptable when passing but it is considered rude not to greet someone. Among friends, one might shake hands by clasping the palms and locking thumbs. Men might pat each other on the back. Belizeans take care to make guests feel at home. People value honesty.

**Belize Church and Religion**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Government at all levels protects this right in full against abuse,  
  
either by governmental or private actors.  
  
There is no state religion; however, the preamble to the Constitution states, "The nation of Belize shall be founded upon principles which acknowledge the supremacy of God." A 2002 amendment to the Constitution  
  
expanded the appointed Senate to 12 persons, one of whom is appointed by the Governor General acting in accordance with the advice of the Belize Council of Churches and the Evangelical Association of Churches.  
  
The membership of these organizations includes several Christian denominations, among them Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Seventh-day Adventist.  
  
Under the Constitution, freedom of religion is part of a broader protection--that of freedom of conscience. In addition, the Constitution provides that no one shall be compelled to take an oath that is contrary to a person's religion or belief. Discrimination on  
  
religious grounds is illegal. To help maintain  
  
religious harmony, the Constitution reserves the right of the Government to intervene in religious matters "for the purpose of protecting the rights and freedoms of other persons," including the right to observe and practice any religion "without the unsolicited  
  
intervention of members of any other religion."  
  
The Government observes Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Monday, and Christmas as national holidays.  
  
There are no special registration requirements or fees for religious organizations, and legal incorporation for a religious group is a simple matter. Property taxes are not levied against churches and other  
  
places of worship; however, property taxes are levied against other church-owned buildings occupied on a regular basis, such as the pastor's or priest's residence.  
  
Foreign religious workers are permitted to enter the country and proselytize; however, they must be registered and purchase a religious worker's permit.  
  
The Constitution stipulates that religious communities may establish "places of education" and states "no such community shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for persons of that community."  
  
Although there is no state religion, the educational system maintains by statute a strong religious curriculum. The curriculum ties "spirituality" with social studies courses. The law provides for students in both public and church-run schools from kindergarten  
  
through sixth grade to receive one class period per week of religious instruction; however, some schools offer religion classes daily. The Constitution prohibits any educational institution from compelling a  
  
child to receive religious instruction or attend any religious ceremony or observance, and parents may object to and students may abstain from attending religious observances. This constitutional safeguard is  
  
particularly important because most primary and elementary schools, high schools, and colleges are church-affiliated. Catholic holy days are routinely observed as school holidays.  
  
The Constitution also stipulates that no one shall be required to receive religious instruction or attend services without his or her consent while serving in the armed forces, or while being detained in prison or in any correctional institution.

**Religions in Belize**

The following chart illustrates the breakdown of major religions in Belize:

Roman Catholic: 49.6 %Protestant: 27.0 %none: 9.4 %other: 14.0 %Highcharts.com

**Belize Sport and Recreation**

Soccer is the most popular sport followed by basketball. Burrell Boom and Horse Races - Every easter weekend (Monday) an International Cross-Country cycle race is held. Race starts in Belize City, ends at the Sylvestre Stadium in Burrell Boom. Followed by all-day celebrations. Horse races,food and music.  
Among Creoles, all national celebrations are accompanied by open-air dancing called jump-up.