



Belize Fast Facts

Population:

279,457 (July 2005 est.)

Capital:

Belmopan

Currency:

Belizean dollar (BZD)

Religion(s):

Roman Catholic 49.6%, Protestant 27%
(Pentecostal 7.4%, Anglican 5.3%, Seventh-Day
Adventist 5.2%, Mennonite 4.1%,
Methodist 3.5%, Jehovah's Witnesses 1.5%),
other 14%, none 9.4% (2000)

Language(s):

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

Major Events:

Carnival, February (week before Lent)
The Battle of St. George's Caye, 10 September (1798)
Independence Day, 21 September (1981)
Garifuna Day, 19 November

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Online Resources

University of Belize
<http://www.ub.edu.bz/>

Global Learning Semesters
<http://www.GlobalSemesters.com>

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SIT Study Abroad
<http://www.sit.edu/studyabroad/>

Galen University
<http://www.galen.edu.bz/>

Embassy of Belize
<http://www.embassyofbelize.org/>

Belize Government
<http://www.belize.gov.bz/>

Latin American Network
<http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/ca/belize/>

Benjamin A. Gilman
International Scholarship Program
<http://www.iie.org/gilman>

NSEP – National Security Education Program
<http://www.iie.org/nsep>

Protected Areas Conservation Trust
<http://www.pactbelize.org/index.php>

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Belize at a Glance...

As the only English speaking country in Central America, Belize provides a unique location to experience a varied and exciting culture with a range of natural wonders. It is often considered to be the “swinging door” between the Caribbean and Central America.



Belize is a small country located on the eastern coast of Central America, bordering Mexico and Guatemala. The first major society in Belize was the Maya civilization, which stretched across much of what is now Central America and flourished for thousands of years. By the arrival of the first Europeans in the 16th century, the Mayas were in decline. The Spanish used Belize for logging for many years until the British routed them off St. George's Caye in 1798, after which Belize became known as British Honduras. The country only officially gained independence in 1981, and today is a parliamentary democracy and a constitutional monarchy that recognizes Queen Elizabeth II as the chief of state although the power lies with Belize's prime minister, currently Said Wilbert Musa.

As one of the most stable countries in Central America today, Belize has become a major center for tourism, a subject many students go there to study. Belize also depends on the export of sugar, fruit, lumber, and fish. Sugar provides nearly half of the country's exports while the banana industry is the country's largest employer. However, despite these industries, much of the country's population lives in poverty, and Belize struggles with many of the challenges faced by developing nations.

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Belize is a cultural melting pot of many different cultures and people, as evidenced by the variety of languages spoken there and the patchwork of traditions and beliefs of the country's people. Some of the largest segments of the population can be identified as Mestizo, Creole, Ketchi, Yucatec and Mopan Mayas, and Garifuna and East Indian. Other smaller ethnic groups include German and Dutch Mennonites, Chinese, Arabs, and Africans. These diverse groups are heavily intermixed. While English is the official language of Belize, English Creole and Spanish are also commonly spoken and Spanish is taught in schools to encourage bilingualism. Belize's people are known for being laid-back and friendly, and students will find themselves feeling welcomed.

Belize's capital was moved to the small city of Belmopan after Hurricane Hattie caused significant damage to the former capital, Belize City, in 1961. However, Belize City remains the commercial hub of the country, and is the principal city for tourist, educational, and economic activity. This highly urbanized area is home to 58,000 of Belize's approximately 279,000 people.



Belize is a country of incredible natural beauty. According to the Protected Areas Conservation Trust, Belize “boasts 93% of its land under forest covers, the largest coral reef in the western hemisphere (second only to Australia's), the largest cave system in Central America, over 500 species of birds, thousands of Mayan archaeological temples and the only jaguar reserve in the world.”

Belize's marine diversity stems from the barrier reef as well as the numerous cayes to the west of the reef. Two of the best-known, Ambergris Caye and Caye Caulkner, are major attractions for visitors, with exciting activities such as diving, snorkeling, and fishing. Belize demonstrates an amazing commitment to preserving these natural treasures, with over 40% of its land under some form of legal protected status. This represents a world record!

The country's first university was its public university, the University of Belize, which encompasses a number of schools that used to operate separately. Galen University is the only private accredited university in Belize and is also regionally accredited through the University of Indianapolis. Together they provide the core of professional higher education training available to Belizeans. In addition to the native university system, many study abroad programs capitalize on the opportunities of Belize with a variety of challenging programs. For example, Global Learning Semesters, in conjunction with Galen University, offers a program in Belize that examines such subjects as archaeology, business, and sustainable development in the context of Belize's struggle to preserve its cultural and physical heritage while developing its economy.

It is hardly surprising that Belize has become a destination for tourists with its beautiful beaches, warm climate, and tropical jungles. These resources also ensure that Belize has some special opportunities for study abroad students interested in a variety of subjects including natural ecology, environmental science, and sustainable development. Marine biology students are drawn to the extensive coral reefs and marine diversity, while archaeology students focus on the country's fascinating Mayan ruins. Belize's unique blend of people makes it an excellent place to study anthropology and sociology, while its economic challenges make it an excellent place to study business.



Whatever your interest, you can be sure that Belize will provide a warm and welcoming location for your studies and an array of fascinating and engaging opportunities.