[Template:About](/wiki/Template:About" \o "Template:About) [Template:EngvarB](/wiki/Template:EngvarB) [Template:Use mdy dates](/wiki/Template:Use_mdy_dates) [Template:Infobox country](/wiki/Template:Infobox_country)

**Belize** ([Template:IPAc-en](/wiki/Template:IPAc-en)) is a country on the eastern coast of [Central America](/wiki/Central_America). It is the only country in Central America whose [official language](/wiki/Official_language) is [English](/wiki/English_language), though [Belizean Creole](/wiki/Belizean_Creole) (Kriol) and [Spanish](/wiki/Spanish_language) are also commonly spoken. Belize is bordered on the north by [Mexico](/wiki/Mexico), on the south and west by [Guatemala](/wiki/Guatemala), and on the east by the [Caribbean Sea](/wiki/Caribbean_Sea). Its mainland is about [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) long and [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) wide.

With [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of land and [Template:As of](/wiki/Template:As_of) a population of 368,310,<ref name=est2015/> Belize has the lowest [population density](/wiki/Population_density) in Central America.[[1]](#cite_note-1) The country's population growth rate of 1.87% per year (2015) is the second highest in the region and one of the [highest in the Western Hemisphere](/wiki/List_of_countries_by_population_growth).[[2]](#cite_note-2) Belize's abundance of terrestrial and marine species and its diversity of ecosystems give it a key place in the globally significant [Mesoamerican Biological Corridor](/wiki/Mesoamerican_Biological_Corridor).[[3]](#cite_note-3) Belize has a diverse society, composed of many cultures and languages that reflect its rich history.

Belize is considered a Central American and [Caribbean](/wiki/Caribbean) nation with strong ties to both the Latin American and Caribbean regions.[[4]](#cite_note-4) It is a member of the [Caribbean Community](/wiki/Caribbean_Community) (CARICOM), the [Community of Latin American and Caribbean States](/wiki/Community_of_Latin_American_and_Caribbean_States) (CELAC), and the [Central American Integration System](/wiki/Central_American_Integration_System) (SICA), the only country to hold full membership in all three regional organisations. Belize is a [Commonwealth realm](/wiki/Commonwealth_realm), with [Queen Elizabeth II](/wiki/Elizabeth_II) as [its monarch](/wiki/Monarchy_of_Belize) and [head of state](/wiki/Head_of_state).

Belize is known for its [September Celebrations](/wiki/September_Celebrations_of_Belize), its extensive [coral reefs](/wiki/Coral_reef), and [punta music](/wiki/Punta).[[5]](#cite_note-5)<ref name=ryan>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref>

## Contents

* 1 Etymology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]
* 2 History[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]
  + 2.1 Early history[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]
  + 2.2 Maya civilisation[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]
  + 2.3 Conquest and early colonial period (1506–1862)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]
  + 2.4 As part of the British Empire (1862–1981)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]
  + 2.5 Independent Belize (1981–)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]
* 3 Government and politics[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]
  + 3.1 Political culture[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]
  + 3.2 Foreign relations[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]
  + 3.3 Armed forces[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]
  + 3.4 Administrative divisions[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]
* 4 Geography[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]
  + 4.1 Environment preservation and biodiversity[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]
  + 4.2 Vegetation and flora[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]
  + 4.3 Geology, mineral potential, and energy[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]
  + 4.4 Belize Barrier Reef[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=17)]
    - 4.4.1 Species[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=18)]
    - 4.4.2 Conservation[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=19)]
  + 4.5 Climate[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=20)]
* 5 Economy[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=21)]
  + 5.1 Industrial infrastructure[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=22)]
  + 5.2 Tourism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=23)]
  + 5.3 Transport[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=24)]
* 6 Society[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=25)]
  + 6.1 Demographics[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=26)]
  + 6.2 Ethnic groups[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=27)]
    - 6.2.1 The Maya[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=28)]
    - 6.2.2 Creoles[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=29)]
    - 6.2.3 Garinagu[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=30)]
    - 6.2.4 Mestizos[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=31)]
    - 6.2.5 German-speaking Mennonites[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=32)]
    - 6.2.6 Other groups[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=33)]
    - 6.2.7 Emigration, immigration, and demographic shifts[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=34)]
  + 6.3 Languages[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=35)]
  + 6.4 Largest cities[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=36)]
  + 6.5 Religion[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=37)]
  + 6.6 Health[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=38)]
  + 6.7 Education[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=39)]
  + 6.8 Crime[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=40)]
  + 6.9 Social structure[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=41)]
  + 6.10 Women[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=42)]
* 7 Culture[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=43)]
  + 7.1 Cuisine[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=44)]
  + 7.2 Music[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=45)]
  + 7.3 Sports[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=46)]
  + 7.4 National symbols[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=47)]
* 8 See also[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=48)]
* 9 Notes[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=49)]
* 10 References[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=50)]
* 11 External links[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=51)]

## Etymology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]

The origin of the name Belize is unclear, but the earliest record of the name is found in the journal of the [Dominican](/wiki/Dominican_Order) priest Fray José Delgado, dating to 1677.[[6]](#cite_note-6) Delgado recorded the names of three major rivers that he crossed while travelling north along the Caribbean coast: Rio Soyte, Rio Xibum, and Rio Balis. These names, which correspond to the [Sittee River](/wiki/Sittee_River), [Sibun River](/wiki/Sibun_River) and [Belize River](/wiki/Belize_River), were provided to Delgado by his translator.[[6]](#cite_note-6) It is likely that Delgado's "Balis" was actually the Mayan word *belix* (or *beliz*), meaning "muddy-watered".[[6]](#cite_note-6) Others have suggested that the name is derived from a Spanish pronunciation of the name of the Scottish buccaneer Peter Wallace, which was applied to an early settlement at the mouth of the Belize River,[[7]](#cite_note-7) although there is no proof that Wallace actually settled in the area and some have characterised this claim as a myth.[[6]](#cite_note-6) Several other possible etymologies have been suggested by writers and historians, including French and African origins.[[6]](#cite_note-6)

## History[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

### Early history[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]

[right|thumb|Extent of the Maya civilisation](/wiki/File:Mayamap.png) The [Maya civilisation](/wiki/Maya_civilisation) emerged at least three millennia ago in the lowland area of the [Yucatán Peninsula](/wiki/Yucatán_Peninsula) and the highlands to the south, in what is now southeastern [Mexico](/wiki/Mexico), Belize, [Guatemala](/wiki/Guatemala), and western [Honduras](/wiki/Honduras). Many aspects of this culture persist in the area despite nearly 500 years of European domination. Prior to about 2500 BC, some [hunting and foraging](/wiki/Hunter-gatherer) bands settled in small farming villages; they later domesticated crops such as corn, beans, [squash](/wiki/Squash_(plant)), and chili peppers.

A profusion of languages and subcultures developed within the Maya core culture. Between about 2500 BC and 250 AD, the basic institutions of Maya civilisation emerged. The peak of this civilisation occurred during the classic period, which began about 250 AD.<ref name=cs>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref>

[thumb|"Caana" at](/wiki/File:Caracolfacup_o.jpg) [Caracol](/wiki/Caracol) [thumb|"El Castillo" at](/wiki/File:Xunantunich09.jpg) [Xunantunich](/wiki/Xunantunich)

### Maya civilisation[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) The [Maya civilisation](/wiki/Maya_civilisation) spread across what is now Belize around 1500 BC, and flourished there until about 900 AD. The recorded history of the middle and southern regions is dominated by [Caracol](/wiki/Caracol), an urban political centre that may have supported over 140,000 people.[[8]](#cite_note-8)[[9]](#cite_note-9) North of the [Maya Mountains](/wiki/Maya_Mountains), the most important political centre was [Lamanai](/wiki/Lamanai).[[10]](#cite_note-10) In the late [Classic Era](/wiki/Mesoamerican_chronology) of Maya civilisation (600–1000 AD), as many as 1 million people may have lived in the area that is now Belize.[[11]](#cite_note-11) When Spanish explorers arrived in the 16th century, the area that is now Belize included three distinct Maya territories: [Chetumal province](/wiki/Chetumal_province), which encompassed the area around [Corozal Bay](/wiki/Corozal_Bay); [Dzuluinicob province](/wiki/Dzuluinicob_province), which encompassed the area between the [New River](/wiki/New_River_(Belize)) and the [Sibun River](/wiki/Sibun_River), west to [Tipu](/wiki/Tipu,_Belize); and a southern territory controlled by the [Manche Ch'ol](/wiki/Manche_Ch'ol) Maya, encompassing the area between the [Monkey River](/wiki/Monkey_River) and the [Sarstoon River](/wiki/Sarstoon_River).[[12]](#cite_note-12)

### Conquest and early colonial period (1506–1862)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]

[Template:Further](/wiki/Template:Further)

Spanish [conquistadors](/wiki/Conquistadors) explored the land and declared it a [Spanish colony](/wiki/Spanish_colony) but chose not to settle because of its lack of resources like gold and the strong defence of the Yucatán by the Mayans. English and Scottish settlers and pirates known as the [Baymen](/wiki/Baymen) entered the area in the 17th and 18th centuries respectively and established a [logwood](/wiki/Logwood) trade colony, slave economy and [port](/wiki/Port) in what became the [Belize District](/wiki/Belize_District).[[13]](#cite_note-13) Baymen first settled on the coast of what is now Belize in 1638, seeking a sheltered region from which they could attack Spanish ships *(see* [*English settlement in Belize*](/wiki/English_settlement_in_Belize)*)*. The settlers turned to cutting logwood during the 18th century, establishing a system of slave labour using [black slaves](/wiki/Atlantic_slave_trade). The wood yielded a fixing agent for clothing dyes that was vital to the European [wool](/wiki/Wool) industry. The Spanish granted the British settlers the right to occupy the area and cut logwood in exchange for an end to piracy.[[14]](#cite_note-14) [thumb|An excerpt from the 1898 Gazette that declared September 10 an official holiday, part of the efforts of the Centennial Committee](/wiki/File:St._George's_Cay_Day_Official_Holiday.jpg)

The British first appointed a superintendent over the Belize area in 1786. Before then the British government had not recognised the settlement as a colony for fear of provoking a [Spanish](/wiki/Spanish_Empire) attack. The delay in government oversight allowed the settlers to establish their own laws and forms of government. During this period, a few wealthy settlers gained control of the local legislature, known as the Public Meeting, as well as of most of the settlement's land and timber.

[The Battle of St. George's Caye](/wiki/Battle_of_St._George's_Caye) was a 1798 military engagement off the coast of Belize between a Spanish invading force from what would become [Mexico](/wiki/Mexico), attempting to capture the [Baymen](/wiki/Baymen)-controlled territory for Spain from a small force of Baymen and their Black slaves.

Spain's last attempt occurred on September 10, 1798, when the Baymen and their slaves repelled the Spanish fleet in a short engagement with no known casualties on either side. The anniversary of the battle is a national holiday in Belize and is celebrated to commemorate the "first Belizeans" and the defence of their territory.[[15]](#cite_note-15)

### As part of the British Empire (1862–1981)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

In the early 19th century, the British sought greater control over the settlers, threatening to suspend the Public Meeting unless it observed the government's instructions to eliminate slavery outright. Slavery was [abolished](/wiki/Slavery_Abolition_Act_1833) in the [British Empire](/wiki/British_Empire) in 1833,[[16]](#cite_note-16) As a result of their slaves' superior abilities in the work of [mahogany](/wiki/Mahogany) extraction, slave owners in [British Honduras](/wiki/British_Honduras) were compensated at £53.69 per slave on average, the highest amount paid in any British territory.[[13]](#cite_note-13) However, the end of slavery did little to change the former slaves' working conditions. A series of institutions were put in place to restrict the ability of individuals to obtain land, in a debt-peonage system to organise the newly freed. The position of being "extra special" mahogany and logwood cutters undergirded the early ascriptions of the capacities (and consequently the limitations) of people of African descent in the colony. Because a small elite controlled the settlement's land and commerce, former slaves had no choice but to continue to work in timber cutting.[[13]](#cite_note-13) In 1836, after the [emancipation of Central America from Spanish rule](/wiki/Spanish_American_wars_of_independence), the British claimed the right to administer the region. In 1862, Great Britain formally declared it a [British Crown Colony](/wiki/British_Crown_Colony), subordinate to Jamaica, and named it British Honduras.[[17]](#cite_note-17) As a colony, Belize began to attract British investors. Among the British firms that dominated the colony in the late 19th century was the Belize Estate and Produce Company, which eventually acquired half of all the privately held land in the colony. Belize Estate's influence accounts in part for the colony's reliance on the mahogany trade throughout the rest of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. [Template:Wide image](/wiki/Template:Wide_image)

The [Great Depression](/wiki/Great_Depression) of the 1930s caused a near-collapse of the colony's economy as British demand for timber plummeted. The effects of widespread unemployment were worsened by a [devastating hurricane](/wiki/1931_Belize_hurricane) that struck the colony in 1931. Perceptions of the government's relief effort as inadequate were aggravated by its refusal to legalise labour unions or introduce a minimum wage. Economic conditions improved during [World War II](/wiki/World_War_II) as many Belizean men entered the armed forces or otherwise contributed to the war effort.

Following the war, the colony's economy stagnated because of the pressures caused by the war's spending. Britain's decision to [devalue](/wiki/Devalue) the British Honduras dollar in 1949 worsened economic conditions and led to the creation of the People's Committee, which demanded independence. The People's Committee's successor, the [People's United Party](/wiki/People's_United_Party) (PUP), sought constitutional reforms that expanded voting rights to all adults. The first election under [universal suffrage](/wiki/Universal_suffrage) was held [in 1954](/wiki/British_Honduras_general_election,_1954) and was decisively won by the PUP, beginning a three-decade period in which the PUP dominated the country's politics. Pro-independence activist [George Cadle Price](/wiki/George_Cadle_Price) became PUP leader in 1956 and the effective head of government in 1961, a post he would hold under various titles until 1984.

Under a new constitution Britain granted British Honduras self-government in 1964. On June 1, 1973 British Honduras was officially renamed Belize.[[18]](#cite_note-18) Progress toward independence, however, was hampered by a [Guatemalan claim to sovereignty over Belizean territory](/wiki/Belizean–Guatemalan_territorial_dispute).

### Independent Belize (1981–)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]

Belize was granted independence on September 21, 1981. [Guatemala](/wiki/Guatemala) refused to recognize the new nation because of its longstanding territorial dispute with the British colony, claiming that Belize belonged to Guatemala. About 1,500 British troops remained in Belize to deter any possible incursions.[[19]](#cite_note-19) With Price at the helm, the PUP won all national elections [until 1984](/wiki/Belizean_general_election,_1984). In that election, the first national election after independence, the PUP was defeated by the [United Democratic Party](/wiki/United_Democratic_Party_(Belize)) (UDP). UDP leader [Manuel Esquivel](/wiki/Manuel_Esquivel) replaced Price as prime minister, with Price himself unexpectedly losing his own [House](/wiki/House_of_Representatives_(Belize)) seat to a UDP challenger. The PUP under Price returned to power after elections [in 1989](/wiki/Belizean_general_election,_1989). The following year the United Kingdom announced that it would end its military involvement in Belize, and the RAF Harrier detachment was withdrawn the same year, having remained stationed in the country continuously since its deployment had become permanent there in 1980. British soldiers were withdrawn in 1994, but the United Kingdom left behind a military training unit to assist with the newly created [Belize Defence Force](/wiki/Belize_Defence_Force).

The UDP regained power in the [1993 national election](/wiki/Belizean_general_election,_1993), and Esquivel became prime minister for a second time. Soon afterwards Esquivel announced the suspension of a pact reached with Guatemala during Price's tenure, claiming Price had made too many concessions to gain Guatemalan recognition. The pact may have curtailed the 130-year-old border dispute between the two countries. Border tensions continued into the early 2000s, although the two countries cooperated in other areas.

The PUP won a landslide victory in the 1998 national elections, and PUP leader [Said Musa](/wiki/Said_Musa) was sworn in as prime minister. In the 2003 elections the PUP maintained its majority, and Musa continued as prime minister. He pledged to improve conditions in the underdeveloped and largely inaccessible southern part of Belize.

In 2005, Belize was the site of [unrest](/wiki/2005_Belize_unrest) caused by discontent with the PUP government, including tax increases in the national budget. On February 8, 2008, [Dean Barrow](/wiki/Dean_Barrow) was sworn in as prime minister after his [UDP](/wiki/United_Democratic_Party_(Belize)) won [a landslide victory](/wiki/Belizean_general_election,_2008) in general elections. Barrow and the UDP were re-elected [in 2012](/wiki/Belizean_general_and_local_elections,_2012) with a considerably smaller majority.

Throughout Belize's history, Guatemala has [claimed ownership](/wiki/Belizean–Guatemalan_territorial_dispute) of all or part of Belizean territory. This claim is occasionally reflected in maps showing Belize as Guatemala's twenty-third [department](/wiki/Departments_of_Guatemala). As of June 2015, the border dispute with Guatemala remains unresolved and quite contentious.[[2]](#cite_note-2)[[20]](#cite_note-20)[[21]](#cite_note-21) Guatemala's claim to Belizean territory rests, in part, on Clause VII of the [Anglo-Guatemalan Treaty of 1859](/wiki/Anglo-Guatemalan_Treaty_of_1859), which obligated the British to build a road between Belize City and Guatemala. At various times the issue has required mediation by the United Kingdom, [Caribbean Community](/wiki/Caribbean_Community) heads of government, the [Organization of American States](/wiki/Organization_of_American_States) (OAS), Mexico, and the United States. Notably, both Guatemala and Belize participate in [confidence-building](/wiki/Confidence-building) measures approved by the OAS such as the Guatemala-Belize Language Exchange Project.[[22]](#cite_note-22)

## Government and politics[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) Belize is a [parliamentary](/wiki/Parliamentary_system) [constitutional monarchy](/wiki/Constitutional_monarchy). The structure of government is based on the British parliamentary system, and the legal system is modelled on the [common law of England](/wiki/English_law#Common_law). The symbolic head of state is [Queen Elizabeth II](/wiki/Elizabeth_II), who holds the title [Queen of Belize](/wiki/Monarchy_of_Belize). The Queen resides in the [United Kingdom](/wiki/United_Kingdom), and is represented in Belize by the [Governor-General](/wiki/Governor-General_of_Belize). Executive authority is exercised by the cabinet, which advises the Governor-General and is led by the [Prime Minister of Belize](/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_Belize), who is head of government. Cabinet ministers are members of the majority political party in parliament and usually hold elected seats within it concurrent with their cabinet positions.

The bicameral [National Assembly of Belize](/wiki/National_Assembly_of_Belize) is composed of a [House of Representatives](/wiki/House_of_Representatives_of_Belize) and a [Senate](/wiki/Senate_of_Belize). The 31 members of the House are popularly elected to a maximum five-year term and introduce legislation affecting the development of Belize. The Governor-General appoints the 12 members of the Senate, with a Senate president selected by the members. The Senate is responsible for debating and approving bills passed by the House.

[Legislative power](/wiki/Legislative_power) is vested in both the government and the [Parliament of Belize](/wiki/Parliament_of_Belize). Constitutional safeguards include freedom of speech, press, worship, movement, and association. The judiciary is independent of the executive and the legislature.[[23]](#cite_note-23) Members of the independent judiciary are appointed. The judicial system includes local magistrates grouped under the Magistrates' Court, which hears less serious cases. The [Supreme Court](/wiki/Supreme_Court_of_Belize) (Chief Justice) hears murder and similarly serious cases, and the Court of Appeal, hears appeals from convicted individuals seeking to have their sentences overturned. Defendants may, under certain circumstances, appeal their cases to the [Caribbean Court of Justice](/wiki/Caribbean_Court_of_Justice).

### Political culture[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]

Since 1974 the party system in Belize has been dominated by the centre-left [People's United Party](/wiki/People's_United_Party) and the centre-right [United Democratic Party](/wiki/United_Democratic_Party_(Belize)), although there have been other small parties that have participated at all levels of elections in the past. Though none of these small political parties have ever won any significant number of seats and/or offices, their challenge has been growing over the years.

### Foreign relations[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) Belize is a full participating member of the [United Nations](/wiki/United_Nations), [Commonwealth of Nations](/wiki/Commonwealth_of_Nations), [Organization of American States](/wiki/Organization_of_American_States) (OAS), [Central American Integration System](/wiki/Central_American_Integration_System) (SICA), [Caribbean Community](/wiki/Caribbean_Community) (CARICOM), [CARICOM Single Market and Economy](/wiki/CARICOM_Single_Market_and_Economy) (CSME), [Association of Caribbean States](/wiki/Association_of_Caribbean_States) (ACS),[[24]](#cite_note-24) and the [Caribbean Court of Justice](/wiki/Caribbean_Court_of_Justice) (CCJ), which currently pertains only to [Barbados](/wiki/Barbados), Belize and [Guyana](/wiki/Guyana). In 2001 the Caribbean Community heads of government voted on a measure declaring that the region should work towards replacing the UK's [Judicial Committee of the Privy Council](/wiki/Judicial_Committee_of_the_Privy_Council) with the Caribbean Court of Justice. It is still in the process of acceding to CARICOM and SICA treaties, including trade and single market treaties.

Belize is an original member (1995) of the [World Trade Organization](/wiki/World_Trade_Organization) (WTO), and participates actively in its work. The pact involves the Caribbean Forum (CARIFORUM) subgroup of the [Group of African, Caribbean, and Pacific states](/wiki/African,_Caribbean_and_Pacific_Group_of_States) (ACP). CARIFORUM presently the only part of the wider ACP-bloc that has concluded the full regional trade-pact with the [European Union](/wiki/European_Union).

### Armed forces[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|Belizean Coast Guard working with the](/wiki/File:Belize_Coast_Guard_and_U.S._Navy_Working_Together.jpg) [United States Navy](/wiki/United_States_Navy). Belize's open water ways and long barrier reef make it susceptible to drug traffickers.

The [Belize Defence Force](/wiki/Belize_Defence_Force) (BDF) serves as the country's military and is responsible for protecting the sovereignty of Belize. The BDF, with the Belize National Coast Guard and the Immigration Department, is a department of the Ministry of Defence and Immigration. In 1997 the regular army numbered over 900, the reserve army 381, the air wing 45 and the maritime wing 36, amounting to an overall strength of approximately 1400.[[25]](#cite_note-25) In 2005, the maritime wing became part of the Belizean Coast Guard.[[26]](#cite_note-26) In 2012, the Belizean government spent about $17 million on the military, constituting 1.08% of the country's [gross domestic product](/wiki/Gross_domestic_product) (GDP).[[27]](#cite_note-27) After Belize achieved independence in 1981 the United Kingdom maintained a deterrent force (British Forces Belize) in the country to protect it from invasion by [Guatemala](/wiki/Guatemala) (see [Guatemalan claim to Belizean territory](/wiki/Guatemalan_claim_to_Belizean_territory)). During the 1980s this included a battalion and [No. 1417 Flight RAF](/wiki/No._1417_Flight_RAF) of Harriers. The main British force left in 1994, three years after Guatemala recognised Belizean independence, but the United Kingdom maintained a training presence via the British Army Training and Support Unit Belize (BATSUB) and [25 Flight AAC](/wiki/25_Flight_AAC) until 2011 when the last British Forces left Ladyville Barracks, with the exception of seconded advisers.[[25]](#cite_note-25)

### Administrative divisions[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]

[right|thumb|Districts of Belize](/wiki/File:Belize,_administrative_divisions_-_en_-_monochrome.svg) Belize is divided into [six districts](/wiki/Districts_of_Belize). [Template:#section:Districts of Belize](/wiki/Template:#section:Districts_of_Belize)

These districts are further divided into [31 constituencies](/wiki/Constituencies_of_Belize). [Local government in Belize](/wiki/Local_government_in_Belize) comprises four types of local authorities: [city councils](/wiki/City_council), [town councils](/wiki/Town_council), [village councils](/wiki/Town_council) and [community councils](/wiki/Community_council). The two city councils ([Belize City](/wiki/Belize_City) and [Belmopan](/wiki/Belmopan)) and seven town councils cover the urban population of the country, while village and community councils cover the rural population.[[28]](#cite_note-28)

## Geography[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [right|thumb|Belize Topography](/wiki/File:Belize_Topography.png) [thumb|right|Belizean jungles are home to the](/wiki/File:Junior-Jaguar-Belize-Zoo.jpg) [jaguar](/wiki/Jaguar) and many other mammals. [Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary](/wiki/Cockscomb_Basin_Wildlife_Sanctuary) was founded in 1990 as the first [wilderness](/wiki/Wilderness) sanctuary for the [jaguar](/wiki/Jaguar) and is regarded by one author as the premier site for jaguar preservation in the world.[[29]](#cite_note-29)

Belize is on the Caribbean coast of northern Central America. It shares a border on the north with the Mexican state of [Quintana Roo](/wiki/Quintana_Roo), on the west a non-determined line which is called (buffer zone) with the Guatemalan department of [Petén](/wiki/Petén_(department)), and on the south with the Guatemalan department of [Izabal](/wiki/Izabal_Department). Belize and Guatemala have No definite Borders due to the previously described conflict that includes over 100 isles on Caribbean sea. To the east in the Caribbean Sea, [the second-longest barrier reef](/wiki/Belize_Barrier_Reef) in the world flanks much of the [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of predominantly [marshy](/wiki/Marsh) coastline.[[30]](#cite_note-30) The area of the country totals [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert), an area slightly larger than El Salvador, Israel, [New Jersey](/wiki/New_Jersey) or Wales. The many [lagoon](/wiki/Lagoon)s along the coasts and in the northern interior reduces the actual land area to [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert).

Belize is shaped like a rectangle that extends about [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) north-south and about [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) east-west, with a total land boundary length of [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert). The undulating courses of two rivers, the [Hondo](/wiki/Rio_Hondo_(Belize)) and the [Sarstoon River](/wiki/Sarstoon_River), define much of the course of the country's northern and southern boundaries. The western border follows no natural features and runs north-south through lowland forest and highland plateau.

The north of Belize consists mostly of flat, swampy coastal plains, in places heavily forested. The [flora](/wiki/Flora_and_vegetation_of_Belize) is highly diverse considering the small geographical area. The south contains the low [mountain range](/wiki/Mountain_range) of the [Maya Mountains](/wiki/Maya_Mountains). The highest point in Belize is [Doyle's Delight](/wiki/Doyle's_Delight) at [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert).[[31]](#cite_note-31) Belize's rugged geography has also made the country's coastline and jungle attractive to drug smugglers, who use the country as a gateway into Mexico.[[32]](#cite_note-32) In 2011, the United States added Belize to the list of nations considered major drug producers or transit countries for narcotics.[[33]](#cite_note-33)

### Environment preservation and biodiversity[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|right|](/wiki/File:Scarlett_Macaw.jpg)[Scarlet macaws](/wiki/Scarlet_macaw) are native to Central and northern South America. Various [bird sanctuaries](/wiki/Bird_sanctuaries) exist in Belize, such as the [Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary](/wiki/Crooked_Tree_Wildlife_Sanctuary).

Belize is a country with a rich variety of wildlife, because of its unique position between both [North](/wiki/North_America) and South America, and a wide range of climates and habitats for plant and animal life.[[34]](#cite_note-34) Belize's low human population and approximately [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of undistributed land makes for an ideal home for the more than 5,000 species of plants, and hundreds of species of animals, including [armadillos](/wiki/Armadillo), snakes, and [monkeys](/wiki/Monkey).[[35]](#cite_note-35)[[36]](#cite_note-36) The [Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary](/wiki/Cockscomb_Basin_Wildlife_Sanctuary) is a nature reserve in south-central Belize established to protect the forests, fauna and [watersheds](/wiki/Drainage_basin) of an approximately 400 square kilometre area of the eastern slopes of the Maya Mountains. The reserve was founded in 1990 as the first wilderness sanctuary for the [jaguar](/wiki/Jaguar) and is regarded by one author as the premier site for jaguar preservation in the world.[[29]](#cite_note-29)

### Vegetation and flora[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]

While over 60% of Belize's land surface is covered by forest,[[37]](#cite_note-37) some 20% of the country's land is covered by cultivated land (agriculture) and human settlements.[[38]](#cite_note-38) [Savannah](/wiki/Savannah), scrubland and [wetland](/wiki/Wetland) constitute the remainder of Belize's land cover. Important [mangrove](/wiki/Mangrove) ecosystems are also represented across Belize's landscape.[[39]](#cite_note-39)[[40]](#cite_note-40) As a part of the globally significant Mesoamerican Biological Corridor that stretches from southern Mexico to Panama, Belize's biodiversity – both [marine](/wiki/Marine_(ocean)) and [terrestrial](/wiki/Terrestrial_ecoregion) – is rich, with abundant [flora](/wiki/Flora) and [fauna](/wiki/Fauna).

Belize is also a leader in protecting biodiversity and natural resources. According to the [World Database on Protected Areas](/wiki/World_Database_on_Protected_Areas), 37% of Belize's land territory falls under some form of official protection, giving Belize one of the most extensive systems of terrestrial protected areas in the Americas.<ref name=ProtectedPlanetBZ>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref> By contrast, Costa Rica only has 27% of its land territory protected.<ref name=ProtectedPlanetCR>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref>

Around 13.6% of Belize's [territorial waters](/wiki/Territorial_waters), which contain the [Belize Barrier Reef](/wiki/Belize_Barrier_Reef), are also protected.[[41]](#cite_note-41) The Belize Barrier Reef is a [UNESCO](/wiki/UNESCO)-recognised [World Heritage Site](/wiki/World_Heritage_Site) and is the second-largest barrier reef in the world, behind [Australia's](/wiki/Australia) [Great Barrier Reef](/wiki/Great_Barrier_Reef).

A [remote sensing](/wiki/Remote_sensing) study conducted by the Water Center for the Humid Tropics of Latin America and the Caribbean (CATHALAC) and [NASA](/wiki/NASA), in collaboration with the Forest Department and the Land Information Centre (LIC) of the government of Belize's Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (MNRE), and published in August 2010 revealed that Belize's forest cover in early 2010 was approximately 62.7%, down from 75.9% in late 1980.[[37]](#cite_note-37) A similar study by Belize Tropical Forest Studies and Conservation International revealed similar trends in terms of Belize's forest cover.[[42]](#cite_note-42) Both studies indicate that each year, 0.6% of Belize's forest cover is lost, translating to the clearing of an average of [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) each year. The [USAID](/wiki/USAID)-supported ERVIR study by CATHALAC, NASA, and the MNRE also showed that Belize's protected areas have been extremely effective in protecting the country's forests. While only some 6.4% of forests inside of legally declared protected areas were cleared between 1980 and 2010, over a quarter of forests outside of protected areas were lost between 1980 and 2010.

As a country with a relatively high forest cover and a low [deforestation](/wiki/Deforestation) rate, Belize has significant potential for participation in initiatives such as [REDD](/wiki/REDD). Significantly, the SERVIR study on Belize's deforestation[[37]](#cite_note-37) was also recognised by the [Group on Earth Observations](/wiki/Group_on_Earth_Observations) (GEO), of which Belize is a member nation.[[43]](#cite_note-43)

### Geology, mineral potential, and energy[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]

Belize is known to have a number of economically important minerals, but none in quantities large enough to warrant mining. These minerals include [dolomite](/wiki/Dolomite), [barite](/wiki/Barite) (source of [barium](/wiki/Barium)), [bauxite](/wiki/Bauxite) (source of aluminium), [cassiterite](/wiki/Cassiterite) (source of tin), and gold. In 1990 [limestone](/wiki/Limestone), used in road-building, was the only mineral resource being exploited for either domestic or export use.

In 2006, the cultivation of newly discovered [crude oil](/wiki/Crude_oil) in the town of [Spanish Lookout](/wiki/Spanish_Lookout) has presented new prospects and problems for this developing nation.[[44]](#cite_note-44)

### Belize Barrier Reef[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=17)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

[thumb|right|Belize Barrier Reef, aerial view looking north](/wiki/File:Belize_Barrier_Reef_Aerial_Looking_North.jpg) [thumb|right|The](/wiki/File:Great_Blue_Hole.jpg) [Great Blue Hole](/wiki/Great_Blue_Hole). A phenomenon of [karst topography](/wiki/Karst_topography)

The Belize Barrier Reef is a series of [coral reefs](/wiki/Coral_reef) straddling the coast of Belize, roughly [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) offshore in the north and [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) in the south within the country limits. The Belize Barrier Reef is a [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) long section of the [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) long [Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System](/wiki/Mesoamerican_Barrier_Reef_System), which is continuous from [Cancún](/wiki/Cancún) on the northeast tip of the [Yucatán Peninsula](/wiki/Yucatán_Peninsula) through the [Riviera Maya](/wiki/Riviera_Maya) up to [Honduras](/wiki/Honduras) making it one of the largest coral reef systems in the world.

It is Belize's top tourist destination, popular for [scuba diving](/wiki/Scuba_diving) and [snorkelling](/wiki/Snorkelling), and attracting almost half of its 260,000 visitors. It is also vital to its fishing industry.[[45]](#cite_note-45) In 1842 [Charles Darwin](/wiki/Charles_Darwin) described it as "the most remarkable reef in the [West Indies](/wiki/West_Indies)".

The Belize Barrier Reef was declared a [World Heritage Site](/wiki/World_Heritage_Site) by [UNESCO](/wiki/UNESCO) in 1996 due to its vulnerability and the fact that it contains important natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biodiversity.[[46]](#cite_note-46)

#### Species[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=18)]

The Belize Barrier Reef is home to a large diversity of plants and animals, and is one of the most diverse [ecosystems](/wiki/Ecosystem) of the world:

* 70 hard coral species
* 36 [soft coral](/wiki/Alcyonacea) species
* 500 species of fish
* hundreds of [invertebrate](/wiki/Invertebrate) species

With 90% of the reef still to be researched, some estimate that only 10% of all species have been discovered.[[47]](#cite_note-47)

#### Conservation[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=19)]

Belize became the first country in the world to completely ban [bottom trawling](/wiki/Bottom_trawling) in December 2010.[[48]](#cite_note-48)[[49]](#cite_note-49) In December 2015, Belize banned offshore oil drilling within [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of the Barrier Reef and all of its 7 World Heritage Sites.[[50]](#cite_note-50) Despite these protective measures, the reef remains under threat from [oceanic pollution](/wiki/Marine_pollution) as well as uncontrolled tourism, shipping, and fishing. Other threats include hurricanes, along with [global warming](/wiki/Global_warming) and the resulting increase in ocean temperatures,[[51]](#cite_note-51) which causes [coral bleaching](/wiki/Coral_bleaching). It is claimed by scientists that over 40% of Belize's coral reef has been damaged since 1998.[[45]](#cite_note-45)

### Climate[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=20)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) Belize has a [tropical climate](/wiki/Tropical_climate) with pronounced [wet](/wiki/Wet_season) and [dry seasons](/wiki/Dry_season), although there are significant variations in weather patterns by region. Temperatures vary according to elevation, proximity to the coast, and the moderating effects of the northeast trade winds off the Caribbean. Average temperatures in the coastal regions range from [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) in January to [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) in July. Temperatures are slightly higher inland, except for the southern highland plateaus, such as the [Mountain Pine Ridge](/wiki/Mountain_Pine_Ridge), where it is noticeably cooler year round. Overall, the seasons are marked more by differences in humidity and rainfall than in temperature.

Average rainfall varies considerably, from [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) in the north and west to over [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) in the extreme south. Seasonal differences in rainfall are greatest in the northern and central regions of the country where, between January and April or May, less than [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of rainfall per month. The dry season is shorter in the south, normally only lasting from February to April. A shorter, less rainy period, known locally as the "little dry", usually occurs in late July or August, after the initial onset of the rainy season.

[Hurricane](/wiki/Hurricane)s have played key—and devastating—roles in [Belizean history](/wiki/History_of_Belize). In 1931 an unnamed hurricane destroyed over two-thirds of the buildings in Belize City and killed more than 1,000 people. In 1955 [Hurricane Janet](/wiki/Hurricane_Janet) levelled the northern town of [Corozal](/wiki/Corozal_Town). Only six years later, [Hurricane Hattie](/wiki/Hurricane_Hattie) struck the central coastal area of the country, with winds in excess of [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) and [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) [storm tide](/wiki/Storm_tide)s. The devastation of Belize City for the second time in thirty years prompted the relocation of the capital some [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) inland to the [planned city](/wiki/Planned_city) of [Belmopan](/wiki/Belmopan).

In 1978 [Hurricane Greta](/wiki/Hurricane_Greta-Olivia) caused more than US$25 million in damages along the southern coast. On October 9, 2001, [Hurricane Iris](/wiki/Hurricane_Iris) made landfall at [Monkey River Town](/wiki/Monkey_River_Town) as a [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) Category Four storm. The storm demolished most of the homes in the village, and destroyed the banana crop. In 2007 [Hurricane Dean](/wiki/Hurricane_Dean) made landfall as a Category 5 storm only [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) north of the Belize–Mexico border. Dean caused extensive damage in northern Belize.

The most recent hurricane to affect Belize directly was the Category 2 [Hurricane Richard](/wiki/Hurricane_Richard), making landfall approximately [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) south-southeast of Belize City at around 00:45 UTC on October 25, 2010.[[52]](#cite_note-52) The storm moved inland towards [Belmopan](/wiki/Belmopan), causing estimated damage of [BZ$](/wiki/Belize_dollar)33.8 million ($17.4 million 2010 USD), primarily from damage to crops and housing.[[53]](#cite_note-53)

## Economy[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=21)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

[thumb|A proportional representation of Belize's exports, 2012.](/wiki/File:Belize_Export_Treemap.jpg) [thumb|An oil well in Belize. Petroleum is one of Belize's chief exports.](/wiki/File:Oil_well_in_Belize.jpg) [thumb|A](/wiki/File:Sugar_Cane_Processing_Plant_2.jpg) [sugar cane](/wiki/Sugar_cane) processing plant, Orange Walk Town, Belize. Sugar is one of Belize's top exports.

Belize has a small, mostly private enterprise economy that is based primarily on export of [petroleum](/wiki/Petroleum) and [crude oil](/wiki/Crude_oil), agriculture, agro-based industry, and merchandising, with tourism and construction recently assuming greater importance.[[44]](#cite_note-44) [Template:As of](/wiki/Template:As_of), oil production was [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) and [Template:As of](/wiki/Template:As_of) oil exports were [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert). The country is also a producer of [industrial mineral](/wiki/Industrial_mineral)s.[[54]](#cite_note-54) In agriculture, [sugar](/wiki/Sugar), like in colonial times, remains the chief crop, accounting for nearly half of exports, while the banana industry is the populations's largest employer.[[44]](#cite_note-44) The new government faces important challenges to economic stability. Rapid action to improve tax collection has been promised, but a lack of progress in reining in spending could bring the [exchange rate](/wiki/Exchange_rate) under pressure. The tourist and construction sectors strengthened in early 1999, leading to a preliminary estimate of revived growth at 4%. Infrastructure remains a major economic development challenge;[[55]](#cite_note-55) Belize has the region's most expensive electricity. Trade is important and the major trading partners are the United States, Mexico, the [European Union](/wiki/European_Union), and Central America.[[55]](#cite_note-55) Belize has five commercial banks, of which the largest and oldest is [Belize Bank](/wiki/Belize_Bank). The other four banks are Heritage Bank, Atlantic Bank, [FirstCaribbean International Bank](/wiki/FirstCaribbean_International_Bank), and [Scotiabank](/wiki/Scotiabank) (Belize). A robust complex of [credit unions](/wiki/Credit_union) began in the 1940s under the leadership of [Marion M. Ganey](/wiki/Marion_M._Ganey), S.J., and is a continuing resource for the betterment of the peoples across economic and cultural lines.[[56]](#cite_note-56)

### Industrial infrastructure[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=22)]

[Template:Update](/wiki/Template:Update) The largest integrated electric utility and the principal distributor in Belize is [Belize Electricity Limited](/wiki/Belize_Electricity_Limited). BEL was approximately 70% owned by [Fortis Inc.](/wiki/Fortis_Inc.), a [Canadian](/wiki/Canadians) investor-owned distribution utility, which represented less than 2% of Fortis assets. Fortis took over the management of BEL in 1999, at the invitation of the government of Belize in an attempt to mitigate prior financial problems within the locally managed utility. In addition to its regulated investment in BEL, Fortis owns Belize Electric Company Limited (BECOL), a non-regulated [hydroelectric](/wiki/Hydroelectric) generation business that operates three hydroelectric generating facilities on the [Macal River](/wiki/Macal_River).

On June 14, 2011, the government of Belize nationalised the majority ownership interest of Fortis Inc. in Belize Electricity Ltd. The Belize utility encountered serious financial problems after the country's Public Utilities Commission (PUC) in 2008 disallowed “the recovery of previously incurred fuel and purchased power costs in customer rates and set customer rates at a level that does not allow BEL to earn a fair and reasonable return”, Fortis said in a June 2011 statement.[[57]](#cite_note-57) BEL appealed this judgment to the Court of Appeal; however, a hearing is not expected until 2012. In May 2011, the [Supreme Court of Belize](/wiki/Supreme_Court_of_Belize) granted BEL's application to prevent the PUC from taking any enforcement actions pending the appeal. The Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry issued a statement saying the government had acted in haste and expressed concern over the message it sent to investors.

In August 2009, the government of Belize nationalised [Belize Telemedia Limited](/wiki/Belize_Telemedia_Limited) (BTL), which now competes directly with [Speednet](/wiki/Speednet). As a result of the nationalisation process, the [interconnection](/wiki/Interconnection) agreements are again subject to negotiations. Both BTL and Speednet boast a full range of products and services including basic telephone services, national and international calls, prepaid services, cellular services via GSM 1900 megahertz (MHz) and 3G [CDMA](/wiki/CDMA) 2000 respectively, international cellular roaming, fixed wireless, dial-up and internet, high-speed [DSL](/wiki/Digital_subscriber_line), internet service, and national and international data networks.[[58]](#cite_note-58)

### Tourism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=23)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

[Template:Wide image](/wiki/Template:Wide_image)

A combination of natural factors—climate, the [Belize Barrier Reef](/wiki/Belize_Barrier_Reef), over 450 offshore Cayes (islands), excellent fishing, safe waters for boating, [scuba diving](/wiki/Scuba_diving), and [snorkelling](/wiki/Snorkelling), numerous rivers for [rafting](/wiki/Rafting), and [kayaking](/wiki/Kayaking), various [jungle](/wiki/Jungle_(terrain)) and [wildlife reserves](/wiki/Wildlife_reserves) of fauna and flora, for hiking, [bird watching](/wiki/Bird_watching), and helicopter touring, as well as many Maya ruins—support the thriving tourism and [ecotourism](/wiki/Ecotourism) industry. It also has the largest [cave](/wiki/Cave) system in Central America.

Development costs are high, but the government of Belize has made tourism its second development priority after agriculture. In 2012, tourist arrivals totalled 917,869 (with about 584,683 from the United States) and tourist receipts amounted to over $1.3 billion.[[59]](#cite_note-59)

### Transport[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=24)]

[Template:Further](/wiki/Template:Further)

## Society[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=25)]

### Demographics[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=26)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|Belize is known for its diversity of cultures and races](/wiki/File:BZEBOYS_o.jpg)

Belize's population was 324,528 in 2010.[[60]](#cite_note-60) Belize's [total fertility rate](/wiki/Total_fertility_rate) in 2009 was 3.6 children per woman. Its birth rate was 27.33 births/1,000 population, and the death rate was 5.8 deaths/1,000 population.[[2]](#cite_note-2)

### Ethnic groups[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=27)]

#### The Maya[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=28)]

[Mayan children|thumb](/wiki/File:Kek'Chi_Maya_Children.jpg) The Maya are thought to have been in Belize and the [Yucatán region](/wiki/Yucatán_region) since the second millennium BC; however, much of Belize's original Maya population was wiped out by disease and conflicts between tribes and with Europeans. Three Maya groups now inhabit the country: The [Yucatec](/wiki/Yucatec) (who came from Yucatán, Mexico, to escape the [Caste War](/wiki/Caste_War_of_Yucatán) of the 1840s), the [Mopan](/wiki/Mopan_people) (indigenous to Belize but were forced out by the British; they returned from Guatemala to evade slavery in the 19th century), and [Q'eqchi'](/wiki/Q'eqchi'_people) (also fled from slavery in Guatemala in the 19th century).[[61]](#cite_note-61) The latter groups are chiefly found in the [Toledo District](/wiki/Toledo_District).

#### Creoles[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=29)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

Creoles, also known as *Kriols*, make up roughly 21% of the Belizean population and about 75% of the [diaspora](/wiki/Belizean_American). They are descendants of the Baymen slave owners, and [slaves](/wiki/Slavery) brought to Belize for the purpose of the logging industry.[[62]](#cite_note-62) These slaves were ultimately of [West](/wiki/West_Africa) and [Central African](/wiki/Central_Africa) descent (many also of [Miskito](/wiki/Miskito_people) ancestry from [Nicaragua](/wiki/Nicaragua)) and born Africans who had spent very brief periods in Jamaica and [Bermuda](/wiki/Bermuda).[[63]](#cite_note-63) [Bay Islanders](/wiki/Caracoles) and ethnic Jamaicans came in the late 19th century, further adding to these already varied peoples, creating this ethnic group.

For all intents and purposes, Creole is an ethnic and linguistic denomination. Some natives, even those blonde and blue-eyed, may call themselves Creoles. The designation is more cultural than racial, and is not limited to some certain physical appearance.[[63]](#cite_note-63) [Belize Creole English](/wiki/Belize_Creole_English) or *Kriol* developed during the time in slavery, and historically was only spoken by former slaves. However, this ethnicity has become synonymous with the Belizean identity, and as a result it is now spoken by about 75% of Belizeans.[[63]](#cite_note-63)[[64]](#cite_note-64) Belizean Creole is derived mainly from English. Its [substrate languages](/wiki/Substratum) are the Native American language [Miskito](/wiki/Miskito_language), and the various [West African](/wiki/West_African) and [Bantu languages](/wiki/Bantu_languages) brought into the country by slaves. Creoles are found all over Belize, but predominantly in urban areas such as Belize City, coastal towns and villages, and in the Belize River Valley.[[65]](#cite_note-65)

#### Garinagu[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=30)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [right|thumb|Traditional Garifuna dancers in](/wiki/File:Garifuna_dancers_in_Dangriga,_Belize.jpg) [Dangriga](/wiki/Dangriga), Belize The [Garinagu](/wiki/Garinagu) (singular *Garifuna*), at around 4.5% of the population, are a mix of West/Central African, [Arawak](/wiki/Arawaks), and [Island Carib](/wiki/Island_Carib) ancestry. Though they were captives removed from their homelands, these people were never documented as slaves. The two prevailing theories are that, in 1635, they were either the survivors of two recorded shipwrecks or somehow took over the ship they came on.[[66]](#cite_note-66) Throughout history they have been incorrectly labelled as [Black Caribs](/wiki/Black_Caribs). When the British took over [Saint Vincent and the Grenadines](/wiki/Saint_Vincent_and_the_Grenadines) after the [Treaty of Paris](/wiki/Treaty_of_Paris_(1763)) in 1763, they were opposed by French settlers and their Garinagu allies. The Garinagu eventually surrendered to the British in 1796. The British separated the more African-looking Garifunas from the more indigenous-looking ones. 5,000 Garinagu were exiled from the Grenadine island of [Baliceaux](/wiki/Baliceaux). However, only about 2,500 of them survived the voyage to [Roatán](/wiki/Roatán), an island off the coast of Honduras. The [Garifuna language](/wiki/Garifuna_language) belongs to the [Arawakan language family](/wiki/Arawakan_languages), but has a large number of loanwords from Carib languages and from English.

Because [Roatán](/wiki/Roatán) was too small and infertile to support their population, the Garinagu petitioned the Spanish authorities of Honduras to be allowed to settle on the mainland coast. The Spanish employed them as soldiers, and they spread along the Caribbean coast of Central America. The Garinagu settled in Seine Bight, [Punta Gorda](/wiki/Punta_Gorda,_Belize) and Punta Negra, Belize, by way of Honduras as early as 1802. However, in Belize November 19, 1832 is the date officially recognised as "[Garifuna Settlement Day](/wiki/Garifuna_Settlement_Day)" in Dangriga.[[64]](#cite_note-64) According to one genetic study, their ancestry is on average 76% [Sub Saharan African](/wiki/Sub_Saharan_Africa), 20% [Arawak](/wiki/Arawak)/[Island Carib](/wiki/Island_Carib) and 4% [European](/wiki/European_ethnic_groups).[[66]](#cite_note-66)

#### Mestizos[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=31)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) The Mestizo culture are people of mixed Spanish and Maya descent. They originally came to Belize in 1847, to escape the [Caste War](/wiki/Caste_War_of_Yucatán), which occurred when thousands of Mayas rose against the state in Yucatán and massacred over one-third of the population. The surviving others fled across the borders into British territory. The Mestizos are found everywhere in Belize but most make their homes in the northern districts of Corozal and Orange Walk. The Mestizos are the largest ethnic group in Belize and make up approximately half of the population. The Mestizo towns centre on a main square, and social life focuses on the Catholic Church built on one side of it. Spanish is the main language of most Mestizos and Spanish descendants, but many speak English and Belize Kriol fluently.[[67]](#cite_note-67) Due to the influences of Kriol and English, many Mestizos speak what is known as ["Kitchen Spanish"](/wiki/Spanglish).[[68]](#cite_note-68) The mixture of Latin and Maya foods like tamales, escabeche, chirmole, relleno, and empanadas came from their Mexican side and corn tortillas were handed down by their Mayan side. Music comes mainly from the marimba, but they also play and sing with the guitar. Dances performed at village fiestas include the Hog-Head, Zapateados, the Mestizada, Paso Doble and many more.

#### German-speaking Mennonites[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=32)]

[thumb|Mennonite children selling peanuts near Lamanai in Belize. Roughly 10,000](/wiki/File:Menonite_Children.JPG) [Plautdietsch](/wiki/Plautdietsch_language)-speaking [Mennonites](/wiki/Mennonites_in_Belize) live in Belize, farming the land and living according to their religious beliefs. [Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) Some 4% of the population are German-speaking [Mennonite](/wiki/Mennonite) farmers and craftsmen. The vast majority are so-called [Russian Mennonites](/wiki/Russian_Mennonites) of German descent who settled in the [Russian Empire](/wiki/Russian_Empire) during the 18th and 19th centuries. Most Russian Mennonites live in Mennonite settlements like [Spanish Lookout](/wiki/Spanish_Lookout), [Shipyard](/wiki/Shipyard,_Belize), [Little Belize](/wiki/Little_Belize), and Blue Creek. These Mennonites speak [Plautdietsch](/wiki/Plautdietsch) (a [German dialect](/wiki/German_dialects)) in everyday life, but use mostly [Standard German](/wiki/Standard_German) for reading (the Bible) and writing. The Plautdietsch-speaking [Mennonites came mostly from Mexico](/wiki/Mennonites_in_Mexico) in the years after 1958. There are also some mainly [Pennsylvania German](/wiki/Pennsylvania_German)-speaking [Old Order Mennonites](/wiki/Old_Order_Mennonites) who came from the United States and Canada in the late 1960s. They live primarily in [Upper Barton Creek](/wiki/Upper_Barton_Creek) and associated settlements. These Mennonites attracted people from different [Anabaptist](/wiki/Anabaptist) backgrounds who formed a new community. They look quite similar to [Old Order Amish](/wiki/Amish), but are different from them.[[69]](#cite_note-69)

#### Other groups[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=33)]

The remaining 5% or so of the population consist of a mix of [Indians](/wiki/Indians_in_Belize), [Chinese](/wiki/Ethnic_Chinese_in_Belize), whites from the United States and Canada, and many other foreign groups brought to assist the country's development. During the 1860s, a large influx of East Indians who spent brief periods in Jamaica and [American Civil War](/wiki/American_Civil_War) veterans from [Louisiana](/wiki/Louisiana) and other Southern states established [Confederate settlements in British Honduras](/wiki/Confederate_settlements_in_British_Honduras) and introduced commercial sugar cane production to the colony, establishing 11 settlements in the interior. The 20th century saw the arrival of more Asian settlers from mainland China, South Korea, India, [Syria](/wiki/Syria), and [Lebanon](/wiki/Lebanon). [Said Musa](/wiki/Said_Musa), the son of an immigrant from [Palestine](/wiki/Palestine_(region)), was the [Prime Minister of Belize](/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_Belize) from 1998 to 2008. [Central American](/wiki/Central_American) immigrants and expatriate Americans and Africans also began to settle in the country.[[64]](#cite_note-64)

#### Emigration, immigration, and demographic shifts[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=34)]

Creoles and other ethnic groups are emigrating mostly to the United States, but also to the United Kingdom and other developed nations for better opportunities. Based on the latest [US Census](/wiki/US_Census), the number of Belizeans in the United States is approximately 160,000 (including 70,000 legal residents and naturalised citizens), consisting mainly of Creoles and Garinagu.[[70]](#cite_note-70) Because of conflicts in neighbouring Central American nations, Mestizo [refugees](/wiki/Refugee) from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras have fled to Belize in significant numbers during the 1980s, and have been significantly adding to this group. These two events have been changing the demographics of the nation for the last 30 years.[[71]](#cite_note-71)

### Languages[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=35)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

English is the official language of Belize, a former British colony. English is the primary language of public education, government and most media outlets. The majority of Belizeans regardless of ethnicity speak an [English-based creole](/wiki/English-based_creole) called [Belizean Creole](/wiki/Belizean_Creole) (also referred to as *Kriol*) for most informal, social and interethnic dialogue.

When a Creole language exists alongside its [lexifier](/wiki/Lexifier) language, as is the case in Belize, a continuum forms between the Creole and the lexifier language. It is therefore difficult to substantiate or differentiate the number of Creole speakers compared to English speakers. Belizean Creole might best be described as the [lingua franca](/wiki/Lingua_franca) of the nation.[[72]](#cite_note-72) Approximately 50% of Belizeans self-identify as *Mestizo*, *Latino*, or *Hispanic* and 30% speak Spanish as a native language.[[73]](#cite_note-73) When Belize was a British colony, Spanish was banned in schools but today it is widely taught as a [second language](/wiki/Second_language). ["Kitchen Spanish"](/wiki/Spanglish) is an intermediate form of Spanish mixed with Belizean Creole, spoken in the northern towns such as Corozal and San Pedro.[[68]](#cite_note-68) Over half the population is bilingual, and many Belizeans are in fact [multilingual](/wiki/Multilingual). Being a small, multiethnic state, surrounded by Spanish-speaking nations, multilingualism is strongly encouraged.[[74]](#cite_note-74)[[75]](#cite_note-75) Belize is also home to three [Mayan languages](/wiki/Mayan_languages): [Q’eqchi’](/wiki/Q’eqchi’_language), the [endangered](/wiki/Endangered_language) [indigenous](/wiki/Indigenous_people) Belizean language of [Mopan](/wiki/Mopan_language), and [Yucatec Maya](/wiki/Yucatec_Maya_language).[[76]](#cite_note-76)[[77]](#cite_note-77)[[78]](#cite_note-78)Approximately 16,100 people speak the [Arawakan-based](/wiki/Ta-Arawakan_languages) [Garifuna language](/wiki/Garifuna_language),[[79]](#cite_note-79) and 6,900 Mennonites in Belize speak mainly [Plautdietsch](/wiki/Plautdietsch_language) while a minority of Mennonites speak [Pennsylvania German](/wiki/Pennsylvania_German_language).[[80]](#cite_note-80)

### Largest cities[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=36)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) [Template:Largest cities of Belize](/wiki/Template:Largest_cities_of_Belize)

### Religion[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=37)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [Template:Bar box](/wiki/Template:Bar_box) Religious freedom is guaranteed in Belize. According to the 2010 census[[60]](#cite_note-60) 40.1% of Belizeans are Roman Catholics, 31.8% are Protestants (8.4% Pentecostal; 5.4% Adventist; 4.7% [Anglican](/wiki/Anglicanism); 3.7% [Mennonite](/wiki/Mennonite); 3.6% [Baptist](/wiki/Baptist); 2.9% [Methodist](/wiki/Methodism); 2.8% Nazarene), 1.7% are [Jehovah's Witnesses](/wiki/Jehovah's_Witnesses), 10.3% adhere to other religions ([Maya religion](/wiki/Maya_religion), [Garifuna religion](/wiki/Garifuna_religion), [Obeah](/wiki/Obeah) and [Myalism](/wiki/Myalism), and minorities of [Mormons](/wiki/Mormonism), [Hindus](/wiki/Hinduism), [Buddhists](/wiki/Buddhism), [Muslims](/wiki/Islam), [Bahá'ís](/wiki/Bahá'í_Faith), [Rastafarians](/wiki/Rastafarians) and other) and 15.5% profess to be irreligious.

Once a [Catholic-majority country](/wiki/History_of_Roman_Catholicism_in_Belize) (Catholics formed 57% of the population in 1991, and 49% in 2000), the percentage of Roman Catholics in the population has been decreasing in the past few decades due to the growth of Protestant churches, other religions and non-religious people.[[81]](#cite_note-81) The [Greek Orthodox Church](/wiki/Greek_Orthodox_Church) has a presence in [Santa Elena](/wiki/Santa_Elena,_Belize).[[82]](#cite_note-82) The [Association of Religion Data Archives](/wiki/Association_of_Religion_Data_Archives) estimates there were 7,776 Bahá'ís in Belize in 2005, or 2.5% of the national population. Their estimates suggest this is the highest proportion of Bahá'ís in any country.[[83]](#cite_note-83) Their data also states that the Bahá'í Faith is the second most common religion in Belize, followed by Hinduism (2.0%) and Judaism (1.1%).[[84]](#cite_note-84) Hinduism is followed by most Indian immigrants.

Muslims claim that there have been Muslims in Belize since the 16th century having been brought over from [Africa](/wiki/Africa) as slaves, but there are no sources for that claim.[[85]](#cite_note-85) The Muslim population of today started the 1980s.[[86]](#cite_note-86) Muslims numbered 243 in 2000 and 577 in 2010 according to the official statistics.[[87]](#cite_note-87) and comprise 0.16 percent of the population. A mosque is at the Islamic Mission of Belize (IMB), also known as the Muslim Community of Belize. Another mosque, Masjid Al-Falah, officially opened in 2008 in Belize City.[[88]](#cite_note-88)

### Health[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=38)]

[Template:Further](/wiki/Template:Further)

Belize has a high prevalence of communicable diseases such as [malaria](/wiki/Malaria), respiratory diseases and intestinal illnesses.<ref name=MoH>[Health Agenda 2007 – 2011](https://www.healthresearchweb.org/files/National_Health_Policies-Belize_2007-2011.pdf). Ministry of Health, Belize</ref>

### Education[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=39)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) A number of kindergartens, secondary, and tertiary schools in Belize provide quality education for students—mostly funded by the government. Belize possesses about five tertiary level institutions, which offer associates, bachelors, and undergraduate degrees. The only university in the country is the [University of Belize](/wiki/University_of_Belize), that evolved out of the University College of Belize founded in 1986. Before that [St. John's College](/wiki/St._John's_College,_Belize), founded in 1877, had dominated the tertiary education field.

Education in Belize is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 14 years. [Template:As of](/wiki/Template:As_of), the literacy rate in Belize was estimated at 79.7%,[[60]](#cite_note-60) one of the [lowest in the Western Hemisphere](/wiki/List_of_countries_by_literacy_rate).

The educational policy is currently following the "Education Sector Strategy 2011–2016", which sets 3 objectives for the years to come: Improving access, quality, and governance of the education system by providing technical and [vocational education](/wiki/Vocational_education) and training.[[89]](#cite_note-89)

### Crime[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=40)]

Belize has relatively high rates of violent crime.[[90]](#cite_note-90) The majority of violence in Belize stems from gang activity, which includes trafficking of drugs and persons, protecting drug smuggling routes, and securing territory for drug dealing.[[91]](#cite_note-91) In 2015, 119 murders were recorded in Belize, giving the country a homicide rate of 34 murders per 100,000 inhabitants, one of the highest in the world, but lower than the neighbouring countries of [Honduras](/wiki/Honduras), [El Salvador](/wiki/El_Salvador), and [Guatemala](/wiki/Guatemala).[[92]](#cite_note-92) Compared to the other districts in Belize, [Belize District](/wiki/Belize_District) (containing Belize City) had the most murders by far compared to all the other districts. In 2007, 54% of the murders occurred in the Belize District.[[91]](#cite_note-91) The violence in Belize City (especially the southern part of the city) is largely due to gang warfare.[[90]](#cite_note-90) In 2015, there were 40 reported cases of rape, 214 robberies, 742 burglaries, and 1027 cases of theft.[[92]](#cite_note-92) The Belize Police Department has implemented many protective measures in hopes of decreasing the high number of crimes. These measures include adding more patrols to "hot spots" in the city, obtaining more resources to deal with the predicament, creating the "Do the Right Thing for Youths at Risk" program, creating the Crime Information Hotline, creating the Yabra Citizen Development Committee, an organisation that helps youth, and many other initiatives. The Belize Police Department began an Anti-Crime Christmas campaign targeting criminals; as a result, the crime rates dropped in that month.[[91]](#cite_note-91) In 2011, the government established a truce among many major gangs, lowering the murder rate.[[90]](#cite_note-90)

### Social structure[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=41)]

[Template:Further](/wiki/Template:Further)

Belize's social structure is marked by enduring differences in the distribution of wealth, power, and prestige. Because of the small size of Belize's population and the intimate scale of social relations, the social distance between the rich and the poor, while significant, is nowhere as vast as in other [Caribbean](/wiki/Caribbean) and [Central American](/wiki/Central_America) societies, such as [Jamaica](/wiki/Jamaica) and [El Salvador](/wiki/El_Salvador). Belize lacks the violent class and racial conflict that has figured so prominently in the social life of its Central American neighbours.<ref name=sbs>Rutheiser, Charles C., "Structure of Belizean Society". In Merrill.</ref>

Political and economic power remain vested in the hands of a relatively small local elite, most of whom are either white, light-skinned [Creole](/wiki/Creole_peoples), or [Mestizo](/wiki/Mestizo). The sizeable middle group is composed of peoples of different ethnic backgrounds. This middle group does not constitute a unified [social class](/wiki/Social_class), but rather a number of middle-class and [working-class](/wiki/Working-class) groups, loosely oriented around shared dispositions toward education, cultural respectability, and possibilities for upward social mobility. These beliefs and the social practices they engender, help distinguish the middle group from the grass roots majority of the [Belizean people](/wiki/Belizean_people).<ref name=sbs/>

### Women[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=42)]

In 2013, the [World Economic Forum](/wiki/World_Economic_Forum) ranked Belize 101st out of 135 countries in its [Global Gender Gap Report](/wiki/Global_Gender_Gap_Report). Of all the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Belize ranked 3rd from last and had the lowest female-to-male ratio for primary school enrolment.[[93]](#cite_note-93) In 2013, the [UN](/wiki/United_Nations) gave Belize a [Gender Inequality Index](/wiki/Gender_Inequality_Index) score of 0.435, ranking it 79th out of 148 countries.[[94]](#cite_note-94) [Template:As of](/wiki/Template:As_of), 48.3% of women in Belize participate in the workforce, compared to 81.8% of men.[[94]](#cite_note-94) 13.3% of the seats in Belize's [National Assembly](/wiki/National_Assembly_(Belize)) are filled by women.[[94]](#cite_note-94)

## Culture[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=43)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

In Belizean folklore, there are the legends of [Lang Bobi Suzi](/wiki/Lang_Bobi_Suzi), [La Llorona](/wiki/La_Llorona), [La Sucia](/wiki/La_Sucia), Luguchu Ellis, [Tata Duende](/wiki/Tata_Duende), Chatona, [X'tabai](/wiki/X'tabai), [Anansi](/wiki/Anansi), and the [cadejo](/wiki/Cadejo).

Most of the [public holidays in Belize](/wiki/Public_holidays_in_Belize) are traditional Commonwealth and [Christian holidays](/wiki/Liturgical_year), although some are specific to Belizean culture such as [Garifuna Settlement Day](/wiki/Garifuna_Settlement_Day) and [Baron Bliss Day](/wiki/Baron_Bliss_Day).[[95]](#cite_note-95) In addition, the month of September is considered a [special time of national celebration](/wiki/September_Celebrations_of_Belize). Besides [Independence Day](/wiki/Independence_Day) and St. George's Caye Day, Belizeans also celebrate [Carnival](/wiki/Carnival) during September, which typically includes several events spread across multiple days. In some areas of Belize, however, Carnival is celebrated at the traditional time before [Lent](/wiki/Lent) (in February).[[96]](#cite_note-96)

### Cuisine[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=44)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [right|thumb|Rice and beans (with coconut milk), stewed recado chicken and potato salad. An inter-ethnic staple meal](/wiki/File:Rice_and_Beans,_Stew_Chicken_and_Potato_Salad_-_Belize.jpg) Belizean cuisine is an amalgamation of all ethnicities in the nation, and their respectively wide variety of foods. It might best be described as both similar to Mexican/Central American cuisine and Jamaican/Anglo-Caribbean cuisine.

Breakfast typically consists of bread, flour [tortillas](/wiki/Tortilla), or [fry jacks](/wiki/Fry_jack) that are often homemade. Fry jacks are eaten with various cheeses, [refried beans](/wiki/Refried_beans), various forms of eggs or cereal, along with powdered milk, coffee, or tea. Midday meals vary, from lighter foods such as rice and beans or beans and rice with or without coconut milk, [tamales](/wiki/Tamale), ["panades"](/wiki/Empanadas) (fried maize shells with beans or fish), and meat pies, [escabeche](/wiki/Escabeche) (onion soup), [chimole](/wiki/Chimole) (soup), [caldo](/wiki/Caldo_de_pollo), stewed chicken and garnaches (fried tortillas with beans, cheese, and sauce) to various constituted dinners featuring some type of rice and beans, meat and salad or coleslaw.

In rural areas, meals are typically more simple than in cities. The Maya use [maize](/wiki/Maize), [beans](/wiki/Beans), or [squash](/wiki/Cucurbita) for most meals, and the Garifuna are fond of seafood, [cassava](/wiki/Cassava) (particularly made into cassava bread or Ereba) and vegetables. The nation abounds with restaurants and fast food establishments selling fairly cheaply. Local fruits are quite common, but raw vegetables from the markets less so. Mealtime is a communion for families and schools and some businesses close at midday for lunch, reopening later in the afternoon. Steak is also common.

### Music[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=45)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [Punta](/wiki/Punta) is by the far most popular genre of [Garifuna music](/wiki/Garifuna_music) and has become the most popular genre in all of Belize. It is distinctly Afro-Caribbean, and is sometimes said to be ready for international popularisation like similarly-descended styles ([reggae](/wiki/Reggae), [calypso](/wiki/Calypso_music), [merengue](/wiki/Merengue_(music))).

[Brukdown](/wiki/Brukdown) is a very popular modern style of Belizean music related to [calypso](/wiki/Calypso_music). It evolved out of the music and dance of loggers, especially a form called [buru](/wiki/Buru). [Reggae](/wiki/Reggae), [dancehall](/wiki/Dancehall), and [soca](/wiki/Soca_music) imported from [Jamaica](/wiki/Jamaica) and the rest of the [West Indies](/wiki/West_Indies), and [rap](/wiki/Rapping), [hip-hop](/wiki/Hip-hop), heavy metal and [rock music](/wiki/Rock_music) from the United States, are also popular among the youth of Belize.

### Sports[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=46)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|right|Accomplished Belizean cyclist, Shalini Zabaneh](/wiki/File:Shalini_Zabaneh,_Cyclist,_Belize.jpg) The major sports in Belize are [football](/wiki/Association_football), [basketball](/wiki/Basketball), [volleyball](/wiki/Volleyball) and [cycling](/wiki/Cycle_sport), with smaller followings of [boat racing](/wiki/Boat_racing), [track and field](/wiki/Track_and_field), [softball](/wiki/Softball) and [cricket](/wiki/Cricket). [Fishing](/wiki/Fishing) is also popular in coastal areas of Belize.

The [Cross Country Cycling Classic](/wiki/Cross_Country_Cycling_Classic), also known as the "cross country" race or the Holy Saturday Cross Country Cycling Classic, is considered one of the most important Belize sports events. This one-day sports event is meant for amateur cyclists but has also gained worldwide popularity. The history of Cross Country Cycling Classic in Belize dates back to the period when [Monrad Metzgen](/wiki/Monrad_Metzgen) picked up the idea from a small village on the [Northern Highway](/wiki/Northern_Highway_(Belize)) (now Phillip Goldson Highway). The people from this village used to cover long distances on their bicycles to attend the weekly game of cricket. He improvised on this observation by creating a sporting event on the difficult terrain of the [Western Highway](/wiki/George_Price_Highway), which was then poorly built.

Another major annual sporting event in Belize is the [La Ruta Maya Belize River Challenge](/wiki/La_Ruta_Maya_Belize_River_Challenge), a 4-day [canoe marathon](/wiki/Canoe_marathon) held each year in March. The race runs from [San Ignacio](/wiki/San_Ignacio,_Belize) to [Belize City](/wiki/Belize_City), a distance of [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert).[[97]](#cite_note-97) On Easter day, citizens of Dangriga participate in a yearly fishing tournament. First, second, and third prize are awarded based on a scoring combination of size, species, and number. The tournament is broadcast over local radio stations, and prize money is awarded to the winners.

The [Belize national basketball team](/wiki/Belize_national_basketball_team) is the only national team that has achieved major victories internationally. The team won the 1998 CARICOM Men's Basketball Championship, held at the Civic Center in Belize City, and subsequently participated in the 1999 Centrobasquet Tournament in Havana. The national team finished seventh of eight teams after winning only 1 game despite playing close all the way. In a return engagement at the 2000 CARICOM championship in Barbados, Belize placed fourth. Shortly thereafter, Belize moved to the Central American region and won the Central American Games championship in 2001.

The team has failed to duplicate this success, most recently finishing with a 2 and 4 record in the 2006 COCABA championship. The team finished second in the 2009 COCABA tournament in Cancun, Mexico where it went 3–0 in group play. Belize won its opening match in the Centrobasquet Tournament, 2010, defeating Trinidad and Tobago, but lost badly to Mexico in a rematch of the COCABA final. A tough win over Cuba set Belize in position to advance, but they fell to Puerto Rico in their final match and failed to qualify.

### National symbols[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=47)]

[thumb|The](/wiki/File:Ramphastos_sulfuratus_-Belize_Zoo-6a-2c.jpg) [keel-billed toucan](/wiki/Ramphastos_sulfuratus) [thumb|The](/wiki/File:Tapirus_bairdii_-Franklin_Park_Zoo,_Massachusetts,_USA-8a.jpg) [Baird's tapir](/wiki/Tapirus_bairdii) The national flower of Belize is the black orchid ([*Prosthechea cochleata*](/wiki/Prosthechea_cochleata), also known as *Encyclia cochleata*).<ref name=symbols>[Template:Wayback](/wiki/Template:Wayback). Council on Diplomacy, Washington, D.C. and Consulate General of Belize. Retrieved February 5, 2008.</ref>

The national tree of Belize is the [mahogany](/wiki/Mahogany) tree ([*Swietenia macrophylla*](/wiki/Swietenia_macrophylla)), one of the magnificent giants of the Belize rain forest. Rising straight and tall to over a hundred feet from great buttresses at the roots, it emerges above the [canopy](/wiki/Canopy_(biology)) of the surrounding trees with a crown of large, shining green leaves.

In the early months of the year, when the leaves fall and new red-brown growth appears, the tree can be spotted from a great distance. The tree puts out a great flush of small whitish flowers—the blossom for dark fruits, which are pear-shaped capsules about six inches long. When the fruits mature, they split into five valves, which frees large winged seeds that are carried away by the wind. They fall on the shaded protection of the forest floor and germinate to begin a new life cycle. The mahogany tree matures in 60 to 80 years.

British settlers exploited the Belizean forest for mahogany, beginning around the middle of the 17th century. It was originally exported to the United Kingdom in the form of squared logs, but shipments now consist mainly of sawn lumber. The motto "Sub Umbra Florero" means: Under the shade (of the mahogany tree) I flourish.<ref name=symbols/>

The keel-billed toucan ([*Ramphastos sulphuratus*](/wiki/Ramphastos_sulphuratus)) is the national bird of Belize. It is noted for its great, canoe-shaped bill and its brightly coloured green, blue, red and orange feathers.

Toucans make a monotonous frog-like croak. They like fruit, and eat by cutting with the serrated edge of their bills. Toucans nest in holes in trees, using natural holes or holes made by woodpeckers, often enlarging the cavity by removing soft, rotten wood. They lay two to four eggs, which both parents incubate. The nesting stage lasts from six to seven weeks.

Belize's national animal is the [Baird's tapir](/wiki/Baird's_tapir), the largest land mammal of the American tropics. It is also known as the mountain cow, although it is actually related to the horse and the [rhinoceros](/wiki/Rhinoceros). It is protected under Belizean law. [Template:Clear](/wiki/Template:Clear)

## See also[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=48)]

[Template:Portal](/wiki/Template:Portal)

* [Belizean people](/wiki/Belizean_people)
* [Index of Belize-related articles](/wiki/Index_of_Belize-related_articles)
* [Outline of Belize](/wiki/Outline_of_Belize)
* [*The Forgotten District*](/wiki/The_Forgotten_District) – a documentary on Maya ecotourism in southern Belize

[Template:Clear](/wiki/Template:Clear)

## Notes[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=49)]

[Template:Reflist](/wiki/Template:Reflist)

## References[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=50)]

[Template:Reflist](/wiki/Template:Reflist)

## External links[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=51)]

[Template:Sister project links](/wiki/Template:Sister_project_links)

* [Government of Belize](http://www.belize.gov.bz) – Official governmental site
* [Template:Wikiatlas](/wiki/Template:Wikiatlas)
* [Profile at U.S. Department of State](https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/belize.html)
* [Belize National Emergency Management Organization](http://www.nemo.org.bz) – Official governmental site
* [Belize Wildlife Conservation Network](http://www.wildlifebelize.com) – Belize Wildlife Conservation Network
* [CATHALAC](http://www.cathalac.org) – Water Center for the Humid Tropics of Latin America and the Caribbean
* [LANIC Belize page](http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/ca/belize/)
* [Template:CIA World Factbook link](/wiki/Template:CIA_World_Factbook_link)
* [Belize](http://ucblibraries.colorado.edu/govpubs/for/belize.htm) at *UCB Libraries GovPubs*
* [Template:Dmoz](/wiki/Template:Dmoz)
* [Belize](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profiles/1211472.stm) from the [BBC News](/wiki/BBC_News)
* [Key Development Forecasts for Belize](http://www.ifs.du.edu/ifs/frm_CountryProfile.aspx?Country=BZ) from [International Futures](/wiki/International_Futures)
* [Hydromet.gov.bz](http://www.hydromet.gov.bz/) – Official website of the Belize National Meteorological Service

[Template:Geographic location](/wiki/Template:Geographic_location)

[Template:Belize topics](/wiki/Template:Belize_topics) [Template:Central America topic](/wiki/Template:Central_America_topic) [Template:North America topic](/wiki/Template:North_America_topic) [Template:Commonwealth of Nations](/wiki/Template:Commonwealth_of_Nations) [Template:Commonwealth realms](/wiki/Template:Commonwealth_realms)

[Template:Authority control](/wiki/Template:Authority_control) [Template:Coord](/wiki/Template:Coord)

[Category:Belize](/wiki/Category:Belize) [Category:Countries in Central America](/wiki/Category:Countries_in_Central_America) [Category:Yucatán Peninsula](/wiki/Category:Yucatán_Peninsula) [Category:Member states of the Caribbean Community](/wiki/Category:Member_states_of_the_Caribbean_Community) [Category:Former British colonies](/wiki/Category:Former_British_colonies) [Category:Former Spanish colonies](/wiki/Category:Former_Spanish_colonies) [Category:Member states of the Commonwealth of Nations](/wiki/Category:Member_states_of_the_Commonwealth_of_Nations) [Category:English-speaking countries and territories](/wiki/Category:English-speaking_countries_and_territories) [Category:Spanish-speaking countries and territories](/wiki/Category:Spanish-speaking_countries_and_territories) [Category:Liberal democracies](/wiki/Category:Liberal_democracies) [Category:States and territories established in 1981](/wiki/Category:States_and_territories_established_in_1981) [Category:1981 establishments in Belize](/wiki/Category:1981_establishments_in_Belize) [Category:Member states of the United Nations](/wiki/Category:Member_states_of_the_United_Nations) [Category:World Digital Library related](/wiki/Category:World_Digital_Library_related) [Category:Small Island Developing States](/wiki/Category:Small_Island_Developing_States)