

Beulah Heights University

Cultural Resume
Northern and Southern Belize

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Introduction

The nation that I have chosen to compose my social resume is Northern and Southern Belize. I have a few friends who are from both locations in Belize. They are altogether scattered about in the United States. Nonetheless, there is one friend who is near me that I consider as a sister. For a considerable length of time, she had been revealing to me that I should go there to simply inhale the natural air.

I particularly love seeing the blue water and the unwinding environment of the shorelines. Skimming through the recreation magazines looking for exactly how delightful the nation of Belize would make a man not give any apprehension to jumping on a plane. I have had the chance to visit there. Simply tuning in to the discussions they take part in about the nation when we are largely together influences me to take a major opportunity for an incredible ordeal. The energy in their voices as they discuss traveling there influences me to observe that Belize must see. Previously called British Honduras, the country now known as Belize derives its name from one of two historical sources: Maya root words or the surname of the Scottish buccaneer Peter Wallace, who maintained a camp near present-day Belize City in the seventeenth century. Belizeans affectionately refer to their country as "the Jewel."

Currently, I have traveled to Belize twice in my lifetime. I had to go with this country because original I choose another one and the individual decided she couldn't participate at the very last minute.

Country Profile

Belize is a small slender country in Central America that is situated on the southeast side of the Yucatan Peninsula, south of Mexico and east and north of Guatemala. The country's name comes from a Mayan word meaning "muddy water." In area, it is about the size of New Hampshire and slightly larger than Wales. Most of the country is heavily forested with various hardwoods. Mangrove swamps and cays along the coast give way to hills and mountains in the interior. With only (8866 sq. miles) of area (which includes 266 sq. miles of offshore islands). The small place is tucked onto the much larger masses of Guatemala and Mexico who in the not too distant past, laid territorial claims to parts or all of Belize. Belize is 174 miles in length and just 75 miles wide at its broadest point Its barrier reef, which runs along virtually the entire coast, lies about 15 miles off-shore. To its north Belize borders, the Mexican state of Quintana Roo, to its west and south, Guatemala, and to the east the Caribbean. The Hondo River traces the border with Quintana, the border with Guatemala to the west is an arbitrary north-south line, and the southern border is the Sarstoon River.¹

One of the nicest things about Belize is its weather. The average yearly temperature is 84°F. Belizean weather varies with location and time of year. The drier season runs from December through May or June (coinciding with the main tourist season), and the rainy season lasts from June through November (on average, in Belize City, there are about 16 rainy days in September or October, but only 4 or 5 rainy days in March or April). The amount of rainfall, surprisingly within such a small country varies with latitude. In the north, in the Corozal District, the average annual rainfall is only about 51 inches; and moving southwards, to Belize City, the average is about 79 inches; and in the very southeast coastal corner, near Punta Gorda, the

¹ Beletsy, Les, Belize & Northern Guatemala – Travelers' Wildlife Guides, 1st Ed. 2010, Interlink Publishing Group, Inc. 46 Crosby St. Northampton, MA 01060 www.Interlnkbooks.com, p.14.

amount reaches 177 inches, or an average of about half an inch a day. Temperatures and humidity levels, except at higher elevations in the Maya Mountains and Mountain Pine Ridge region, are warmly, moistly, tropical: the average daily temperature in Belize City ranges from 73°F in December through June to 88°F in May through September. Average maximum temperatures, of course, are higher and range into the mid-90°F. High in the Mountain Pine Ridge, average daily lows are 63°F in December, 71°F May; average highs are 78°F in December, 90°F in May.²

We can forget that as with any other country in the Caribbean, Belize is subject to hurricanes. During the hurricane season, while statistically Belize does not attract many major direct hits, it does get its share of severe tropical weather with high winds and rain. However, they are emergency ready with a cooperative early warning network that we share with our neighbors. So far, their safety precautions and evacuation methods and procedure have proven to be highly effective.³

Belize extremely diverse in culture and is made up of a Mosaic of backgrounds and languages. The Maya civilization spread into the area of Belize between 1500 B.C. and A.D. flourishing until about A.D. 1200. Archaeologist estimated that at their peak 1 to 2 million Amerindians lived within the borders of present day Belize. The population of about 250,000 is concentrated in the six cities and larger towns: inland, Belmopan, replaced Belize as the official capital in 1972 after a hurricane 1961 with 13,260 people, and on the coast, Belize City, which is the largest city makes up nearly a fifth of the population with 49,050 people and Dangriga (formerly Stann Creek), Punta Gorda, and Orange Walk and San Ignacio make up the rest. The racial and ethnic makeup of the country is 44.1 percent Mestizo are mixed white and Amerindian; 31 percent Creole are a mix of black and white; 9.2 percent Maya-Yucatec; 6.2

² Ibid 15

³ <https://www.travelbelize.org/facts-about-belize>.

percent Garifuna-mixed black and Caribbean islander; and 9.5 percent Mopans and Kekchi Amerindians. Other ethnic groups account for a small percentage of the population: East Indian, German/Dutch, and Mennonite. Large neighborhoods of Arabs, European, and Chinese can be found as well. The age structure: 0-14 years 43 percent, 15-64 years 54 percent, 65 years and over 3 percent. The population growth rate is 2.75 percent with the birth rate of 3.29 births per 1,000 and death rate of 4.81 per 1,000 of the population. The religious make up of Belize is 62 percent Roman Catholic, 30 percent Protestant with 8 percent making up none or other. .⁴

Belize celebrates ten official holidays:

New Year's Day/January 1. Good Friday, Easter - March/April – Most of the residents of Belize are Christians. There are numerous festivals surround the season of Lent, Holy Week and Easter Sunday. On Good Friday in Ambergris Caye and Caye Caulker, special Catholic Church Services are held. Most villagers participate in processions carrying a crucifix through the streets. **Labor Day/May 1** – There is an address by the Minister of Labor or a representative is followed by parades and rallies. Other activities include kite-flying contest, cycle race, harbor regatta, and horse races. **Commonwealth Day/May 24** - Is a nationwide celebration for the Queen's birthday. The National Sports Council holds horse races in Belize City at the National Stadium and in Orange Walk Town at the People's Stadium. **St. George's Caye Day/September 10** – This holiday commemorates a battle in 1798 when the Spanish were defeated by slaves, Baymen, and the British soldiers. Carnivals, sporting activities, fire engine parade, and pop concerts are held several days prior to this event. **Independence Day/September 21** – This celebration consists of numerous cultural, religious and sporting activities, flag-raising ceremonies, parades, street jump-ups, music, dance and food. A festival is

⁴ Shields, Charles J., Discovering Central America-Belize, Mason Crest Publishers, Copyright 2003, 370 Reed Road, Broomall, PA 19008, www.masoncrest.com, p.34.

held for the crowning of Miss San Pedro. **Columbus Day/October 12** – This holiday is also called Pan American Day and celebrated with regatta racing in Belize City. Fiestas and beauty contests are held in Orange Walk and Corozal to celebrate Mestizo culture. Horses and cycle races are held as well. **Garifuna Settlement Day/November 19** – This is a festival held mainly in the southernmost areas of the country to mark the first arrival of the Garifuna in 1832 in Dangriga. **Christmas Day/December 25 and Boxing Day/December 26** – This day features parties, dances, horse races and Garifuna dances.⁵

Belize is a place that is known for mountains, swampy bogs, and tropical unsettled areas. The key attractions of Belize to remote visitors are its tropical rainforests and related characteristic life, its incredible number of exceedingly accessible yet delicately went to Mayan decimate goals and its long block reef and related close to nothing, tropical islands. There is the level shoreline front plain along the Caribbean Ocean, a considerable amount of it masses of mangroves and swamps and wet waterfront marshland. The Xunantunich (Maiden of the Rock), a Mayan stately concentration disregards the Hopan Waterway in Belize.

What are some popular foods in this country? Belize has never extremely built up a national food. Its cooking obtains components from Britain, the United State, Mexico and the Caribbean. The conventional staples are rice and beans which is regularly eaten with chicken, pork, meat, fish or vegetables. Coconut drain, and fricasseed plantain include a tropical flavor. Outlandish customary sustenance's incorporate armadillo, venison, and browned paca, a little rat like guinea pig.

What are some customs and courtesies of this country e.g. greetings?

⁵ Ibid 50-51

From the time you arrive in Belize, whether you are an adventure traveler, part of a family trip or in the country for a relaxing beach vacation – Belize people and culture make you feel as welcome and comfortable, like nowhere you've ever visited.

Describe the educational system of this country. Education is important to the people of Belize. The Mennonites have made it a point to have their own schools. The Belize government and people encourage every child to pursue education. However, there are certain barriers in terms of financial resources for books, tuition, uniforms, and sometimes transportation that can be addressed by LTA volunteers to keep children in school. Living Tree Academy (LTA) is a group of volunteers from around the world that are committed to helping children with educational opportunities. The LTA Library is an extension of Living Tree Academy that is working to partner with libraries around the world to grant access to supplies, technology, and support for their communities, children, and families. Currently LTA volunteers are partnering with the San Pedro, Belize public library to remodel the facility, expand their book inventory, and establish a sustainable system for individuals to donate books.

Describe the political system of this country (be sure to include information such as the percentage of women in government). A snapshot of the country depicts it as a country that is free from political strife. Belize's government is a parliamentary democracy. The head of state is Queen Elizabeth II since February 6, 1952. She is represented in Belize by Governor General Sir Colville Young since November 17, 1993. The head of Belize's government is Prime Minister Said Musa, who was appointed on August 27, 1998. There are no elections in Belize. The monarchy is hereditary; the governor general is appointed by the monarch; and the governor general appoints the prime minister from the House of Representatives. This is usually the leader of the leader of the majority party. **P. 38 ibid**

Discuss the history of this country e.g. Are there wars or important events that took place in this country?

The Mayan civilization spread into the area of Belize between 1500 B.C. and A.D. 300 and flourished until about 1200. Several major archaeological sites—notably Caracol, Lamanai, Lubaantun, Altun Ha, and Xunantunich—reflect the advanced civilization and much denser population of that period. European contact began in 1502 when Columbus sailed along the coast. The first recorded European settlement was begun by shipwrecked English seamen in 1638. Over the next 150 years, more English settlements were established. This period was also marked by piracy, indiscriminate logging, and sporadic attacks by Indians and neighboring Spanish settlements. Both Spain and Britain lay claim to the land until Britain defeated the Spanish in the battle of St. George's Cay (1798). It became a colony of Great Britain in 1840, known as British Honduras, and a Crown colony in 1862. Full internal self-government was granted in January of 1964. In 1973, the country changed its name from British Honduras to Belize.

Belize became independent on Sept. 21, 1981, but Guatemala, which had made claims on the territory since the 1800s, refused to recognize it. British troops remained in the country to defend it. Although the dispute between Guatemala and Great Britain remained unresolved, Guatemala recognized Belize's sovereignty in Sept. 1991. In the late 1990s, Belize tended to be a refuge for Guatemalans fleeing fighting between guerrillas and government forces. Figures from January 1997 show that 8,672 registered refugees had settled in Belize, however since then many of them have returned home.

Guatemala, however, still claims more than half of Belize's territory. Prime Minister Said Musa was reelected to a second term in 2003. Musa promised to improve conditions to the largely underdeveloped, southern part of Belize.

Northern Belize

Belize's northern region was settled in the 19th century by refugees from southern Mexico during the Caste War, and you will still more Spanish than English there. What's left of the three forts (Mundy and Cairns in Orange Walk Town and Fort Barley in Corozal) reminds one that this was the scene of violent battles between Belizean settlers and war-minded Maya trying to rid the area of outsiders. The last battle took place in 1872. For centuries before settlement by farming-inclined mestizo refugees from Yucatan (Mexico) in 1849, this was timber country. Logs from the north and middle districts of Belize were floated down the New River to Corozal Bay, and then to Belize City; from there they were shipped all over the world. If you travel about two miles south pass Orange Walk Town, you'll find a toll bridge over the New River. Tree harvesting is still going on and you'll encounter large logging trucks crossing the toll bridge. At one time, sugarcane was the most important Belizean crop, then oranges. Today local farmers grow more papaya than citrus and beef producers are tapping into the export market. Caribbean rum (a product of sugarcane) is still big business in the area. **P. 241-242 Moon**

Southern Belize

The indigenous population of southern Belize dates back 3,600 years and the Mopan Maya are still well represented, especially in towns like Maya Centre and other villages in the hills. The earliest white settlers were puritan from the island of New Providence in the Bahamas. The simple living people began a trading post (also known as a "stand", which over time deteriorated

to “Stan”) and spread south into the Plascencia area. The town’s destiny was drastically altered when the first bats of Garifuna people reached the shore from Roatan.

Over the millennia, rivers and streams gushing from the Maya Mountains have deposited a rich layer of soil, making the coastal and valley regions ideal farming areas. A disease called “Panama Rot” wiped out the once thriving industry here, but with new technology, a strain of bananas has been developed that appears to be surviving. Otherwise, it’s all about the oranges. Stann Creek’s citrus produces Valencia oranges and grapefruits, which are then processed (onsite) into juice – one of Belize most important exports. **P 174 Moon**

Challenging My Biases and Assumptions

What biases and assumptions did you have about this country before you conducted this research? I really have no biases that were challenging, nor did I have any assumptions that were challenging. As a tourist I always envision the beauty of the islands never really stopped to thing about the fact that the element of crime and economical challenges exist there just as it does everywhere else.

What are some contemporary challenges that this country is facing e.g. conflict, limited access to education, child trafficking?

Belize is no different than any other place as it faces numerous challenges with the criminal elements. Outside of drug possession, trafficking, petty theft and burglary, gang violence in Belize is a growing and getting worse day by day.

The languages in Belize is considered a diverse adventure. It is the only country in Central America whose official language is English spoken by nearly all Belizean. However Belizean Creole (Kriol) and Spanish are also commonly spoken. Spanish is the native tongue of 50 percent of the population and spoken as a second language by another 20 percent. The

Garifuna, Mayans and Mennonite speak their own languages in addition to English and Spanish. The various Mayan groups speak their own original languages which traces back to more than 1,000 years. The Mennonite speaks German.⁶

⁶ Ibid 41

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A land of majestic beauty.