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Belize



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Background:  

Belize was the site of several Mayan city states until their decline at the end of the first millennium A.D. The British and Spanish disputed the region in the 17th and 18th centuries; it formally became the colony of British Honduras in 1854. Territorial disputes between the UK and Guatemala delayed the independence of Belize until 1981. Guatemala refused to recognize the new nation until 1992. Tourism has become the mainstay of the economy. Current concerns include an unsustainable foreign debt, high unemployment, growing involvement in the South American drug trade, growing urban crime, and increasing incidences of HIV/AIDS.

Geography**Belize**[Top of Page](#)**Location:**  

Central America, bordering the Caribbean Sea, between Guatemala and Mexico

Geographic coordinates:  

17 15 N, 88 45 W

Map references:  

[Central America and the Caribbean](#)

Area:   

total: 22,966 sq km

land: 22,806 sq km

water: 160 sq km

Area - comparative:  

slightly smaller than Massachusetts

Land boundaries:  

total: 516 km

border countries: Guatemala 266 km, Mexico 250 km



Coastline:  

386 km



Maritime claims:  

territorial sea: 12 nm in the north, 3 nm in the south; note - from the mouth of the Sarstoon River to Ranguana Cay, Belize's territorial sea is 3 nm; according to Belize's Maritime Areas Act, 1992, the purpose of this limitation is to provide a framework for negotiating a definitive agreement on territorial differences with Guatemala



exclusive economic zone: 200 nm

Climate:  

tropical; very hot and humid; rainy season (May to November); dry season (February to May)

Terrain:  



flat, swampy coastal plain; low mountains in south

Elevation extremes:  

lowest point: Caribbean Sea 0 m
highest point: Doyle's Delight 1,160 m

Natural resources:  

arable land potential, timber, fish, hydropower

Land use:  



arable land: 3.05%
permanent crops: 1.39%
other: 95.56% (2005)

Irrigated land:  

30 sq km (2003)

Total renewable water resources:  

18.6 cu km (2000)

Freshwater withdrawal (domestic/industrial/agricultural):  


total: 0.15 cu km/yr (7%/73%/20%)
per capita: 556 cu m/yr (2000)

Natural hazards:  

frequent, devastating hurricanes (June to November) and coastal flooding (especially in south)

Environment - current issues:  

deforestation; water pollution from sewage, industrial effluents, agricultural runoff; solid and sewage waste disposal

Environment - international agreements:  

party to: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Wetlands, Whaling
signed, but not ratified: none of the selected agreements

Geography - note:  

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

People**Belize**[Top of Page](#)**Population:**   

307,899 (July 2009 est.)

Age structure:  

0-14 years: 37.9% (male 59,462/female 57,117)
15-64 years: 58.6% (male 91,298/female 89,170)
65 years and over: 3.5% (male 5,185/female 5,667) (2009 est.)

Median age:  

total: 20.4 years
male: 20.3 years

female: 20.6 years (2008 est.)

Population growth rate:   

2.154% (2009 est.)

Birth rate:   

27.84 births/1,000 population (2008 est.)

Death rate:   

5.77 deaths/1,000 population (2008 est.)

Net migration rate:   

NA (2009 est.)

Sex ratio:  

at birth: 1.05 male(s)/female

under 15 years: 1.04 male(s)/female

15-64 years: 1.02 male(s)/female

65 years and over: 0.92 male(s)/female

total population: 1.03 male(s)/female (2009 est.)

Infant mortality rate:   

total: 23.07 deaths/1,000 live births

male: 26 deaths/1,000 live births

female: 19.99 deaths/1,000 live births (2009 est.)

Life expectancy at birth:   




total population: 68.2 years

male: 66.44 years


female: 70.05 years (2009 est.)

Total fertility rate:   

3.36 children born/woman (2009 est.)

HIV/AIDS - adult prevalence rate:   

2.1% (2007 est.)

HIV/AIDS - people living with HIV/AIDS:   

3,600 (2007 est.)

HIV/AIDS - deaths:   

fewer than 200 (2007 est.)

Major infectious diseases:  

degree of risk: high

food or waterborne diseases: bacterial diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever

vectorborne diseases: dengue fever and malaria

water contact disease: leptospirosis (2009)



Nationality:  

noun: Belizean(s)

adjective: Belizean

Ethnic groups:  



mestizo 48.7%, Creole 24.9%, Maya 10.6%, Garifuna 6.1%, other 9.7% (2000 census)

Religions:  

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

Languages:  

Spanish 46%, Creole 32.9%, Mayan dialects 8.9%, English 3.9% (official), Garifuna 3.4% (Carib), German 3.3%, other 1.4%, unknown 0.2% (2000 census)



Literacy:  

definition: age 15 and over can read and write

total population: 76.9%

male: 76.7%




female: 77.1% (2000 census)

School life expectancy (primary to tertiary education):  

total: 13 years

male: 13 years

female: 13 years (2004)

Education expenditures:   

5.3% of GDP (2004)

Government Belize

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Country name:  

conventional long form: none

conventional short form: Belize

former: British Honduras

Government type:  

parliamentary democracy

Capital:  

name: Belmopan

geographic coordinates: 17 15 N, 88 46 W

time difference: UTC-6 (1 hour behind Washington, DC during Standard Time)

Administrative divisions:  

6 districts; Belize, Cayo, Corozal, Orange Walk, Stann Creek, Toledo

Independence:  

21 September 1981 (from UK)

National holiday:  



Independence Day, 21 September (1981)

Constitution:  

21 September 1981

Legal system:  

English law; has not accepted compulsory ICJ jurisdiction

Suffrage:  

18 years of age; universal

Executive branch:  

chief of state: Queen ELIZABETH II (since 6 February 1952); represented by Governor General Sir Colville YOUNG, Sr. (since 17 November 1993)

head of government: Prime Minister Dean BARROW (since 8 February 2008); Deputy Prime Minister Gaspar VEGA (since 12 February 2008)

cabinet: Cabinet appointed by the governor general on the advice of the prime minister

elections: the monarch is hereditary; governor general appointed by the monarch; following legislative elections, the leader of the majority party or the leader of the majority coalition is usually appointed prime minister by the governor general; prime minister recommends the deputy prime minister

Legislative branch:  

bicameral National Assembly consists of the Senate (12 seats; members appointed by the governor general - 6 on the advice of the prime minister, 3 on the advice of the leader of the opposition, and 1 each on the advice of the Belize Council of Churches and Evangelical Association of Churches, the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Belize Better Business Bureau, and the National Trade Union Congress and the Civil Society Steering Committee; to serve five-year terms) and the House of Representatives (31 seats; members are elected by direct popular vote to serve five-year terms)

elections: House of Representatives - last held 6 February 2008 (next to be held in 2013)



election results: percent of vote by party - NA; seats by party - UDP 25, PUP 6

Judicial branch:  

Summary Jurisdiction Courts (criminal) and District Courts (civil jurisdiction); Supreme Court (the chief justice is appointed by the governor general on the advice of the prime minister); Court of Appeal; Privy Council in the UK; member of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ)

Political parties and leaders:  



National Alliance for Belizean Rights or NABR; National Reform Party or NRP [Cornelius DUECK]; People's National Party or PNP [Wil MAHEIA]; People's United Party or PUP [Said MUSA]; United Democratic Party or UDP [Dean BARROW]; Vision Inspired by the People or VIP [Paul MORGAN]; We the People Reform Movement or WTP [Hipolito BAUTISTA]

Political pressure groups and leaders:  

Society for the Promotion of Education and Research or SPEAR [Gustavo PERERA]; Association of Concerned Belizeans or ACB [David VASQUEZ]; National Trade Union Congress of Belize or NTUC/B [Rene GOMEZ]

International organization participation:  

ACP, C, Caricom, CDB, FAO, G-77, IADB, IAEA, IBRD, ICAO, ICCT, ICRM, IDA, IFAD, IFC, IFRCS, ILO, IMF, IMO, Interpol, IOC, IOM, ITU, ITUC, LAES, MIGA, NAM, OAS, OPANAL, OPCW, PCA, RG, UN, UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNIDO, UPU, WCL, WCO, WFTU, WHO, WIPO, WMO, WTO

Diplomatic representation in the US:  

chief of mission: Ambassador Nestor MENDEZ

chancery: 2535 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20008

telephone: [1] (202) 332-9636

FAX: [1] (202) 332-6888

consulate(s) general: Los Angeles

Diplomatic representation from the US:  

chief of mission: Ambassador Robert J. DIETER

embassy: Floral Park Road, Belmopan City, Cayo District



mailing address: P.O. Box 497, Belmopan City, Cayo District, Belize

telephone: [501] 822-4011

FAX: [501] 822-4012

Flag description:  

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

Economy **Belize**[Top of Page](#)**Economy - overview:**  

In this small, essentially private-enterprise economy, tourism is the number one foreign exchange earner followed by exports of marine products, citrus, cane sugar, bananas, and garments. The government's expansionary monetary and fiscal policies, initiated in September 1998, led to sturdy GDP growth averaging nearly 4% in 1999-2007, though growth slipped below 3% in 2008 as a result of the global slowdown. Oil discoveries in 2006 bolstered the economic growth. Exploration efforts continue though no new production is expected in 2009. Major concerns continue to be the sizable trade deficit and unsustainable foreign debt equivalent to nearly 90% of GDP. In February 2007, the government restructured nearly all of its public external commercial debt, which will reduce interest payments and relieve liquidity concerns. A key short-term objective remains the reduction of poverty with the help of international donors.

GDP (purchasing power parity):   










































\$2.577 billion (2008 est.)
















































\$2.459 billion (2007)




\$2.421 billion (2006)




GDP (official exchange rate):  

\$1.383 billion (2008 est.)



GDP - real growth rate:	  
	4.8% (2008 est.)
GDP - per capita (PPP):	  
	\$8,600 (2008 est.)
GDP - composition by sector:	 
	<i>agriculture:</i> 29%
	<i>industry:</i> 16.9%
	<i>services:</i> 54.1% (2008 est.)
Labor force:	  
	113,000
	<i>note:</i> shortage of skilled labor and all types of technical personnel (2006 est.)
Labor force - by occupation:	 
	<i>agriculture:</i> 19.5%
	<i>industry:</i> 17.9%
	<i>services:</i> 61.9% (2005)
Unemployment rate:	  
	8.5% (2007)
Household income or consumption by percentage share:	 
	<i>lowest 10%:</i> NA%
	<i>highest 10%:</i> NA%
Investment (gross fixed):	  
	24.5% of GDP (2008 est.)
Budget:	 
	<i>revenues:</i> \$335.5 million
	<i>expenditures:</i> \$361.5 million (2008 est.)
Inflation rate (consumer prices):	  
	4.5% (2008 est.)
Central bank discount rate:	  
	12% (31 December 2007)
Commercial bank prime lending rate:	  
	14.33% (31 December 2007)
Stock of money:	  
	\$323.9 million (31 December 2007)
Stock of quasi money:	  
	\$549 million (31 December 2007)
Stock of domestic credit:	  
	\$877.6 million (31 December 2007)

Market value of publicly traded shares:	  	\$NA
Agriculture - products:	 	bananas, cacao, citrus, sugar; fish, cultured shrimp; lumber; garments
Industries:	 	garment production, food processing, tourism, construction, oil
Industrial production growth rate:	  	1.8% (2008 est.)
Electricity - production:	  	213.5 million kWh (2007 est.)
Electricity - consumption:	  	193.3 million kWh (2006 est.)
Electricity - exports:	 	0 kWh (2007 est.)
Electricity - imports:	 	0 kWh (2007 est.)
Oil - production:	  	3,000 bbl/day (2007 est.)
Oil - consumption:	  	7,000 bbl/day (2006 est.)
Oil - exports:	  	1,960 bbl/day (2006)
Oil - imports:	  	7,122 bbl/day (2005)
Oil - proved reserves:	  	6.7 million bbl (1 January 2008 est.)
Natural gas - production:	  	0 cu m (2007 est.)
Natural gas - consumption:	  	0 cu m (2007 est.)
Natural gas - exports:	  	0 cu m (2007 est.)
Natural gas - imports:	  	0 cu m (2007 est.)

Natural gas - proved reserves:   
0 cu m (1 January 2006 est.)



Current account balance:   
-\$32 million (2008 est.)



Exports:   
\$496 million f.o.b. (2008 est.)




Exports - commodities:  
sugar, bananas, citrus, clothing, fish products, molasses, wood

Exports - partners:  
US 28.7%, UK 16.3%, Thailand 5.8%, Cote d'Ivoire 5.4%, Finland 4.2%, Spain 4% (2007)

Imports:   
\$718 million f.o.b. (2008 est.)

Imports - commodities:  
machinery and transport equipment, manufactured goods; fuels, chemicals, pharmaceuticals; food, beverages, tobacco

Imports - partners:  
US 31.2%, Mexico 13.6%, Cuba 8.5%, Guatemala 8%, Russia 4.6% (2007)




Reserves of foreign exchange and gold:   
\$117 million (31 December 2008 est.)




Debt - external:   
\$1.2 billion (June 2005 est.)



Exchange rates:  
Belizean dollars (BZD) per US dollar - 2 (2008 est.), 2 (2007), 2 (2006), 2 (2005), 2 (2004)

Communications Belize



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Telephones - main lines in use:   
33,900 (2007)

Telephones - mobile cellular:   
118,300 (2007)

Telephone system:  
general assessment: above-average system; fixed-line teledensity of 12 per 100 persons; mobile-cellular telephone density of about 40 per 100 persons
domestic: trunk network depends primarily on microwave radio relay
international: country code - 501; landing point for the Americas Region Caribbean Ring System (ARCOS-1) fiber-optic telecommunications submarine cable that provides links to South and Central America, parts of the Caribbean, and the US; satellite earth station - 8 (Intelsat - 2, unknown - 6) (2007)

Radio broadcast stations:  
AM 1, FM 16, shortwave 0 (2006)

Television broadcast stations:  
5 (2006)

Internet country code:  
.bz



Internet hosts:   
2,751 (2008)



Internet users:   
32,000 (2007)

Transportation **Belize**




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Airports:   
44 (2007)

Airports - with paved runways:  
total: 4
1,524 to 2,437 m: 1
914 to 1,523 m: 1
under 914 m: 2 (2007)

Airports - with unpaved runways:  
total: 40
2,438 to 3,047 m: 1
914 to 1,523 m: 12
under 914 m: 27 (2007)

Roadways:   
total: 3,007 km
paved: 575 km
unpaved: 2,432 km (2006)


Waterways:   
825 km (navigable only by small craft) (2008)

Merchant marine:   
total: 216
by type: barge carrier 1, bulk carrier 32, cargo 152, chemical tanker 2, container 1, passenger 1, petroleum tanker 9, refrigerated cargo 12, roll on/roll off 5, specialized tanker 1
foreign-owned: 178 (Australia 1, China 71, Croatia 2, Cyprus 1, Estonia 6, Greece 1, Iceland 2, Italy 3, Japan 8, South Korea 1, Latvia 12, Norway 3, Peru 1, Russia 31, Singapore 2, Spain 1, Turkey 15, Ukraine 7, UAE 5, UK 5) (2008)

Ports and terminals:  
Belize City, Big Creek

Military**Belize**[Top of Page](#)**Military branches:**  

Belize Defense Force (BDF): Army, BDF Air Wing, BDF Volunteer Guard (2009)

Military service age and obligation:  



18 years of age for voluntary military service; laws allow for conscription only if volunteers are insufficient; conscription has never been implemented; volunteers typically outnumber available positions by 3:1 (2008)

Manpower available for military service:  




males age 16-49: 74,605
females age 16-49: 72,926 (2008 est.)

Manpower fit for military service:  



males age 16-49: 56,135
females age 16-49: 54,732 (2009 est.)

Manpower reaching militarily significant age annually:  

male: 3,632
female: 3,500 (2009 est.)

Military expenditures:   

1.4% of GDP (2006)

Transnational Issues**Belize**[Top of Page](#)**Disputes - international:**  

OAS-initiated Agreement on the Framework for Negotiations and Confidence Building Measures saw cooperation in repatriation of Guatemalan squatters and other areas, but Guatemalan land and maritime claims in Belize and the Caribbean Sea remain unresolved; the Line of Adjacency created under the 2002 Differendum serves in lieu of the contiguous international boundary to control squatting in the sparsely inhabited rain forests of Belize's border region; Honduras claims Belizean-administered Sapodilla Cays in its constitution but agreed to a joint ecological park under the Differendum

Illicit drugs:  

transshipment point for cocaine; small-scale illicit producer of cannabis, primarily for local consumption; offshore sector money-laundering activity related to narcotics trafficking and other crimes (2008)

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