Belize Basics

The Central American country of Belize is located in the Western Caribbean. Belize shares it's borders with Mexico to the north, Guatemala to the south and west, and 174 miles of coastline with the Caribbean Sea to the east. Belize land mass encompasses over 22,800 square kilometers/8,803 square with approximately 266 square miles of islands.

Belize, formerly referred to as British Honduras while a member of the British commonwealth, was granted its independence on September 21, 1981. Today Belize is a melting pot of cultures. Within her borders there are several ethnic groups that speak a variety of languages. With a population of over 256,000 people, during your visit to Belize you will find that Belizeans are comprised of many ethnicities: from Creole to Mennonite to Lebanese to Chinese to Garifuna to Belize Maya to Mestizo to Taiwanese to East Indians to expats from Canada, the United States, Italy, Holland, Great Britain and other points from around the globe.

Currency

The official currency is the Belize dollar, it has a fixed exchange rate to the US dollar. One US dollar is equivalent to two Belize dollars. Most restaurants, gift shops and tour operators will accept U.S. currency, traveller checks, or major credit cards. Please note that when using your credit cards in Belize, most businesses will add a 5% service charge to your bill. Be sure to ask when making purchases whether the price quoted is in US or Belize dollars.

Weather

The weather in Belize is subtropical. The annual mean temperature is 30 degrees Celcius/80 degrees Fahrenheit. Annual rainfall ranges from 50 inches per year in the far northern Orange Walk District to as much as 165 inches in the far southern Toledo District. The rainy season usually runs from mid June through late August, with the dry season primarily from January until late May. During the rainy season it generally rains during the night, though at any time of the year an occasional refreshing rain can pop up at a moments notice.

Language

Although English is the official language of Belize, while visiting you are likely to hear Creole, Spanish, as well Yucatec, Ketchi and Mopan dialects of the Belize Maya. You are also likely to encounter the Germanic based language spoken by the Mennonite as well as the Garifuna language of the coastal populations, the Garinagu.