

Belize

Geography

Location: Middle America, bordering the Caribbean Sea, between Guatemala and Mexico.

Map references: Central America and the Caribbean.

Area:

total area: 22,960 sq km.

land area: 22,800 sq km.

Land boundaries: total 516 km, Guatemala 266 km, Mexico 250 km.

Coastline: 386 km.

Maritime claims:

exclusive economic zone: 200 nm.

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 miles; according to Belize's Maritime Areas Act, 1992, the

purpose of this limitation is to provide a framework for the negotiation of a definitive agreement on territorial differences with Guatemala.

Climate: tropical; very hot and humid; rainy season (May to February).

Terrain: flat, swampy coastal plain; low mountains in south.

Natural resources: arable land potential, timber, fish.

Land use:

arable land: 2%.

permanent crops: 0%.

meadows and pastures: 2%.

forest and woodland: 44%.

other: 52%.

Irrigated land: 20 sq km (1989 est.)

Environment:

current issues: deforestation; water pollution from sewage, industrial effluents, agricultural runoff.

natural hazards: frequent, devastating hurricanes (September to December) and coastal flooding (especially in south).

Note: national capital moved 80 km inland from Belize City to Belmopan because of hurricanes; only country in Central America without a coastline on the North Pacific Ocean.

People

Population: 214,061 (July 1995 est.)

Age structure:

0-14 years: 44% (female 45,812; male 47,618).

15-64 years: 53% (female 55,630; male 57,230).

65 years and over: 3% (female 3,970; male 3,801) (July 1995 est.)

Population growth rate: 2.42% (1995 est.)

Birth rate: 33.71 births/1,000 population (1995 est.)

Death rate: 5.86 deaths/1,000 population (1995 est.)

Net migration rate: -3.7 migrant(s)/1,000 population (1995 est.)

Infant mortality rate: 34.7 deaths/1,000 live births (1995 est.)

Life expectancy at birth:
total population: 68.32 years.
male: 66.37 years.
female: 70.36 years (1995 est.)

Total fertility rate: 4.25 children born/woman (1995 est.)

Nationality:
noun: Belizean(s).
adjective: Belizean.

Ethnic divisions: mestizo 44%, Creole 30%, Maya 11%, Garifuna 7%, other 8%.

Religions: Roman Catholic 62%, Protestant 30% (Anglican 12%, Methodist 6%, Mennonite 4%, Seventh-Day Adventist 3%, Pentecostal 2%, Jehovah's Witnesses 1%, other 2%), none 2%, other 6% (1980).

Languages: English (official), Spanish, Maya, Garifuna (Carib).

Literacy: age 15 and over has ever attended school (1970).
total population: 91%.
male: 91%.
female: 91%.

Labor force: 51,500.

by occupation: agriculture 30%, services 16%, government 15.4%, commerce 11.2%, manufacturing 10.3%.

note: shortage of skilled labor and all types of technical personnel (1985).

Government

Names:

conventional long form: none.

conventional short form: Belize.

former: British Honduras.

Type: parliamentary democracy.

Capital: Belmopan.

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.

Suffrage: 18 years of age; universal.

Flag: 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

Overview: The small, essentially private enterprise economy is based primarily on agriculture, agro-based industry, and merchandising, with tourism and construction assuming increasing importance. Agriculture accounts for about 30% of GDP and provides 75% of export earnings, while sugar, the chief crop, accounts for almost 40% of hard currency earnings. The US, Belize's main trading partner, is assisting in efforts to reduce dependency on sugar with an agricultural diversification program.

Transportation

Railroads: 0 km.

Highways:
total: 2,710 km.

Inland waterways: 825 km river network used by shallow-draft craft;
seasonally navigable.

Ports: Belize City, Big Creek, Corozol, Punta Gorda.

Airports:
total: 46.

Defence Forces

Branches: Belize Defense Force (includes Army, Navy, Air Force,
and Volunteer Guard), Belize National Police.