



TRIP PREPARATION INFORMATION

BELIZE BIRDING: FEBRUARY- MARCH 2020

Belize is a stable, comfortable country with one of the world's largest coral reefs, a landscape rich with history and Mayan ruins, beautiful beaches, friendly people, and many national parks and preserves full of tropical wildlife. Belize is different from other Central American countries in at least one respect, it was a British colony (until 1981), not a Spanish one, with most residents speaking English.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

All U.S. citizens must have a U.S. passport valid for at least six months from the date of arrival in Belize and proof of an onward or return ticket. No visas are required for citizens of the United States for tourist visits of up to 30 days, but they must have onward or return air tickets and proof of sufficient funds to maintain themselves in Belize. All tourists and non-Belizean citizens are required to pay an exit fee of ~ \$40U.S. (this is usually built into your airline ticket costs).

We recommend you read the US State Department page on Belize:

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/Belize.html#/>

We recommend that you make a photocopy of your passport photo pages and to keep this copy in a different place from the passport during the tour. In the event your passport is lost or stolen, this copy, as well as two extra passport photos will expedite getting a new replacement passport.

Additional information on entry and customs requirements may be obtained from the Embassy of Belize at 2535 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20008, Tel. (202) 332-9636 or at their website:

<http://www.embassyofbelize.org/>.

HEALTH MATTERS

We recommend that you please review this itinerary with your physician at least 3 months before traveling. Although no vaccines are required for entering Belize, the Center for Disease Control (CDC), does recommend the following:

- **Hepatitis A or Immune Globulin (IG):** Transmission of the Hepatitis A virus can occur through direct person-to-person contact; through exposure to contaminated water, ice, or shellfish harvested in contaminated water; or from fruits, vegetables, or other foods that are eaten uncooked and that were contaminated during harvesting or subsequent handling.
- **Hepatitis B:** Transmission of the Hepatitis B virus can occur through exposure to blood or body fluids, (e.g., sexual contact with the local population, medical treatment).

- Rabies: You might want to consider having a vaccination for Rabies but please consult your health care provider. (Note: Please do not pet or handle domesticated animals while on tour.)
- Typhoid: Typhoid fever can be contracted through contaminated drinking water or food, or by eating food or drinking beverages that have been handled by a person who is infected.
- Check to make sure you are up to date on your booster shot for tetanus-diphtheria and measles.

Mosquito borne diseases in Belize include:

- Malaria: At the time of this writing, the CDC reported the following: “Malaria is rare but found in the districts of Cayo, Stann Creek, and Toledo. None in Belize City and islands frequented by tourists. Risk for travelers is low.” Please talk to your health care provider about a prescription anti-malarial drug. We also recommend that you use insect repellent at all times.
- Dengue fever: A common mosquito-borne viral disease of humans is on the increase in all of Central America, including Belize. Good use of insect repellent is the best protection against this and other insect-borne diseases.
- Zika virus is a mosquito-borne illness that can be spread from a pregnant woman to her unborn baby as well as through sexual contact. Good use of insect repellent is the best protection against this and other insect-borne diseases.

For detailed recommendations on vaccinations and other health precautions, such as safe food and water and insect bite protection, please check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website: wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/Belize.

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Medical Care and Insurance:

Medical care is limited and we will be traveling far from hospitals and clinics. Serious injuries or illnesses can usually only be treated in Belize City or necessitate evacuation to another country, which may take several days. Please review your health insurance and purchase supplemental insurance –see below. (Medicare does not cover you overseas).

Insurance: We strongly recommend everyone purchase Trip Insurance (Trip Cancellation, Trip Interruption, Emergency medical, and Baggage coverage) within 2 weeks of signing on to a trip. The best method for shopping for such insurance is online at www.insuremytrip.com. All the reputable companies are listed here, and you can easily compare coverage.

You can't assume your health insurance will go with you when you travel. It's very important to find out BEFORE you leave whether your medical insurance will cover you overseas. You need to ask your insurance company two questions:

- Does my policy apply when I am out of the United States?
- Will it cover emergencies like a trip to a foreign hospital or a medical evacuation?

Physical Conditioning and Pace:

This trip doesn't involve any extended hikes, prolonged up-and-down, or hiking at high altitudes. Your level of conditioning, however, can play a pivotal role in how much you are able to enjoy yourself on our birding walks, and may even impact your ability to be in position to take advantage of some good birding opportunities. You want to be in good enough shape so that all your physical resources are not depleted in the birding walks. Any person leading a reasonably active daily life should not find this trip overly taxing.

Just like birds everywhere, the birds in Belize are most active and vocal in the morning. There are about 550 species of birds found in Belize. In order to have the best chance to see them, we will start early most days. Be prepared for 5 or 6 AM wake up calls! Finally, of course, patience, mental flexibility, good humor, and acceptance of different worldviews will all be valued assets on tour.

Keep in Mind:

- Sunscreen and insect repellent are essential
- The key to health and happiness in the tropics is keeping well hydrated. Bring a water bottle and drink often!
- Chiggers are a common problem in grassy areas (around La Milpa for example). Please liberally apply deet-based repellent to your feet and legs in particular.
- If you have allergies (e.g. to bee stings) that require special medications, you are responsible for providing your own care and medications.

Rest Rooms:

At some rest room stops and lodges you may notice a small covered wastebasket next to the toilet. This is for **all** paper products, including toilet paper. Modern plumbing is something that we take for granted but does not exist in all locations.



FLIGHTS

Belize City airport (BZE) is easily accessed with flights from Houston, Charlotte, NC or Miami.

MONEY MATTERS

Currency:

For several decades, the Belize Dollar has been tied to the U.S. dollar at a rate of approximately BZ\$2 for one U.S. Dollar. (Conversely, 1 BZD = .50 US dollar). U.S. dollars are readily accepted throughout Belize, and it does not make sense to change your money into Belize Dollars. We recommend that you bring small denominations of U.S. currency. Traveler's checks are difficult to exchange and are not recommended. ATM's are not readily available and often have difficulty accessing U.S. banks.

Valuables:

You are encouraged to leave your jewelry at home. Such valuables as you will need - cash, passports, and watches - should not be left in the lodge rooms during the day while you are in the field.

ABOUT BELIZE

Geography:

Belize is a small country, a bit smaller than Massachusetts, with a population of only 367,000. The northern part (including Crooked Tree and Rio Bravo) is mostly low and flat, not more than 300 feet in elevation. Here you will find farms, forests, flat plains, palm savannahs, and swampy areas. Along the coastal areas there are mangrove swamps and lagoons. There are also, if you go inland from the coast, flat areas with little hilly parts. The small hills support semi-deciduous, broadleaf rainforest.

The southern part of Belize is a coastal strip, about 10 miles wide, also at a low elevation. There are marshes, savannahs, and some rainforest. Inland and in the western part of Belize, there are evergreen forests and pine savannahs, which you would find in the Maya Mountains. The mountains make the shape of a crescent and rise up to 3000 feet in some areas. The Maya Mountains run from Belize into Guatemala and include Belize's Mountain Pine Ridge.

Offshore are the cayes (keys), or small islands, along the Belize Barrier Reef. These small islands are covered in mangroves and palms and most don't have any human development on them. Ambergris Caye and Caye Caulker are the largest of the cayes, and support towns and roads including tourist facilities.

Climate:

The dry season has shifted a bit in the past ten years and now is from March to May. Rainy season lasts from June through February. The general climate is moist and tropical. Belize City is warm all year round, with average temperatures at a pleasant 72 degrees in the dry season and up to 88 degrees in the rainy season. In February and March, Belize will be warm and humid. Daytime highs will probably be in the mid-80's, but can be higher. Come prepared for a variety of conditions. Rain can occur any month, so please bring raingear.

Communications:

Cell phone / wifi reception is spotty throughout the tour itinerary. If you are bringing your cell phone, make sure to get an international service package from your cellular provider. If your phone has a sim card, you can buy a sim card at the Belize City airport. But if you just want to keep in touch with friends and family back home, Texting is a great option, it's cheap. The app "WhatsApp" is practically free to text back to the US – but you must set it up before you depart home.

Phone to and from Belize: Belize has a standardized seven-digit phone numbering system. There are no city or area codes to dial from within Belize. **To call Belize:** 1. Dial the international access code: 011 from the U.S.; 2. Dial the country code: 501. 3. Dial the number.

To make international calls from Belize, first dial 00 and then the country code (U.S. or Canada 1, U.K. 44, Ireland 353, Australia 61, New Zealand 64). Next dial the area code and number. For example, if you wanted to call the British Embassy in Washington, D.C., you would dial tel. 00-1-202-588-7800.

Food and Drink:

As a general precaution, unpeeled fruits and vegetables, lettuce, tomatoes, etc., should be carefully washed. Potable water and safe food will be provided throughout your trip. Vegetarian diets can be easily accommodated, if you inform us on the Personal Information form.

Electric Current:

The current in Belize is 100 volts AC, 60m cycles (the same as in the U.S.); however, we recommend that you do not take electrical appliances such as hair dryers, electric curlers, irons, etc. Such high-power appliances can strain local power supplies. Life is very casual and appliances add unnecessary weight when your goal should be to travel as light as possible.

Language:

As a former British colony, English is spoken everywhere in Belize.

Safety:

Belize has a high crime rate and tourists are targeted for robberies. At all times, please be very aware of your surroundings and keep track of your wallet and passport. Do not travel at night.

Time:

Belize is on Central Standard Time which is one hour behind Eastern Standard Time. (When it is 2:00 p.m. in Boston, it is 1:00 p.m. in Belize.)

US Embassy:

The U.S. Embassy is located in the capital city of Belmopan, located approximately 50 miles west of Belize City on Floral Park Road, Belmopan. Telephone: 011-501-822-4011. The Embassy is open from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except for the 12:00 noon to 1:00 p.m. lunch hour, and U.S. and Belizean holidays. Internet address is <http://usembassy.state.gov/belize/>; e-mail embelize@state.gov. Emergency after-hours telephone: 011-501-610-5030. ACSBelize@state.gov

WHAT TO BRING

If at all possible, try to fit everything into one carry-on and one checked bag. The carry-on bag should include essential items such as medications, all your money, passport and tickets, binoculars, camera, bathroom kit, and one change of clothes. By placing these items in your carry-on bag, you will minimize the problems if your checked bag is delayed. All luggage, including carry-on, should have identification on both the outside and the inside. We will provide you with Mass Audubon baggage tags to make your bags more visible.

Suggested Clothing List:

- Lightweight shirts. You should bring some with long sleeves for protection against the sun and insects.
- T-shirts
- Lightweight pants. Shorts are appropriate for some situations, but you will want long pants for the forest trails and in brush country where chiggers can be bothersome. Avoid denim jeans
- Lightweight rain gear
- Sun hat
- Swimsuit
- Lightweight walking/hiking boots
- A light sweater and/or windbreaker for cool evenings or mornings
- Socks: Athletic-type socks that cover the calf provide better protection and make it easier to tuck your pant legs in.

Field Gear:

- Binoculars (a must for everyone)
- Insect repellent (Deet based is best. Use daily, particularly on feet and legs)
- Sunscreen (SPF 30 and up is recommended) and lip balm with sunscreen
- Camera and batteries/memory cards and/or a recharging device

- Field guides (See the suggested reading list)
- Small daypack and/or birder's vest for use on trails. A fanny pack is also useful.
- Water bottle
- Sunglasses
- Small flashlight or headlamp, as well as spare batteries
- Wind-up or battery operated alarm clock, as well as spare batteries
- Zip-lock bags for things that get wet (or to keep them dry)
- Moist wipes come in handy
- Bird checklist (We will provide a trip checklist for your use)

Personal Items:

- Scent-free toiletries are recommended to avoid attracting insects
- Motion sickness medication – if needed
- Personal first aid kit with band aids, aspirin, Imodium, etc. (see attached list)
- Over-the counter remedies and prescription medications in their original containers packed in your carry-on bag. Take along a copy of the prescription in your suitcase.
- An extra pair of glasses if you are dependent on them.
- Reading and writing materials; you may wish to keep a journal.

Optional: Spotting scope (The leader will have one, but you may want to bring your own.)

Other Reminders:

- Packing patience and sense of humor is always a good idea!
- Be aware of your surroundings and keep track of your baggage and belongings

PERSONAL FIRST-AID KIT

The list below is only intended to serve as a general guideline. Your personal medical kit should reflect your medical history and the specific health risks associated with your upcoming trip.

PAIN RELIEF: Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin)

WOUND CARE: Band-Aids (assorted sizes) & 4x4 gauze pad, Antiseptic wipe, Tape, Antibiotic ointment

ORTHOPEDIC/FOOT CARE: Ace bandage with Velcro, Moleskin/foam padding, Antifungal cream

COUGH/COLDS: Nasal-decongestant spray, Cough suppressant; Cough drops/throat lozenges

EYE CARE: Eye drops (for dry eyes etc.)

GASTROINTESTINAL ISSUES: Pepto-Bismol Tablets, Oral rehydration/electrolyte mix, Rantidine (Zantac); Loperamide (Imodium); Stool softener (Miralax packets); Hemorrhoid cream/suppositories

ALLERGY/RESPIRATORY: Benadryl, Loratadine (Zyrtec), EPI-Pen if allergies are critical.

OTHER: Motion-sickness aids (e.g., Dramamine, Sea-Band), Hand sanitizer (Handwashing with soap is first choice.), Thermometer (Digital); Orasol Gel 20% (for toothache) & dental wax for lost fillings/caps.

PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS: Consult with your personal physician or travel clinic.

Bring meds in original containers with prescription. Often carried are the following:

Antibiotics: Ciprofloxacin (Cipro) & Amoxicillin; Anti-nausea: Ondansetron (Zofransublingual); Eye

infection: Tobrez Ophthalmic Solution; Altitude/acclimatization: Acetazolamide (Diamox) – Note that this is sulfa drug.

SUGGESTED READINGS

The **Massachusetts Audubon Shop** in Lincoln, Massachusetts, has an extraordinary inventory of field guides. Call 781-259-9661 or email audubonshop@massaudubon.org to order or for more information. Book prices and availability are subject to change.

RECOMMENDED FIELD GUIDES:

Peterson Field Guide to the Birds of Northern Central American (Paperback)

By Jesse Fagan, Oliver Komar, Robert Dean (Illustrator). A field guide to the birds of Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, abundantly illustrated and with comprehensive coverage of both endemic and migrant birds

This is the newest field guide to this region—the first new bird guide in over ten years for the countries of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. This guide is far more complete than previous ones, with more than 800 species accounts, full-color range maps, and 1,000 beautiful illustrations and behavioral.

Now in the Audubon Shop! Call 781-259-9661

Birds of Belize. By H. Lee Jones, University of Texas Press. 2004.

Belize, Travellers' Wildlife Guides by Les Beletsky . Illustrations of 200 commonly encountered birds, 50 mammals, 150 coral reef creatures and 80 species of reptiles and amphibians. It also includes a good introduction to Belize, its natural history, and conservation.

Mammals of Belize by Fiona Reid. With full color illustration, paw print, and description. With a map, viewing tips, and a checklist. A talented illustrator, Reid also provides the color plates.

Enjoy your trip!