

Preparation Information for Travelers to Belize

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS for Belize: All U.S. citizens must have a U.S. passport valid for the duration of their visit to Belize. It should be valid for 6 months after departure. U.S. citizens do not need visas for tourist visits of up to thirty days, but they must have onward or return air tickets and proof of sufficient funds to maintain themselves while in Belize. Visitors for purposes other than tourism, or who wish to stay longer than 30 days, must obtain visas from the government of Belize. 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 web site <http://www.embassyofbelize.org/>.

HEALTH MATTERS

MEDICAL FACILITIES AND HEALTH INFORMATION: Medical care for minor conditions is generally available in Belize City, however, trauma or advanced medical care is limited even in Belize City; it is extremely limited or unavailable in rural areas. Serious injuries or illnesses often necessitate evacuation to another country. Information on vaccinations and other health precautions, such as safe food and water precautions and insect bite protection, may be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Preventions hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747) or via the CDC's internet site at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>.

The following vaccines may be recommended for travel to Mexico and Central America by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Discuss your travel plans and personal health with a health-care provider to determine which, if any, vaccines you will need.

- **Hepatitis A** or immune globulin (IG). Transmission of 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**, especially if you might be exposed to blood or body fluids (for example, health-care workers), have sexual contact with the local population, or be exposed through medical treatment. Hepatitis B vaccine is now recommended for all infants and for children ages 11–12 years who did not receive the series as infants.
- **Malaria:** At the time of this writing, the CDC reported the following: Belize: Risk of Malaria in rural areas, no risk in Belize City. Please see your health care provider for a prescription antimalarial drug. It is recommended that you use insect repellent at all times.
- Rabies, if you might have extensive unprotected outdoor exposure in rural areas, such as might occur during camping, hiking, or bicycling, or engaging in certain occupational activities.
- Typhoid vaccine. 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. Large outbreaks are most often related to fecal contamination of water supplies or foods sold by street vendors
- As needed, booster doses for tetanus-diphtheria and measles.

Keep in Mind:

- Sunscreen and insect repellent are highly recommended.
- The key to “health and happiness” in the tropics is keeping well hydrated. Bring a water bottle and drink often!
- We ask that there be no smoking in dining areas, vehicles, and any enclosed place where the group gathers.
- **If you have allergies (i.e. to bee stings) that require special medications, you are responsible for providing for 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.

Insurance

All travelers to international destinations should check to be certain they are covered by their own medical insurance including a travel policy (out-of-state coverage). To look at trip cancellation evacuation policies, you may find this website useful: www.insuremytrip.com

MONEY MATTERS

For several decades now, the Belize Dollar has been tied to the U.S. dollar at a rate of approximately BZ\$1.97 for a US Dollar. However, US dollars are gladly accepted throughout Belize and it does *not* make sense to change your money into Belize dollars. We recommend you bring small denominations of US currency; one and five dollar bills. Also in some lodges you can change up to \$20 US dollars (do not bring bills larger than \$20). Travelers checks may be difficult to exchange. ATM’s are not readily available and often have difficulty accessing US banks.

DEPARTURE TAXES

The departure taxes and fees keep changing, but most recently are about \$35-39 per person depending on how much (if any) has already been included in the airfare. Note that part of the departure tax you pay helps to support ecotourism initiatives and projects by some of Mass Audubon’s Belizean non-profit partners. Departure taxes can be paid in cash, Mastercard or Visa.

GRATUITIES

Tips for local guides can be between \$5 - \$10 per person per day. For drivers \$3 - \$5 per person, per day.

VALUABLES

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

ABOUT BELIZE

CLIMATE

The coastal areas of Belize receive the cooling breezes usually associated with the sea, while the interior regions of Belize will be warm to hot and in some areas, humid. Daytime highs will probably be in the mid-80’s, but can be higher. On the other hand, if the region experiences a strong cold front from the north known as a “norte”, it can be cool and wet, so come prepared for a variety of conditions. The temperatures will range from mid-50’s to mid-90’s.

The length of day and temperature do not change dramatically with the seasons. The sun rises at about 6 a.m. and sets about 6 p.m. The seasons are defined primarily as wet or dry, but have been less predictable in recent years.

ELECTRIC CURRENT

The current is 100 volts AC, 60m cycles (same as in the US), 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 lightly.

TIME

Belize is on Central Standard Time, which is one hour behind EST (when it is 2:00 in Boston, it is 1:00 in Belize)

FOOD AND DRINK

Most foods are safe to eat in Belize. As a general precaution, unpeeled fruits and vegetables, lettuce, tomatoes, etc. should be carefully washed. Potable water and safe food are provided throughout your trip.

WHAT TO BRING

If at all possible, try to fit everything into one carry-on and one checked bag. The carry-on should include essential items such as medications, all your money, passport and tickets, binoculars and camera, bathroom kit, and one change of clothes. By taking these precautions, it won't be such a major difficulty if your bag is delayed. All luggage, including carry-on, should have identification, on both the outside and the inside. We will provide you with MAS luggage tags to make your bags more visible.

Dress casually and pack lightly. Bring clothing for cool nights and mornings (although evenings are often warm), days can be quite hot so warm weather clothing is a must. Despite it being the dry season, it may rain. Occasional "nortes" come down all winter long and we could have one or more days of rain. In general, light weight; fast-drying clothing is preferable. Many people choose all cotton but cotton/synthetic blends are also cool to wear and dry faster.

Clothing List

- Lightweight blouses and shirts. You should bring some with long sleeves for protection against sun and insects.
- T-shirts (bring at least one that you won't mind wearing in salt water to protect your back while snorkeling or swimming).
- 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 as they are usually too warm for the climate.
- Lightweight rain gear.
- Sun hat with a wide brim and a chinstrap for boat rides (the intense tropical sun is potentially the single most hazardous condition encountered during our tour).
- Lightweight walking/hiking boots with padded ankle and lug sole. A pair of sandals (Teva type) and a pair of reef walkers for use in the water should be sufficient in addition to your hiking boots, but you may want to bring an extra pair of shoes for occasions when your boots get wet.
- A light sweater and/or windbreaker for cool evenings or mornings.
- Socks: the athletic type which covers the calf provides better protection, and makes it easier to tuck your pant legs in.
- Swimsuit

Field Gear

- Binoculars
- Insect Repellent
- Sunscreen (SPF 30 and up is recommended) and lip balm with sunscreen.
- Camera and film--one roll per day is recommended (ASA 400 for forest photography), and an extra camera battery. You may also wish to bring telephoto and macro lenses. If you bring a digital camera, be

sure to bring enough batteries and/or a recharging device, as well as memory cards with plenty of capacity.

- Field guides (see suggested reading list)
- Small daypack and/or birder's vest for use on trails. Fanny pack is also useful.
- Water bottle
- Small flashlight or headlamp (which leaves your hands free), and wind-up or battery operated alarm clock, as well as spare batteries for both.
- Zip-lock bags for things that get wet (or to keep them dry)
- Moist wipes come in handy
- Bird checklist

Personal Items

- Scent-free toiletries are recommended to make yourself less attractive to insects.
- Motion sickness medication - we will be traveling in small airplanes and boats. Weather conditions could make the trips rough; it's best to be prepared.
- Personal first aid kit with band aids, aspirin, Imodium, etc.
- 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 U.S. Embassy is located in the capital city of Belmopan, approximately 50 miles west of Belize City. The U.S. Embassy is on Floral Park Road, Belmopan and the telephone number is 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. The Embassy Internet address is <http://usembassy.state.gov/belize/>; e-mail embbelize@state.gov.

READING LIST

Books that are available at the *Massachusetts Audubon Shop* in Lincoln, Massachusetts, are indicated with an asterisk (*). Call 781-259-9661 or e-mail audubonshop@massaudubon.org to order or for more information.

FIELD GUIDES

*Jones, H. Lee. *Birds of Belize*. Univ. of Texas Press. 2004. This is the newest guide to Belizean birds; you'll need no others, since it includes North American migrants.

TROPICAL ECOLOGY

*Kricher, John C. *Neotropical Companion: Introduction to the Animals, Plants, and Ecosystems of the New World Tropics*, Princeton University Press, 1999.

Horwich, Robert H. and Jonathan Lyon. *A Belizean Rain Forest. The Community Baboon Sanctuary*. Orang-utan Press, Gays Mills, WI. 1990. An excellent primer on tropical ecology and Belize in particular.

REGIONAL GUIDE BOOKS

Mahler, Richard. *BELIZE: Adventures in Nature*. 1999. While the book lists lodging, restaurant and other pertinent travel information, their main focus is describing all the unique natural areas. All the sanctuaries, nature preserves and Mayan sites are covered.

Knopf Guides. *Route of the Mayas: Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador*. 1995. Journey through the mysterious Mayan ruins of the Yucatan and Central America and learn about the fascinating Mayan civilization through this lavishly illustrated and information-packed book, with more than 1,000 drawings, photos and maps.

ANCIENT MAYA HISTORY AND CULTURE

Coe, Michael D. *The Maya*. 1999. Long established as the best general introduction to the New World's greatest ancient civilization, *The Maya* has been enlarged and entirely revised. Includes 153 illustrations. Immensely learned and yet highly readable.

Schele, Linda. *CODE OF KINGS: The Language of Seven Sacred Maya Temples and Tombs*. 1999. Well illustrated tour of seven of the most popular Maya ruins will help readers gain new insights into Mayan beliefs.

Wright, Ronald. *Time Among the Maya: Travels in Belize, Guatemala, & Mexico*. 2000.

Wright's travels take him to Belize, the jungles and mountains of Guatemala, and the Yucatan. Embracing history, politics, anthropology, and literature, this is both a fascinating travel memoir and a study of the Mayan civilization.

OTHER

Rabinowitz, Alan. *Jaguar: One Man's Struggle to Establish the World's First Jaguar Preserve*, 2000.

Barry, Tom and Dylan Vernon. *Inside Belize*. The Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center, Albuquerque, NM. 1995.

TO ORDER FROM THE AUDUBON SHOP:

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QUESTIONS? Call Karen O'Neill, Travel Director, at Mass Audubon, at 800-289-9504, 781-259-2166 or email: koneill@massaudubon.org

Happy Travels!