

Mission Atlas Project Latin America

Belize

Snapshot Section of the Country Profile

Country Name: Belize

Country Founded in: September 21, 1981 (Gained independence from the UK)

Population: 283,000

Language: The official language but Creole and Spanish are also used.

Government Type: (national, regional and local) Constitutional Monarchy nationally,

Geography/location in the world: Central America bordering Mexico and Guatemala

Number of people groups: 13

Picture of flag:



Religion Snapshot:

Christian

Anglican, 6.3%

Independent, 3.3%

Protestant, 22.4%

Non-Christian

Roman Catholic 61.8%

Jehovah's Witness 1.5%

Church of Jesus Christ of Later Day Saints (Mormons) 1.5%

Buddhism, 0.8%

Ethnic Religions, 2.1%

Hinduism, 1.1%

Islam, 0.6%

Non-Religious, 9.4%

Government interaction with religion: The government is cooperative and supports church-state education partnerships.

Country Profile

Demographics

The population is estimated at 283,000 people in the country of Belize.

Belize, with the land area being 22,700 km² and around 11 people for each km² is the most sparsely populated country and the second smallest country in Central America.

Population is concentrated in a few principal urban centers, of which Belize City (population, 2000, 49,050) is the largest; it is also the principal port. Belmopan (8,130), a newly constructed city, supplanted Belize City as the official capital in 1972

Currently there are 1% more males than females and the population is growing at a little over 2% a year. The life expectancy for males is 74 whereas the expectancy for females is 77.

English is the official language; other languages spoken include Carib, Mayan, Spanish, and a Creole dialect of English. More than half the people are Roman Catholic, and most of the remainder is Protestant.

Belize City has the densest population in the country with an estimated 64,500 inhabitants as well as the largest commercial market. Belize City is located in the largest District, Belize District, which has an estimated 87,500 people.

Cayo District holds around 61,000 people, Corozal District has close to 34,600 people, Orange Walk District has around 42,800 people, Stann Creek District about 27,900 people, and Toledo District holds close to 26,000. Orange Walk District holds the largest village in the country, Trial Farm, which has around 3,442 inhabitants.

Belize suffers from a lack of skilled laborers and citizens with technical skills. 33% of Belize's inhabitants are considered to be living in poverty and unemployment is around 13%. 25% of those living in poverty are of the Mayan descent. The typical Mayan woman bears 10 children.

52% of the population of Belize is under the age of 20 whereas only 5.8% are over the age of sixty. 46.6% of Belizean population is Mestizo, 27.7% are Creole, 10% Maya, 6.4% Garifuna, 3.3% East Indian, 3.3% Mennonites, and the remaining 2.9 % is mostly Chinese, Syrian, and Lebanese.

Language

The official language is English and Belize is the only country in Central America to use English as the official language. About 90% of the population speaks English, 70% speak Creole (very similar to English), and 35% speak Spanish.

Other languages include Garifuna, Kekchi, Mopan, Yucatan Maya, and Plautdietsch (Low German).

School systems teach in English and students that do not already know English tend to struggle in school.

Society/Culture

The three staple foods of Belize are: rice, beans, and chicken. Other popular foods are homegrown fruit and seafood. American, Central American, Chinese, Creole, and Mexican foods are also available.

Like the western culture internet capabilities are becoming increasingly available since internet cafes are growing popularity among major cities.

Central Time is kept year round and there is no recognition of Daylight Savings.

On March 9th Belizeans celebrate **Barron Bliss Day** which commemorates Henry Edward Ernest Victor Bliss who was a great benefactor for Belize.

The second Monday in March is **Commonwealth Day** a holiday to celebrate the Commonwealth of Nations. The Queen gives an address in the Westminster Abby in celebration of this holiday.

May 1st is **Labour Day** celebrating the accomplishments of the working people.

September 10th Belizeans celebrate **St. George's Caye Day** also known as **National Day**. The Battle of St. George's Caye is important to Belizeans because fought for freedom they conquered the Spanish. Then on September 21st Independence Day is celebrated.

October 13th is **Pan American Day**, a day to celebrate the Mestizo culture.

T. V. Ramos started the celebration of the Garifuna migrating to Belize who escaped Honduras and part of Central America as they were losing the 1832 Revolution, October 19th is **Garifuna Settlement Day**.

December 25th is **Christmas** followed by **Boxing Day** on December 26th.

Quinceanos is a celebration for young girls turning 15 years old and is similar to the idea of a coming out party that formerly meant that the young girl was old enough to be married. Now the holiday celebrates the coming of age for the young girl, she is now an adult.

Overall education in the Toledo District is low, meaning that there must be little motivation for education in the Maya community. Education of Maya girls is not encouraged seeing that few girls make it to primary school and then dropout soon after. At age 13 Ketchi girls begin childbearing and may need education about the affects of childbearing among young girls. The amount of children with little growth leads for concern of their nutrition.

As the country is changing and becoming increasingly metropolitan the means of morality are changing. Death by violence, vehicle accidents, drug abuse, and HIV/AIDS are increasing as things like malaria, measles, polio, and cholera, are greatly decreasing. The means of death are more selfish and materialistic.

Government

Belize has a parliamentary democracy in which the 6 districts are the administrative divisions. Two political parties stand: the People's United Party and the United Democratic Party.

The executive branch of government is headed up by Chief of State Queen Elizabeth II who is represented by Governor General Sir Colville Young. The Prime Minister is Said Musa with Deputy Prime Minister John Briceno. The Chief of State is hereditary, who chooses the Governor General, who elects the Prime Minister, head of the majority party, and the cabinet.

The legislative branch is consisted of the Senate and House of Representatives. Five Senators are elected by the Prime Minister, 2 by the non majority party, and one by the Governor General, making a total of eight Senators in all for five year intervals. The House of Representatives holds 29 seats all elected by the public vote for five year intervals as well. The last election for the House of Representatives was held in November 2003.

The judicial branch is composed of the Supreme Court which holds a position for a Chief Justice appointed by the Governor General.

The military age of service is 18 and the Belize Defense Force divisions include the Army, Maritime Wing, Air Wing, and Volunteer Guard.

Economy

The average income per person is \$2,629 and the average family brings in \$12,885.

Belizeans spend most of their efforts on tourism and producing strong agriculture exports as well as other industries like apparel, bananas, citrus, and sugar. Aquaculture is growing because of the ability to produce year round. Australian red claw lobster, shrimp, tilapia and red drum fin fish to name a few.

The main economic resource is Belize's arable land, although only 3 percent of the total land area is under cultivation and this agricultural emphasis makes industrial growth minimal.

Agricultural exports include sugar, citrus fruits, and bananas. Rice, beans, and corn are grown as subsistence crops. Lumbering, formerly the chief economic activity, has declined in importance. Major manufactures are processed food, wood products, and clothing.

A road network of 2,872 km (1,785 mi) links the major urban centers, but some areas remain inaccessible. An international airport serves Belize City.

The unit of currency is the Belize dollar (2 Belize dollars equal U.S.\$1; 2001 fixed rate). In 2000 exports earned \$194 million, and imports cost \$450 million. The government's budget included \$133 million in revenue and \$179.8 million in expenditure in 1995.

Although Belize is growing and becoming an increasingly stable nation there are still many humanitarian needs such as malnutrition, education, and health care. Only 70% of the population has access to health services and 89% to safe water. There are only 7 hospitals and 110 doctors in the country.

Malnutrition is rampant among those in rural communities. 6% of children under the age of 5 are underweight. Mayan children ages 5 to 9 have the highest rate of growth retardation with close to half of the children not growing at a regular pace.

There is a great need for better education for the nationals, namely the Maya people, and more specifically Maya girls. Only 26% of the young Maya girls attend primary school and one girl had been to secondary school. Also teenage girls that have given birth are very rarely allowed to continue their education. Resources for schools in the southern part of the country are limited where there is the greatest need.

There are 8,650 emigrant refugees many of which are from Guatemala in Belizean rain forests called Guatemalan squatters.

The recent fear is that the HIV/AIDS epidemic is on the horizon with increasing statistics in the major cities and mostly among the heterosexual metropolitan workers.

Literacy

Adult literacy is at 70%, adult male literacy being higher with 75% and adult females literacy being a little lower at 65%. There are more than 267 schools and 4 universities. Enrolment for school is higher for males as well with 92% and females at 91%.

The literacy rate is at just over 94% for people over the age of 15. Most Mayan children drop out of school at an early age.

Land/Geography

The northern half of Belize consists of lowlands with large swampy areas. The southern half boasts of mountain ranges, notably the Maya Mountains, which rise to elevations up to 1,120 m (3,675 ft) atop Victoria Peak.

Overall Belize has 386 km of Caribbean coastline which is fringed by coral barriers and numerous cays (islets), and the largest barrier reef in the world. Tourism is threatening the reef and other natural resources.

The principal streams are the Belize River; the Río Azul, which forms much of the boundary with Mexico; and the Sarstún River, which forms the southwestern boundary with Guatemala.

The climate of Belize is subtropical, moderated by sea breezes along the coast. The average annual temperature is about 26° C (about 79° F). The total annual rainfall increases from north to south and averages about 1,800 mm (about 71 in). A rainy season extends from May to February.

Some 59 percent of Belize is covered by forests with deciduous trees in the north and tropical hardwood trees in the south. Principal species include the commercially important mahogany, cedar, and rosewood, as well as pine, oak, and palms. Mangrove swamp vegetation is found along the coast. Wildlife includes jaguar, deer, tapir, and numerous species of birds and reptiles.

Population is concentrated in a few principal urban centers, of which Belize City (population, 2000, 49,050) is the largest; it is also the principal port. Belmopan (8,130), a newly constructed city, supplanted Belize City as the official capital in 1972. English is the official language; other languages spoken include Carib, Mayan, Spanish, and a Creole dialect of English. More than half the people are Roman Catholic, and most of the remainder are Protestant.

January to May stays dry while June to December is the typical rainy season. Seasonal change is minute and heavily depends on proximity to the coastline and elevation. Much of the inland is forest.

There are six districts within the country that serve as administrative divisions for the government: Belize, Cayo, Corozal, Orange Walk, Stann Creek, Toledo.

As far as natural disasters hurricanes are the most frequent along with coastal flooding. The current capitol of Belize is Belmopan. It was moved from Belize City to Belmopan in 1970 after hurricane Hattie damaged the city. Belmopan is in the center of the country and on higher ground compared to the rest of the country. During hurricanes people can escape to Belmopan for protection since it has the most hurricane shelters in the country.

History

Before 1862 present day Belize was known as the *Settlement of Belize*. From 1862 until 1973 the country was named *British Honduras*.

The Maya started to infiltrate Belize around 1500 BC. Belize was a center for Maya trading as the Maya civilization grew. Cocoa beans were like money. Historically the Maya were great farmers of the land and grew a great many things like cocoa, corn, cotton, salt, and tobacco. Eventually many started to migrate because the land became worn and did not produce sufficient crops for the people as well as warfare and revolt.

As Maya culture declined more people moved. When the Europeans came the Maya suffered even more. In 1517 the Spanish came to the Yucatan and brought with them diseases like influenza, measles, and smallpox. Within one hundred years, 90% of the Mayan population died of disease and war. Until 1724 the Mayans were subject to forced labor. As the English settled in the 17th Century they had conflicting relations with the Spaniards that were already there. In 1765 the form of democracy came through Burnaby's Code. This helped the people govern themselves.

Long-range constitutional reforms were initiated by the British in 1954, resulting in a new constitution ten years later. Guatemalan claims to sovereignty over the territory delayed progress toward independence. When Belize finally attained full independence on September 21, 1981, Guatemala refused to recognize the new nation. Around 1,500 British troops remained to protect Belize from the Guatemalan threat.

The territory's first general election, in 1954, was won by the People's United Party (PUP), headed by independence leader *George Price*. Under Price, the PUP won all elections until 1984, when the first national election was held.

The PUP was defeated by the United Democratic Party (UDP), and UDP leader *Manuel Esquivel* replaced Price as prime minister. Price returned to power after the elections of September 1989.

In May 1993 the United Kingdom announced that it would end its military involvement in Belize. All British soldiers were withdrawn in 1994, apart from a small contingent of troops who remained to train Belizean troops.

The UDP regained power in June 1993 and Esquivel became prime minister for a second time. In July, Esquivel suspended the pact reached with Guatemala during Price's tenure. The reason was that Price had made too many concessions in order to gain Guatemalan recognition. The agreement would have resolved a 130-year-old border dispute between the two countries.

The PUP won a landslide victory in the 1998 national elections, and PUP leader Said Musa was sworn in as prime minister. In the 2003 elections the PUP maintained its majority, and Musa continued as prime minister. The country remains in a state of basic stability.

Christian History

The Spaniards brought Catholicism to Belize in the sixteenth century. In 1638 a shipwreck brought British sailors to the country and with them came Protestantism. The spread of Protestantism grew only to 16 percent of the population even though various missionaries came to spread the Gospel. The lack of response is recognized as the native's perception of Christianity as the religion belonging to the white people.

The first purposeful mission in Belize was constructed by The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, an organization of the Church of England, probably around the 18th century. They began by focusing on the Jamaican laborers in Belize.

In 1825 British Methodists came to Belize as the first Protestants. After the Indian revolt of 1848, around 7,000 Catholics came to modern-day Belize from Mexico making up 60% of the overall population in the area. By 1893 Catholic missionaries had converted two thirds of Belize's population.

The current rise in Catholicism is greatly due to migration of peoples from bordering countries. In 1959 the Mennonites came and flourished building a community around service and programs.

In 1995 Seventh Day Adventists became the largest Protestant denomination next to Methodist, Assemblies of God, and Baptists.

In 1958 the Belize Faith Mission was established as a multi-faith Christian outreach group that grew to tend to the needs of the people. As the BFM grew they established 79 churches in Belize and Guatemala. Also Ontario Christian School was started in the main church building but today has its own building with nine classrooms and over 300 students.

Religions

Non-Christian Religions

Baha'i is the largest with close to 7,000 members. This religious group holds almost 2.88 percent of the people and is increasing at a rate of + 3.9 % annually

Hindu, has over 5600 members and 2.30 % of the people. Hinduism is increasing at a rate of + 6.9 percent annually almost triple the Christian increase.

Jewish religion claims over 2600 members or 1.08 percent of the population

Spiritism/traditional religions have 103 percent of the people for a total of some 2500. This group has experienced a decline of – 2 % annually.

Islam claims 0.58 percent of the people or some 1400 adherents. Islam is, however, experiencing a growth rate of +4 % annually

Buddhism has over 850 adherents or 0.35 percent of the people. Buddhism, however, is experiencing a growth rate of +8.3 %.

Non-religious numbers almost 2000 people or 0.83% of the population. The growth of the non-religious/other group is reported +1.6%.

Non-Christian cults and sects

Jehovah's Witness The Jehovah's Witnesses group reports 31 congregations, almost 1 400 members and around 2500 adherents.

Church of Jesus Christ of Later Day Saints has 7 congregations, around 1200 members and almost 2000 adherents.

These two groups report a combined growth rate of +3.8% that is almost the equal of Protestants and Independents in the country.

Protestant/Evangelicals/Pentecostals

Seventh Day Adventists report 90 congregations with over 17000 members.

Anglicans have 26 congregations and 3600 members

Methodists have 25 churches with almost 5000 members

Church of the Nazarene report as many as 40 congregations and over 1800 members

The Baptist Association reports 52 congregations with some 2000 members

The Assemblies of God have 49 congregations and almost 1000 members

The Church of God in Christ reports 23 churches and over 1700 members

The Church of God (Cleveland) has 26 congregations with 1200 members

The Mennonites have 7 churches with around 1500 members. The Mennonites have tended to be cut off from the rest of society in their own communities.

The Association of Evangelical Christians has 12 churches and some 1100 members

The Church of God of Prophecy reports 14 congregations with almost 400 members.

Twenty other denominations report over 250 congregations and over 6800 members.

Catholics/Orthodox Churches

Roman Catholics claim 61.8 % of the people and come primarily from Blacks and Indians with a few East Indies natives and whites. The Catholics are increasing at +1.7%

annually. Catholic work in over 50 congregations with over 74,000 members. They claim as many as 137,000 in their entire family of adherents

People Groups

16207

Belizean Creole (100,355)

This group speaks Creole English and Christianity is the primary religion. Around 10% are evangelical. There are no Bible translations, Gospel recordings, radio broadcastings, and the Jesus film is also not available. Most live in Belize City or along the coast.

16199

Black Carib, Garifuna (17,047)

These people, also called, Central American Carib, and “Moreno,” speak their own language Garifuna. They mostly practice Traditional Religion (Animism). About 10% are evangelical Christians. Bible Translations, the Jesus film, and Gospel recordings are available but radio broadcast is not. Most live along the coast in Dangriga, Stann Creek, and Toledo

16200

British (1,220)

English is their language and Christianity is their religion but less than 2% are evangelical. Bible translations, the Jesus film, Gospel recordings, and radio broadcasts are all available, but there is no active church planting.

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East Indian (?)

Hindi is probably their main language. Bible translations, the Jesus film, Gospel recordings, and radio broadcasts are all available.

16201

Han Chinese, Mandarin (1,903)

Chinese, Mandarin is their primary language, Buddhism is their religion and Bible translations, the Jesus film, Gospel recordings, and radio broadcasts are all available in their language. But there is no active church planting for this people group.

16202

Itza (777)

The Itza people speak Itza but are becoming mainly Spanish speaking as Itza is disappearing. They practice primarily Christianity. Less than 2% of the Christians are evangelical and there is no church planting at this time. Bible translations, the Jesus film, Gospel recordings, and radio broadcasts, are not available for this people group.

16203

Kekchi, Quecchi, Cacche (10,979)

The Kekchi speak Kekchi, are located mainly in southern Belize, and primarily Christians but less than 2% are evangelical and *there is no current church planting*. Resources available for this people are Bible translations, the Jesus film, Gospel recordings, and radio broadcasts.

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Lebanese (??)

Gospel recordings and radio broadcasts are available, but Bible translations and the Jesus film are not.

16204

Low German (7,075)

The language of the Low German is Plautdietsch. Many also speak English, Creole, and Spanish. Christianity is their religion, yet less than 2% are evangelical and there are no active church planting. Bible translations, the Jesus film, Gospel recordings, and radio broadcasts are all available.

16205

Mestizo (147,115)

The Mestizo speak mainly Spanish, are primarily Christian. At least 5% are evangelical. Bible translations, the Jesus film, Gospel recordings, and radio broadcasts are all available.

16206

Mopan Maya, Mopane (7,466)

The Mopan Maya are mostly Christian, but less than 2% are evangelical. Bible translations and Gospel recordings are available for this people. Church planting is not currently active among these people. Typically they live in the districts of Toledo, Stann Creek, and Cayo.

16208

Syrian Arab (120)

The primary language is Arabic, but North Levantine is also spoken. Islam is their religion and Bible translations and the Jesus film are not available but Gospel recordings and radio broadcasts are.

16209

Yucatan (7,216)

The language of the Yucatan is primarily Maya and Yucatan, but the younger generations are starting to speak more Spanish. These people dwell mostly in the Cayo District and in some parts of Orange Walk and Corozal near the border. They are Christian but less than 2% evangelical. Bible translations, the Jesus film, and Gospel recordings, are all available.

Missiological Implications

1. Evangelical Christians and churches must not be lulled to sleep by the numbers of people in Belize who are claimed by some church group. The Catholics, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Mormons are clearly not Christian as groups. In many Christian groups, nominalism and syncretism are widespread—especially among those of Mayan and Garifuna backgrounds. Evangelicals should strive to support the Christians in the realization of true evangelism among these people who are church members but possibly not true believers.
2. Evangelical Christians and Churches should seek ways to provide Christian discipleship and education to the peoples of Belize. Through these efforts at discipleship and training, some of those trapped in nominalism and syncretism can be brought into a true relationship with Jesus.
3. Evangelical Christians and Churches should seek means of reaching the Mayan and Garifuna people with the Gospel. This effort will require targeting evangelism for these groups and finding the eye openers for them. Bible Storying might be an effective means of proclamation.
4. Evangelical Christians and Churches should assist the Christians and churches of Belize to provide quality Christian training for church members.
5. Evangelical Christians and Churches should seek means to evangelize the distinct groups of immigrant peoples—Chinese, Itza, East Indian, and German. These efforts may well require proclamation in the heart languages of the people.
6. Evangelical Christians and Churches should seek means to meet the many social, health, and educational needs of the people of Belize.

Links – <http://www.beliz.gov.bz>, <http://www.sanpedrosun.net/index.html>, <http://www.belize.org>, <http://ambergiscaye.com>, <http://www.belize.com>, <http://www.nichbelize.org/interior.html>, <http://www.amandala.com.bz/>, <http://www.belizetimes.bz/>, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>, <http://www.belizeyellow.com/>, <http://www.earthcalendar.net>, <http://www.magnumbelize.com/belize.html>, <http://www.blz.paho.org/aids.htm>, <http://www.bzfaith.org/>, <http://www.atlapedia.com>, <http://www.wonderclub.com>,

