

Belize is a small country in Central America on the coast of the Caribbean Sea. Central America is the region located in North America between Mexico and South America.



Figure 1

Belize borders Guatemala and Mexico as seen in Figure 1. Having the second largest barrier reef, Belize is a hotspot for divers and travelers. The country also has a unique geography. The land has mountains, beaches, and jungle, as well as river systems that intertwine throughout the country which all contribute to the overall landscape of the country. Aspects that involve the environment, population, politics,

economy, and history all contribute to the country's culture and the country as a whole.

The climate in Belize is a tropical. With the country's latitude being 17°N, it is not very far from the equator which causes the said tropical climate. Most of the year the country has warm weather and the majority of the climate is tropical monsoonal. In addition, it has a short dry season and a long, wet season. The wet season last from June to November when the country gets the majority of the rainfall throughout the year. The various areas in Belize has slightly different climates. In the southern portion of the country, it is a tropical rainforest. With having a tropical rainforest biome, that region has no dry season. In the northern portion of the country, it is a tropical savanna, which is caused by the climate being dryer than the southern part of the country. Monsoons in Belize happen in between the months of May and November. During those months, heavy rain, tropical storms, and hurricanes are very likely to occur. Compared to other Caribbean countries such as the Bahamas, Dominican Republic, or Haiti, Belize is less likely to be affected by hurricanes and powerful storms directly, however, it still gets affected by them. It

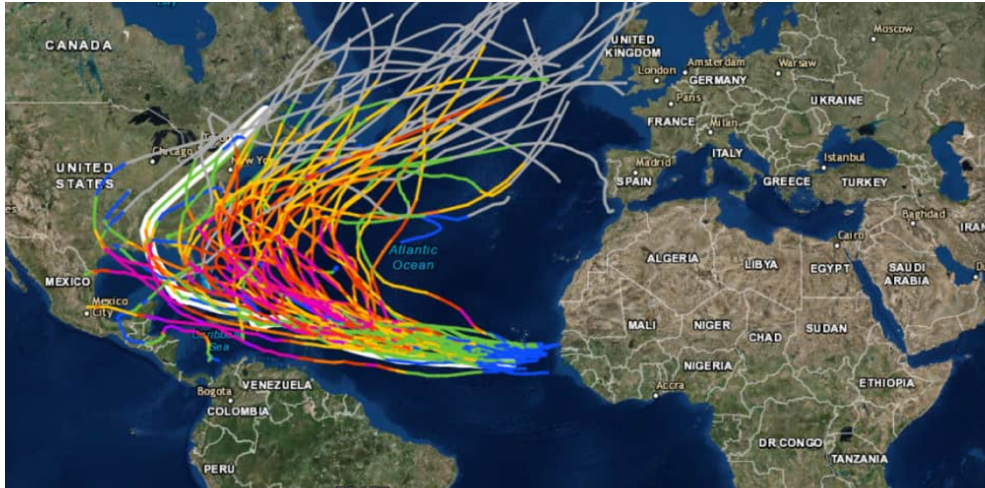


Figure 2

is less likely to be hit by powerful storm because of the geographic location of the country (A-Z The World).

Hurricanes

generally start in the Atlantic Ocean and travel at high speeds towards the Caribbean as shown in Figure 2. The path of hurricanes depends on the location of the wind belt in which the hurricane is travelling on. For example, hurricanes that are formed in the Atlantic Ocean are often steered

by the easterly trade winds in the tropics. The main cause of the easterly trade winds is the Intertropical Convergence Zone, also known as the ITCZ. That causes a band of clouds and tropical storms that form around the equator (Movement of Hurricanes 2010). The dry season, which occurs from February to May is a result from hot and humid weather throughout the year.

As seen in Figure 3, throughout the year, Belize City, a large and populated city in Belize, receives high temperatures varying from 20°C to 30°C and high humidity varying from 80% to 90% through all months, and do not generally fluctuate. There is not a lot of seasonal variability due to the country being at a latitude of 17°N.

Precipitation and sunshine do vary a little more as seasons change. During the winter and spring, precipitation is lower with rainfall of 40 to 125 millimeters of rain during the months of January to May. During the summer and fall, precipitation is higher

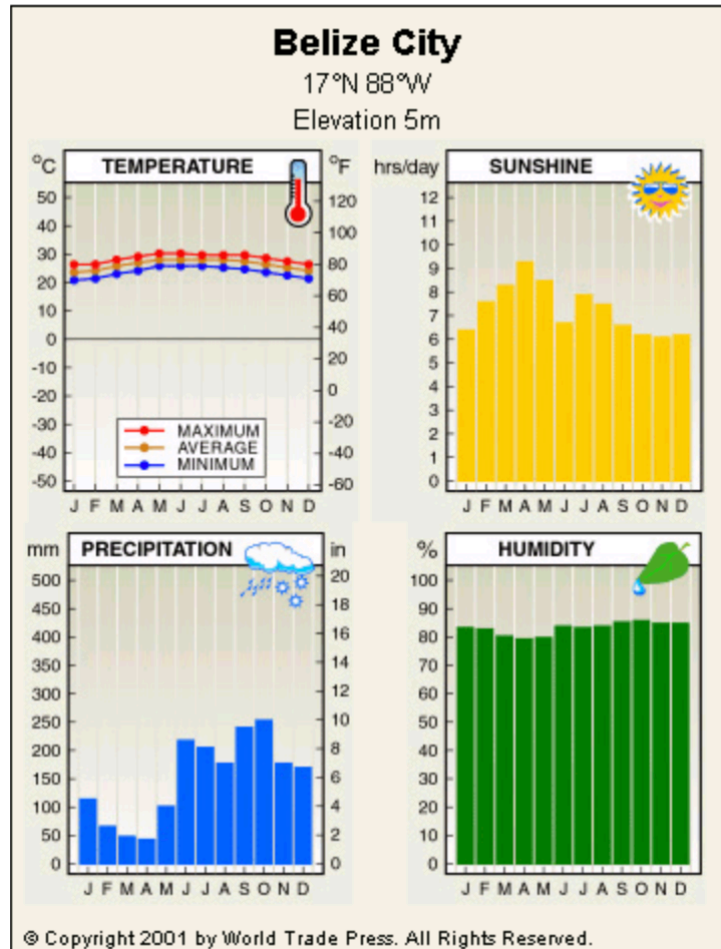


Figure 3

between June and December, varying from 150 to 275 mm per year. Sunshine, which is a contributor to the temperature of the country is highest during the months of May through June and lowest in the month of August through January.

The biomes of Belize are the northern plains, central region, and extreme southern region as seen as numbers 3,4, and 5 in Figure 4. The northern plains have swampy, wet terrains; however, they receive less rainfall than other parts of the country. In the central region are covered by large savannas with low hills which receive high temperatures and a higher amount of rainfall compared to the northern plains. In the extreme southern region, it is rainy and has high temperatures during all months of the year and consists of hills in the western portion as



Figure 4

well as a tropical rainforest (A-Z The World).

As a result of climate change, heavy rains are causing the sea levels to rise which result in changes in geography in the country as well as the economy. From the increase in greenhouse gases and emissions from other areas of the world, especially in the northern hemisphere, it poses negative

impacts in the country economically. For example, from the impacts of climate change risks of water quality decline, changes in agriculture, as well as increased flooding and more powerful storms, in which all pose a risk of economic problems. Fisheries and agriculture are both directly affected by climate change in the country because they depend on natural resources such as air, water, and soil. When rising temperatures cause the crops to not be able to grow efficiently, there will be less production of those crops because they can only withstand a certain temperature

before dying. Agriculture one of the main sources of economy in smaller, developing countries such as Belize, so if one of their major sources of economy lessens, it affects the economy as a whole (Richardson 2009). When global warming continues to occur, a larger number of tropical storms and natural disasters begin to occur more frequently. Although the vulnerability of the counties in the Caribbean are not equal, they all are affected in some way. For example, the exposure of the storm and intensity affects how the country deals with the costs of repair as well as the amount of preparedness the country has before the storm begins to reach the country. In Belize, the country does not get hit by a lot of large, powerful storms, however, with rising temperatures and sea levels, the effects of global warming have been affecting the country already. For example, by 2050 it is projected that Belize, in addition to Jamaica and Dominican Republic, will become the most vulnerable countries to be affected by powerful storms, when in the past they were some of the last on the list of vulnerability to climate change effects. It is projected that by 2030 Belize will be fourth on the list of vulnerability and by 2050 it will rise in rank to number two in just 2 years (Stennet-Brown 2019).

The population in Belize is mainly natives, commonly named “Belizean(s).” The majority of the ethnic groups in Belize are Mestizo, which have Spanish and indigenous decent, making up about 50% of the population, Creole, which is a person mixed of European descent and Caribbean descent, making up about 25%, and Maya, which are indigenous people of Mexico and Central America, making up around 11%. The other ethnic groups such as Garifuna, Indian, Mennonite, white, and Asian have less than 10% for each group. There is no tensions between these groups of people today, The official language in Belize is English, however a large amount of the population also speaks Spanish. The population of Belize is about 375,000 people and is projected to rise. The population is generally spread out throughout the country,

however, 25 to 30% of the population lives Belize City, which was the original capital of the country. The rest of the population lives in rural areas, which are a large abundance in the country. As seen in the

figure below, there are only a few high-density population areas in the country. Those areas being places such as Belize City, Belmopan, and Dangriga. Belize City was the old capital of Belize, before a hurricane hit the country and caused damage to the majority of the city. That caused Belmopan to be designated as the new capital of Belize. The rest of the country is generally rural,



Figure 5

which causes the population to be more spread out in those areas causing the population numbers to be lower when compared to the population of the cities in the country.

Belize's population is greatly affected by migration. There is a large number of Belizeans travelling to the United States, Canada, and other English-speaking countries because of the better opportunities that are offered for them that are not able to be achieved in their home

country of Belize such as job and educational opportunities. As a result of emigration, there has been a change in ethnic groups because of the moving of groups in and out of the country as well as changes in population of certain groups. With people from other countries such as Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador immigrating to Belize, it caused the majority language in the country from English/ Creole to Spanish. The main language in Belize is English, which is different than its surrounding countries. This is because when the British colonized the country, one of their main influences on the country was their language. Therefore, it caused Belize to have a different language than the surrounding countries that were not colonized by the British. For example, Belize's border, Guatemala was colonized by the Spanish, therefore their main language was Spanish rather than any other language. There has been a decline in fertility in the country, but the increasing numbers of immigration to the country results in the continuing population increase (A-Z The World). As a result of the climate in Belize being tropical it is a desirable climate for people from other countries to visit and eventually have a permanent residence in Belize. The majority of people that move to people from outside of the country are retired individuals. Belize is also a cheaper option for travelers and retirees to go to compared to popular destinations in the United States and surrounding countries. As seen in Figure 6 below, from study done on the distribution of ethnic groups and populations, one is able to see the differences in spatial distribution of the population in Belize in which they compare the population in various areas within the country. As shown, and predicted, areas of high population such as Belize City, Corozal, and Cayo are larger cities within the country and smaller areas such as Toledo and Orange Walk have smaller populations (Woods 1991). There is also an increase of the population moving to the rural areas of the country. As a result of economic opportunities in various locations throughout the country, the population can often be spread out. However, with

TABLE 7 Relationship between Ethnicity and Spatial Distribution of Population in Belize, 1980 and 1991

Ethnicity	Location (Administrative Districts)						Total
	Belize	Cayo	Corozal	Orange Walk	Stann Creek	Toledo	
1980							
Mestizo or Indian	7,062	12,332	16,604	16,352	2,255	7,387	61,992
Afro-Belizean	39,777	7,513	4,397	3,110	11,132	2,893	68,822
Other <sup>a</sup>	3,962	2,992	1,901	3,408	794	1,482	14,539
Total	50,801	22,837	22,902	22,870	14,181	11,762	145,353
1991							
Mestizo or Indian	10,841	24,331	22,457	24,636	5,554	13,068	100,887
Afro-Belizean	39,727	9,009	2,512	2,611	10,712	2,754	67,325
Other <sup>a</sup>	3,744	3,183	3,450	3,258	1,211	1,664	16,510
Total	54,312	36,523	28,419	30,505	17,477	17,386	184,722

Sources: CARICOM, 1980–1981 *Population Census of the Commonwealth Caribbean: Belize* (Kingston: Statistical Institute of Jamaica, n.d.); and Ministry of Finance, Central Statistical Office, 1991 *Population Census: Major Findings* (Belmopan: Government Printery, n.d.).

<sup>a</sup> Other includes East Indian, Mennonite, Chinese, Syrian or Lebanese, white, and those who responded “other” or “don’t know” or did not respond.

Figure 6

main economic supply coming from agriculture there is an increasing number of individuals migrating to rural areas to seek economic opportunities that they would not be able to get in urban areas (Rajack-Talley 2016).

#### Culture in

Belize is shaped with their religion, language, ethnicities, and landscape. The dominant religion in Belize is Catholic. The Catholic religion was heavily influenced by the Spanish and other Europeans that entered Belize when European countries such as Britain and Spain began to colonize countries in the Caribbean. When colonists began to impose their religion on the Mayan population and culture, the British looked down on them and used their religion and education to convince them from causing damage and war. That was able to happen because the Mayans and the European colonists shared a common religion, Catholicism. That started the trend of having a main religion being Catholic (Shoman 2010). The official language in Belize is English. Largely contributed to the European colonists in the 1800’s, the English language was widely spoken and eventually became the most widely spoken language in the country. When the two culture of the Mayans and the Europeans, there were similarities between the two, as well as major differences



which caused conflicts when first interacting with each other. One of the main differences was the language. Mayans had a different language than the Europeans, that being Yucatec Maya, while the Europeans spoke English. It was difficult for them to communicate which caused conflict; however, the colonists won and took over the country. Also, in the Belizean government, even though they are independent from Britain, they still have a British monarch, who is Elizabeth II, who in which serves as the head of state in the country. Having a British monarch as head of state influences the country to have an official language of English because they must be able to communicate with her. Even though the British influenced the Mayans and other indigenous people with their language, the Mayans also influenced the British in ways such as traditions. Certain traditions such as gift giving, sports, and superstitions originated in the Mayan culture which are still present in the Belizean culture today. Sports such as soccer are a very important part of Belize culture. People come together to play and form an overall great community and country. In Mayan culture, they played a game similar to soccer which eventually evolved to be the same rules as soccer in the future (A-Z The World).

The Belizean government is a parliamentary democracy government. It has an executive, legislative, and judicial branch just like the United States. The executive branch consists of a British monarch which is the head of state and a prime minister which is the head of government which is Elizabeth II in Britain. The legislative branch consists of a bicameral National Assembly. The National Assembly has two parts, a House of Representatives having 29 members and a Senate having five members. The judicial branch consists of the supreme court, court of appeal, and the district magistrates. Within the country there are four political parties such as People's United Party, United Democratic Party, National Alliance for Belizean Rights, and People's Liberation Front (Belize 2000). Queen Elizabeth II is the monarch with

representation from Sir Colville N. Young. The members of the House of Representatives are elected by popular vote for a five-year term in office and the members of the senate are appointed as are the members of the judiciary. Belize has relations with many countries and is a member of the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, internationally. Between Belize and Guatemala, there had been disagreements of ownership of territory which causes the two countries to not get along, although in recent years the two countries have increased their relationship because of their commonalities such as economy and trade. The United States is one of Belize's closest relationships and contributes to their economy (Country Watch 2019).

The economy in Belize mainly comes from tourism and natural resources. Natural resources such as marine products, sugar, crude oil, bananas, and citrus are the main exports from Belize. As a result of the expansion of their monetary policies, their GDP grew 4% in eight years. After the discovery of oil in 2006, their economy was able to expand even more. However, As a result of continuing natural disasters, the revenue from the oil industry in Belize dropped significantly but eventually picked back up in 2015. Income of the population in Belize are variable from one household to another. The line between rich and poor is very large which causes inequality within the country. There are not many middle-class citizens of Belize, most are either well above the poverty line or well below it. The unemployment rate, as of 2014, is 12.9%, which is a decrease since 2013 when it was 14.1%; so, there is a trend towards less people being unemployed. Forty one percent of the population is below the poverty line while the rest are at or above it (A-Z The World). Their economy is also greatly dependent on its exports. Marine products, citrus, sugar, and bananas, being the majority of exports are essential to the country's economy. The United States is one of the largest contributors for tourism and

American tourism to Belize increased after the United States expanded their economy, which caused the expansion of the Belizean economy. Attractions in Belize that increase the tourism rates are the diving opportunities, coastal views and overall geography of the country, with it having both beaches and jungle (Country Watch 2019).

Belize has a long ongoing history, starting off with the Mayans inhabiting the land. Around 1000 BC, Mayan civilizations began to thrive and create ruins such as Xunantunich, Caracol, and Altun Ha which were the main ones throughout the country. After 1000 CE, the Mayan civilizations began to separate into smaller parts and their original civilizations were abandoned which resulted in their temples to be left as well as many other artifacts that portrayed their overall culture and the way they lived. In 1502, Christopher Columbus arrived in Central America and by 1638, English and Scottish settlers inhabited the coast of Central America including what is now Belize. African slaves were brought to British settlements and works in the timber industry which resulted in the mix of Europeans and African cultures and marriages. As a result of that mixture, the Creole population was formed and grew to become the majority within the country. The first constitution was devolved in 1765, which was Burnaby's Code which allowed them to elect magistrates. The Spanish declared war on Britain in 1779 in an attempt to get rid of the British in the settlements in the Central American coast. Slave trade was abolished in British settlements in 1833. The Mayans eventually led a revolt against the Spanish as well in the 1840s. Mennonites settled in the settlements of Britain in Central America in 1858 and will stay there for the future. British Honduras became a colony in Central America and created its own constitution to reflect a British colony in 1862 to 1871. The colony remained British Honduras until the country of Belize gained their independence in 1964 (A-Z The World).

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