

## DOING BUSINESS WITH BELIZE



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### 1. GENERAL INFORMATION

**Official Name:** Belize

**Capital:** Belmopan

**Area:** 22,966 sq. km

**Population:** 294,385 (July 2007 est.)

**Population growth index:**  
3.4% (2006 est.)

**Population density:**  
12.82 inhabitants per square kilometer

**Official language:** English, the official language, is spoken by virtually all except the refugees who arrived during the past decade. Spanish is the native tongue of about 50 percent of the people and is spoken as a second language by another 20 percent. The various Mayan groups still speak their indigenous languages, and an English Creole dialect similar to the Creole dialects of the English-speaking Caribbean Islands is spoken by most.

**Currency:** Dollar (BZD)

**Exchange rate:** Since 1976 Belizean banks have bought U.S. dollars at the rate of 2.0175 and sold them at 1.9825, making for an effective fixed rate of Belize \$2=U.S. \$1

**Climate:** Subtropical; very hot and humid; rainy season (May to November); dry season (February to May). Rainfall ranges from 60 inches in

the north to 200 inches in the south annually.

#### **Principal Cities and Population:** (2005 est.)

Belize City	60,800
San Ignacio	16,800
Orange Walk	15,300
Belmopan	13,500
Dangriga	10,800

#### **Airports:**

As of 2005, an estimated 43 airports and airstrips were in operation. The international airport is Philip S. W. Goldson International Airport in Ladyville, outside of Belize City. Currently, the international airport is served by American, Continental, Delta, TACA and US Air, along with local airlines Maya Island and Tropic. A runway expansion program set to be completed in 2007 may allow larger aircraft to land and may encourage new direct or nonstop service from Europe and Canada. Also in Belize City is the Municipal Airport, on the seafront off Princess Margaret Drive. In addition, a number of local airports and airstrips provide for flights within Belize. Flights are readily available with destination including Belize City, Corozal, Dangriga, Placencia, Sarteneja, Savannah and Punta Gorda on the mainland. Ambergris Caye and Caye Caulker, two small islands off Belize's coast, can also be reached by plane. Local flights are relatively inexpensive, beginning at about \$30 (US). Fares for domestic flights from the municipal

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airport generally are lower than from the international airport.<sup>1</sup>

### Ports:

- Belize City
- Big Creek
- Corozal Town
- Punta Gorda

### Holidays:

New Year's Day	Jan 01
Baron Bliss Day	Mar 12
Good Friday	Apr 06
Holy Saturday	Apr 07
Easter Monday	Apr 09
Labour Day	May 01
Sovereign's Day	May 21
National Day	Sep 10
Independence Day	Sep 21
Pan American Day	Oct15
Garifuna Settlement Day	Nov 19
Christmas Day	Dec 25
Boxing Day	Dec 26

**Life Expectancy:** Total Population - 67.4 years

**Literacy Rate:** Total Population - 76.5%

**Local Time:** UTC-6 (1 hour behind Washington, DC during Standard Time). Daylight Saving Time is not observed in Belize.

**Telephone Codes:** 501

**Health:** Belize considers public health a high priority. Belize has public hospitals in every major town and a host of private doctors countrywide. Though not endemic to Belize, visitors who are

coming from well-known 'high-risk' areas (parts of South America and Africa) are required to get the Yellow Fever vaccination before entering the country. Visitors may at their discretion take precaution by receiving medication before leaving for their trip.

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[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transport\\_in\\_Belize](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transport_in_Belize)

## 2. THE ECONOMY

### 2.1 Structure of the Economy

In this small, essentially private-enterprise economy tourism is the number one foreign exchange earner followed by exports of marine products, citrus, cane sugar, bananas, and garments. The government's expansionary monetary and fiscal policies, initiated in September 1998, led to sturdy GDP growth averaging nearly four percent in 1999-2006. Major concerns continue to be the sizable trade deficit and unsustainable foreign debt. The government in 2006 announced it would seek a restructuring of its sovereign debt and has been negotiating with international creditors to find an acceptable formula for doing so. A key short-term objective remains the reduction of poverty with the help of international donors.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.2 Recent Economic Performance

Belize's economic performance is highly susceptible to external market changes. Although the economy recorded a growth rate of 4.0 percent in 2006, this achievement is vulnerable to world commodity price fluctuations and continuation of preferential trading agreements, especially with the United States and the European Union (cane sugar) and the United Kingdom (bananas).

GDP - real growth rate: 4.0% (2006)  
GDP - per capita (PPP): \$8,400 (2006)

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<sup>2</sup>  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bh.html>

Unemployment rate:  
9.4% (2006)<sup>3</sup>

### 2.3 Balance of payments

While bilateral financing, better-than-expected exports, and foreign direct investment are helping to close the foreign financing gap for the current year, international reserves remain very low at less than one month of imports. Under current policies, the mission estimates on a preliminary basis that in 2007 Belize's net balance of payments financing needs will reach about 10 percent of GDP, and remain high thereafter at about six percent of GDP during 2008-11 and more than 10 percent during 2012-15. Foreign financing of this magnitude may not be forthcoming, given Belize's high external public debt burden; and, even if it could be obtained, its high cost would worsen the debt dynamics and leave the economy vulnerable to adverse shocks. At the same time, fully closing such large financing gaps through further fiscal and monetary tightening would not be feasible without severely disrupting economic activity.<sup>4</sup>

### 2.4 Overview of Trade

Belize continues to rely heavily on foreign trade, with the United States as its number-one trading partner. Imports in 2005 totaled \$518.83 million, while total exports were only \$212.83 million.

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<sup>3</sup>  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bh.html>

<sup>4</sup>  
<http://www.imf.org/external/np/ms/2006/082906.htm>

In 2005, the United States provided 39 percent of all Belizean imports and accounted for 52.2 percent of Belize's total exports. Other major trading partners include the United Kingdom, European Union, Canada, Mexico, and Caribbean Common Market (CARICOM) member states.<sup>5</sup>

(orange, grapefruit, and pineapple), sugar cane, animal feeds and toilet paper. The top imports included chicken sausages, malt extract, rum and tafia, paints, insecticides, plywood, baby napkins, aluminium doors, plastic insulated copper conductors, printed paper and paper boards and personal and household effects.

### 2.4.1 Exports

Exports (2005)--US\$212.83 million: cane sugar, clothing, citrus concentrate, lobster, fish, banana, and farmed shrimp. Major markets--U.S. (52.2%), U.K., CARICOM

### 2.4.2 Imports

Traditionally, Belize has been a consumer nation, relying heavily on imports.

Imports (2005)--US\$518.83 million: food, consumer goods, machinery, mineral fuels and lubricants. Major suppliers--U.S. (39%), Mexico, U.K.<sup>6</sup>

## 2.5 Belize's Trade with CARICOM

In 2006, Belize's imports were in excess of EC\$36 million while exports to CARICOM were EC\$62 million leading to a trade surplus of EC\$26 million.

Belize's top exports to CARICOM in 2006 included; shrimp, prawns, lobster, blackeye peas, red kidney beans, juices

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<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1955.htm>

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<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1955.htm>

### 3. GENERAL MARKETING FACTORS

#### 3.1 Distribution and Sales Channels

A typical distribution channel for an American-made product involves (1) the local importer, who is generally also the wholesaler and the distributor, (2) the retailer, and finally (3) the buyer/consumer.

Goods imported from North America, the Caribbean and Europe enter the country through the port in Belize City, while those imported from neighboring Central American countries enter Belize through the two main inland borders.

#### 3.2 Use of Agents/Distributors

Consistent with U.S. Department of Commerce guidelines, the Economic and Commercial section of the United States Embassy in Belize can assist interested American companies find agents and distributors in the country through the International Partner Search (IPS) service<sup>7</sup>

#### 3.3 Franchising

Although many Belizeans are familiar with most popular U.S. brand names, franchising remains rare, since competition in the local market is more often based on price than name recognition or perceived quality standards.

Franchising in Belize currently extends to just a few well-known brand names,

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<sup>7</sup> Doing Business in Belize: A Country Commercial Guide for U.S. Companies, 2006.

including Best Western in the hospitality industry, Coca-Cola and Pepsi in the soft drink industry, Mail Boxes Etc. in the postal service, and Avis, Budget, Hertz and National in the auto rental business.<sup>8</sup>

#### 3.4 Promotion

Belize enacted electronic transactions legislation in 2003, which allows businesspeople to employ e-commerce to conduct across-the-border transactions.

Advertising in Belize is done mainly through radio, newspapers, magazines, and television, and billboards.

#### 3.5 Transportation

Ports in Belize City, Dangriga, and Big Creek handle regularly scheduled shipping from the United States and the United Kingdom, although draft is limited to a maximum of 10 feet in Belize City and 15 feet in southern ports. American Airlines, Continental Airlines, U.S. Air, Delta Airlines, and TACA provide international air service to gateways in Dallas, Houston, Miami, Charlotte, Atlanta, and San Salvador.<sup>9</sup>

Belize has four major asphalt-paved two-lane roads: the Hummingbird Highway, Southern Highway, Western Highway, Northern Highway. The remaining roads are unpaved, rough and in poor condition. A 9-mile stretch of the Southern Highway near Big Falls is

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<sup>8</sup> Doing Business in Belize: A Country Commercial Guide for U.S. Companies, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1955.htm>

unpaved as well. Driving is on the right-hand side of the road, as in the United States.



### 4. MARKET ACCESS CONDITIONS

#### 4.1 Customs Tariffs

Custom Duties are applicable according to the rates set out in the Customs Tariff and Trade Classification, Chapter 48 Laws of Belize, First Schedule. The Belize Customs Tariff is modeled from the Harmonized Description and Coding System (HS).

The rates are applied based on the Customs Value (Cost, Insurance, Freight). Applicable rates range from 0 to 45 percent with the majority of commodities attracting a rate of 20 percent.

Goods in Primary Forms, Machinery and Parts, Raw Materials, Textile Fabric, Chemicals, Office Equipment (except Computers and Accessories – 0 percent) Hand Tools, attract rates of 0 or 5 percent based on the customs value.

Customs duties and taxes are collected based on the value which is derived from the value stated on the invoice, receipt or other proof of purchase. The dollar value must be converted from the foreign currency stated on the proof of purchase document to Belize (BZCY) currency. The Belize currency is tied to the US dollar at \$2.0175 BZCY to \$1.00USD. Other foreign currency rates are subject to change and are updated weekly in conjunction with the Central Bank of Belize.

An exchange rate for the conversion of foreign currency to BZD is published weekly for the convenience of importers and customs brokers.

The rate of duty applicable to Motor Vehicles is according to the engine capacity in Motor Cars; according to the weight for Pickup and Trucks, and according to the seating capacity in Vans and Busses for Public Transport.

Imports from CARICOM Countries are exempted from the payment of import duty provided the importer produces a Certificate of Origin from the country within the Common Market certifying that the goods were produced within the region of the common market. Some commodities imported from CARICOM pay Revenue Replacement Duty (RRD). There are restrictions for certain commodities imported from CARICOM that require an Import License from Ministry of Trade prior to importation.<sup>10</sup>

There are some items that attract a Revenue Replacement Duty (RRD) ranging from 5 to 40 percent based on the aggregate of the Customs Value and the Import Duties.

Sales Tax is charged at a rate of 9 percent based on the aggregate of the customs value and any other relative duty (Import Duty and RRD if applicable) and 14 percent on Alcoholic Beverages (including Beer), Petroleum, Tobacco and Tobacco Products, large fans, Air Conditioners, Yachts, Jewellery, Perfumery, Cosmetics, Vehicles over four cylinders, Stoves and refrigerators over 15 Cu. ft.. Some commodities are exempted from the payment of sales tax at the time of importation.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.customs.gov.bz/duty.html>

### 4.2 Free Trade Agreements

Belize has double tax treaties with the United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark and the countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

In October, 2003, the Prime Minister of Belize, Said Musa announced a five year economic cooperation agreement with Taiwan that will help develop and finance basic public services within the Central American jurisdiction.

In June 2005, Belize and Guatemala extended talks on a possible Partial Scope Trade Agreement (PSA). Proposals on market access were cited as the primary reason for the decision to convene a fourth round of talks. These negotiations included the lowering existing tariff and non-tariff barriers, a move intended to enhance bilateral trade. Provisions for the removal of non-tariff barriers were also included in the agreement. The trade pact is also expected to provide an investment promotion and protection framework. Guatemala has also proposed measures concerning financial services and tourism.

Belize has preferential market access for many products to Europe, Canada, USA and the Caribbean:

Europe under LOME IV  
CANADA under CARIBCAN  
USA under CBI II  
Caribbean under CARICOM <sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>

<http://www.lowtax.net/lowtax/html/jbzcfr.html>

### 4.3 Non-Tariff Barriers

The importation of some live animals, foodstuff, plant and plant materials, and veterinary vaccines requires an import permit from the Ministry of Agriculture and is subjected to inspection at the time of importation by Quarantine Inspectors. Import permits are required for certain foodstuffs, live animals, plant and plant materials, and veterinary vaccines from the Belize Agricultural Health Authority (BAHA) (<http://www.baha.bz/>) and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

BAHA also requires phyto-sanitary and zoo-sanitary certificates, health risk analysis documentation, and certificates of origin.

Importers are required to submit also all original commercial invoices to the Customs Department.

In order to protect certain domestic industries, the government maintains a list of 27 categories of products that require import licenses. This list includes mostly consumer goods, such as flour, rice, beans, dry pasta products, aerated beverages and beer. <sup>12</sup>

### 4.4 Import Documentation

Information on all shipping documents must be in metric units. For all shipments the following are required:

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<sup>12</sup> Doing Business In Belize: A Country Commercial Guide for U.S. Companies, 2006.

- **Commercial invoice:** Five copies are required. Chamber of commerce certification and consular legalization are not required.
- **Certificate of origin:** Required for goods claiming CARICOM preferential treatment. Five copies of the Certificate of Origin are required. The Certificate of Origin must be certified by a designated agency in the country of exportation.
- **Proforma invoice:** Not necessarily required. May be requested by importer when applying for an import licence.
- **Bill of lading:** This is required, however, there are no regulations specifying the form or number of bills of lading required for any particular shipment. The airway bill replaces the bill of lading on air cargo shipments.
- **Phytosanitary certificate:** This certificate is required on all shipments of fresh fruits and vegetables, meats and plants and planting materials.
- **Health certificate:** Required for imports of live animals. The certificate must state that the animal is free from disease and must provide proof of origin.
- **Plant health certificate:** Import permits or certificates of introduction (to be obtained in advance by the importer from the Ministry of Agriculture, Belize City) usually are required for

most plants and plant products, including wrappings and packaging used in connection with such living plants.

### 4.5 Labelling and Marking Requirements

The Belize Bureau of Standards has standard requirements for labeling and marking of locally manufactured and imported products sold in Belize.

The standard requires that the label affixed to a product shall give detailed information on the good, such as the ingredients used and nutritional facts.

### 4.6 Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures

The Food Safety Department has a mandate to monitor, evaluate and take action on any matters that may have a direct or indirect effect on the safety of the food supply. This is done not only for the export market, but for local consumption as well. Providing safe, wholesome and nutritious food is also regarded as a requirement under the World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreement, to which Belize is a signatory.

To carry out this increasingly important role, the Food Safety Department is active in the following areas:

A team of Food Safety Inspectors performs sanitary inspections of the various food-processing plants as well as on certain food products imported into Belize. The Inspectors are continuously

trained in the latest inspection and sanitary auditing techniques, so as to be able to respond to any new methods of food processing applied by industry, and to the ever changing conditions encountered in food preparation and processing environment that may have an impact on food safety.

Investigations into food borne diseases and outbreaks have been very basic in Belize thus far. The staff of the Food Safety Department has been upgrading its capacity for carrying out such investigations and a structured programme has been put in place to start appropriate monitoring, evaluation and response to food borne diseases.

The food safety department applies the principles of Risk Analysis when called to evaluate the risks arising from hazards (or potential hazards) in foods to ensure that the various food exporting and importing establishments comply with current internationally accepted rules and regulations for the safe handling of food. In collaboration with the SPS Unit, companies may request a Risk Analysis to be conducted by a BAHA-team in order to be able to import certain food items into Belize.

BAHA has accelerated the upgrading of the Central Investigation Laboratory (CIL) of the Food Safety Department by purchasing state-of-the-art equipment and providing high-quality training for the staff to enable them to use this equipment competently, professionally and with optimum efficiency. The Laboratory is enrolled in several proficiency testing and quality assurance programs to ensure testing excellence and gain industry and consumer

confidence as well as to keep abreast of international developments in the field.

CIL is offering a wide range of Laboratory Services at regionally competitive prices.

The BAHA Act of 1999 (Chapter 211 of the Laws of Belize) gave provision for the establishment of the Food Safety Department to effectively put in place the necessary regulations and controls, allowing BAHA to deal with the issues where food affect human health. The legislation is being reviewed and revised (January 2006) to reflect new regulatory developments (such as traceability requirements) in the global demand for food safety. Regulations dealing with the import and export of food items are being implemented by BAHA's programmes, such as Import Permits and Certification Programmes.

The Food Safety Department has been taking on the role of educator in issues of food safety. This is done not only for food processors but also for policymakers, technical officers and consumers. A public that is educated in issues surrounding food safety is the key to the implementation of safe food safety practices. A BAHA multi-disciplinary team will always be ready to promote food safety education in your establishment: from the basics of food safety to the latest on food safety technology.

### **Liaison/International Collaboration**

The food safety department actively pursues collaborative work and liaisons with its international partners involved in food safety. By seeking out and collaborating with those international

organizations that have a similar focus, BAHA can dovetail their work programme to complement what food safety programmes or tasks need to be done in the country with less duplication of roles and effect conservation of scarce financial resources. Many of the food safety programmes and plan of work established by BAHA has been augmented and supported by international organizations (e.g. FAO, WHO/PAHO, OIRSA, IICA) having the same focus and wanting to achieve similar goals. Partnering with these agencies avoids duplication and strengthens collaborative efforts in food safety.<sup>13</sup>

### 4.7 Prohibited and Restricted Imports

Certain goods are generally not allowed into Belize unless they originate from another CARICOM member state.

The list includes peanut butter, jam, jellies, matches, pasta, beans, rice, wheat flour, and pepper sauce.

Beans and rice, however, like many other locally produced agricultural products, may not be imported at all whenever there is a surplus of these products on the domestic market.

### 4.8 Standards

The Belize Bureau of Standards (BBS) prepares and promotes standards in relation to goods, services and processes.

As such, the BBS monitors compulsory standards with the aim of preventing the

access to the market place of goods that are likely to be a danger to the health or safety of consumers.

### 4.9 Product Certification

A certification programme, based on the implementation of the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) food safety system was established for the fish and fishery products processing industry in Belize which enabled Belize to export these products freely to both the USA and the European Union (EU). The farm to table approach of BAHA's food safety program, provides for food safety assurances along the entire chain, from the production site on the farm with the application of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), to the processing plants' implementation of Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), Standard Sanitary Operating Procedures (SSOP) and HACCP systems that is verified and certified by BAHA's inspectors and sanitary auditors. Other certification programmes, such as one for meat processing plants and one for fruit and vegetable packing plants are currently being developed in collaboration with industry and other regulatory agencies.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.baha.bz/food\\_safety.html](http://www.baha.bz/food_safety.html)

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<sup>14</sup> [http://www.baha.bz/food\\_safety.html](http://www.baha.bz/food_safety.html)

### 5. INVESTMENT PROFILE

#### 5.1 Investment Incentives Schemes

Belize's investment policy is codified in the Belize Investment Guide, which sets out the development priorities for the country. In spite of the establishment of the Belize Trade and Investment Development Service (BELTRAIDE) to serve as a one-stop shop for export and investment assistance, bureaucratic red tape may still be encountered when seeking government fiscal incentives. BELTRAIDE continues to encourage investment in the following sectors of the economy:

- Agriculture, agro-industries, food processing and livestock.
- Tourism and tourism-related industries.
- Aquaculture and horticulture.
- Light-manufacturing industries and offshore assembly plants, and
- Forestry and forestry-based industries.<sup>15</sup>

Investment incentives are contained in the following legislation:

- Fiscal Incentive Act, No. 6 of 1990;
- International Business and Public Investment Companies (IBC) Act 1990;
- Mines and Mineral Act 1988;
- Export Processing Zone (EPZ) Act 1990;
- Commercial Free Zone (CFZ) Act 1994.

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<http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/ifd/2007/80680.htm>

#### FISCAL INCENTIVES ACT 1990

The Fiscal Incentives Act (No.6) offers tax holidays and duty exemptions.

Tax holidays are normally offered for 5 years, extensible for up to a further 10 years; but in the case of agricultural investment may be for up to 25 years. However, there is a provision that the Minister for Economic Development, on application made by the company in a fit and proper case, can review the company's operations and renew the tax-holiday period for a further term not exceeding ten years.

Duty exemptions are offered to every company which has been granted an Approved Enterprise Order (Development Concession) to import into Belize, free of import duty, and revenue replacement duty, a wide range of industrial machinery, construction materials and raw materials. Exemption is normally given for 15 years, with a 10-year extension.<sup>16</sup>

#### 5.2 Foreign Investment Regime

The Government of Belize lists the following criteria according to which it judges foreign investment:

- creates employment opportunities;
- makes maximum use of indigenous raw materials;
- earns foreign exchange;
- results in increased production;
- introduces state-of-the-art technology;
- enhances local management skills;

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<http://www.lowtax.net/lowtax/html/jbzcfr.html>



- promotes greater efficiency through competition;
- diversifies the economic base;
- facilitates access to foreign markets;
- is environmentally friendly.

Longer term incentives are offered for the location of industries in the less-developed rural areas of the country and for export-oriented projects or projects utilizing technology not previously introduced into Belize. The government prefers joint venture and partnership investments, but does permit one hundred percent foreign ownership of an enterprise.<sup>17</sup>

### 5.3 Free Trade Zones

#### 5.3.1 The Commercial Free Zone

The Commercial Free Zone Act 1994 established a Commercial Free Zone at Corozal to attract foreign investment. The Zone provides facilities for various activities including manufacturing, processing, packaging, warehousing and distribution of goods and services.

Businesses established in the Free Zone are free of foreign exchange restrictions and receive a range of other benefits including duty exemptions and tax holidays.

Goods and supplies entering and leaving the Free Zone for commercial purposes are exempt from import or export duties, quotas, stamp duties and revenue replacement duties.

Income tax is charged at between 2 and 8 percent on Free Zone businesses, but these rates can be reduced by up to two percent through tax credits earned by the employment of Belizean workers.<sup>18</sup>

#### 5.3.2 Export Processing Zones (EPZ)

Three locations have been designated as EPZs under the Export Processing Zone Act. The San Andres EPZ occupies 28.5 acres of land in the northern section of the country, only 8 miles away from the Mexican border, right next door to NAFTA. The other two Zones are both located approximately 9 miles from Belize City, the country's commercial capital. The EPZ adjacent to the Philip Goldson International Airport covers four acres, while the Price Barracks EPZ covers 14 acres.

In the EPZ, facilities are provided for activities in manufacturing, processing, packaging, warehousing and the distribution of goods and services. In fact, amendments made to the legislation in 1994 provide investors with the added option of constructing their own facilities and developing infrastructure within an EPZ, including independent utility installations. This option enables an EPZ to enhance its economic development, since it does not necessarily have to use the electricity or telephone facilities provided by the two local monopolies, The Belize Electricity Limited and The Belize Telecommunications Limited respectively.

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<http://www.lowtax.net/lowtax/html/jbzcfr.html>

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<http://www.lowtax.net/lowtax/html/jbzcfr.html>

While new applications have been approved for ICT companies, the government continues to streamline the EPZ programme. In 2006, only eight new EPZ companies were approved, bringing the total number of EPZ companies operating in Belize at the end of 2006 to 73.<sup>19</sup>

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<http://www.lowtax.net/lowtax/html/jbzcfr.html>

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<http://www.lowtax.net/lowtax/html/jbz2tax.html>



### 6. ESTABLISHMENT OF BUSINESSES

#### 6.1 Right to Private Ownership

The Constitution of Belize protects the right to private property. Chapter II, Article (3a) guarantees “protection from arbitrary deprivation of property.” Among other documents, records of companies and real estate mortgages are kept in the government’s general registry office.

Also, foreigners must obtain approval from the Minister of Natural Resources in order to purchase or hold land in excess of half an acre for urban areas or in excess of ten acres for rural areas.

There are controls on land ownership by foreigners in excess of 0.5 acre in a town or 10 acres in the country. The Minister of Natural Resources issues licenses if a satisfactory development plan is presented or is in existence. If a property is being sub-divided for sale, a subdivision permit must be obtained from the Minister of Natural Resources. Land can be leased from the Government of Belize with an option to buy if the planned development indicated at the time of the application is carried out. Land in general has a (one percent) tax on the unimproved value of the land. The cost for transfer of title to real property is 10 percent of value for Stamp Duty (usually shared between buyer and seller) and a token fee for registration. Attorney fees are additional.

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#### 6.2 Establishing an Office

The following is taken from the laws of Belize, Chapter 206, Part IX. It applies to foreign companies wishing to establish an office in Belize.

- 1) Overseas companies that establish a place of business within Belize shall, within one month of the establishment of the place of business, deliver the following to the Registrar for registration:
  - a) A certified copy of the charter, statutes or memorandum and articles of the company or other instrument constituting or defining the constitution of the company, and if the instrument is not written in the English language, a certified translation thereof;
  - b) A list of the directors and secretary of the company containing the particulars;
  - c) The names and addresses of someone or more persons resident in Belize authorized to accept on behalf of the company service of process and any notices required to be served on the company.
- 2) Every overseas company shall, in every calendar year, file with the Registrar such a statement in the form of a balance sheet as would, if it were a company incorporated in Belize and having a share capital, be required to be included in the annual summary.
- 3) Every overseas company shall do the following:
  - a) In every prospectus inviting subscriptions for its shares or debentures in Belize, state the

- country in which the company is incorporated;
- b) Conspicuously exhibit on every place where it carries on business in Belize the name of the company and the country in which the company is incorporated;
  - c) Cause the name of the company and of the country in which it is incorporated to be stated in legible characters in all bill heads and letter paper, and in all notices and other official publications of the company; and
  - d) If the liability of the members of the company is limited, cause notice of that fact to be stated in legible characters in every such prospectus as aforesaid and in all bill heads, letter paper, notices and other official publications of the company in Belize, and to be affixed on every place where it carries on business.

In addition, foreign companies are required to pay a registration fee of BZ\$84 (\$42) at the office of the Registrar General in the Supreme Court Building in Belize City.<sup>22</sup>

### 6.3 Work Permit Requirements

The application process takes approximately three weeks. Although the Ministry of Labour processes and approves the issuing of work permits, the permit is issued by the Immigration Department - the fee can range anywhere from \$100.00 to \$750.00 depending on the level of skill. Two recent passport

size pictures endorsed by the applicant must accompany the application.

In the case of an investor a present passport, three passport size pictures, and substantive proof of ability to sustain him/herself without infringing on the country's limited economic resources. Bank statements or other proof of financial independence are also required.

The 'life' of a work permit ranges from three months to one year and is subject to renewal.<sup>23</sup>

### 6.4 Intellectual Property Rights

In 2003, Belize signed up to an agreement on intellectual property development. According to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO): "The agreement establishes the terms of a project that is designed to support a more effective integration of the region into the global economy by fostering technological innovation, creativity and competitiveness through intensive and effective mobilization and use of intellectual property."

Belize has fulfilled its obligation under the World Trade Organization (WTO) to implement the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property (the TRIPS Agreement). The Belize Intellectual Property Office (BELIPO) was subsequently established to administer these IPR laws, which include copyrights, industrial designs, patents, trademarks, protection of new plant varieties, and protection of layout –

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<sup>22</sup> Doing Business in Belize: A Country Commercial Guide for U.S. Companies, 2006.

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<http://www.lowtax.net/lowtax/html/jbzlab.html>

designs (topographies) of integrated circuits.

Belize is a party to the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property and of Literary and Artistic Works and the Patent Copyright Treaty. However, Belize has ratified neither the WIPO Copyright Treaty (WCT) nor the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty (WCCT).

Under Belize's Copyright and Trademarks Laws, the onus to institute legal action against violators of intellectual property rights lies upon the holder of the copyright and trademark, and not upon local law enforcement officials.

In April 2007, Chief Justice of Belize, Abdulai Conteh, and the President of the Central American Court of Justice, Dr Ricardo Acevedo Peralta, signed a Cooperation Agreement between the Supreme Court of Belize and the Central American Court of Justice. The government of Belize has said that the purpose of the Agreement is to institutionalize inter-jurisdictional relations, develop juridical integration processes in the region and foster wider cooperation.<sup>24</sup>

### 6.5 Conversion and Transfer Policies

According to the Belize Trade and Investment Development Service (BELTRAIDE), foreign investors are required to register any investments made in Belize with the Central Bank of

Belize to facilitate the repatriation of profits, dividends, etc.

The Government of Belize allows companies with proper documentation to go directly to the commercial banks to request foreign exchange. However, much to the aggravation of foreign investors (and local importers alike), there are occasional shortages of foreign exchange in the commercial banks, which result in some delays in payments for current international transactions.

Transfer or sale of land in excess of 10 acres to or from non-Belizeans requires the approval of the Minister of Natural Resources,<sup>25</sup> but this is usually not an obstacle.

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<http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/ifd/2007/80680.htm>

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<http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/ifd/2007/80680.htm>

### 7. CULTURAL PRACTICES

#### 7.1 Business Customs

There is a favorable business environment, with few regulatory restrictions and minimum of red tape. Government hours are from 8 am to 12 noon and 1 pm to 5 pm Monday to Friday. Belize Telecommunications Limited provides telephone communication between Belize and the United States and Canada. Direct dial service is available worldwide. The Belize telephone system is one of the best in the region, with a modern fibre-optics network. Cellular and paging services are available. International calls are expensive. Direct Internet access is available from Belize Telecommunications, Ltd.

Mail service is generally reliable. Letters (US\$30 cents for a one-half ounce airmail letter) to the US from Belize City take about a week, longer from more remote areas. Belize is a very informal country, with a casual life-style. Formal attire is seldom necessary.<sup>26</sup>

#### 7.2 Entry/Exit Requirements:

All travelers entering the country must have a valid passport (valid for up to six months after visit) and a proof of return to their country. No visas are required for citizens of the United States, United Kingdom and the majority of Caribbean Islands. Visitors from other countries must check for information about

obtaining a visa. Belize allows visitors a maximum of one-month stay in the country before they require an extension.<sup>27</sup>

The Philip Goldson International Airport is 2 hours' flying time (daily flights) from Miami, New Orleans or Houston. There are reliable shipping and air cargo services to and from Europe, United States of America, Central America and the Caribbean. The departure tax at the International Airport has is US\$20 per person. There is a Tourist Departure Tax of US\$10 per person when departing Belize at either of the land border crossings.

Departing the country through land borders requires payment of the land border exit fee of US\$18.75 per person.

A portion of the departure tax goes toward the protection and preservation of the environment. Due to the country's effort to effectively manage their abundant protected areas, visitors are asked to pay a conservation exit fee at any of the exit or entry points. The proceeds from this fee goes to the Protected Areas Conservation Trust (PACT), which is then distributed and used to sustain the protected areas in Belize.

There is a standard nine percent hotel tax that is added to your hotel bill (7 percent until April 1, 2005). In some of the more exclusive resorts and hotels, a service charge of about 10 percent is charged to your hotel bills (restaurant, bar and room), while in other locations, tipping

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<http://www.lowtax.net/lowtax/html/jbzcfr.html>

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[http://www.belize.gov.bz/weather\\_travel.html](http://www.belize.gov.bz/weather_travel.html)

is optional. A nine percent sales tax is also attached to most goods and services in the country.<sup>28</sup>

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[http://www.belize.gov.bz/weather\\_travel.html](http://www.belize.gov.bz/weather_travel.html)