

Geography Now! Belize
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MrYk3kCUGk>
Transcript: <https://dontveter.com/ec/belize.pdf>

If I told you - welcome to Latin America, the place where people speak English and to a lesser extent German you would call me crazy!

Well, you'd best start beliezing that there's a, that such it's, that there's such a, it's a, it's called Belize! Nailed it!

It's time to learn geography...NOW!!! Hey everybody, I'm your host Paul Barbado.

Ah, Belize, Central America's most adorable little anomaly.

But first, you know the drill, let's dissect the flag.

Oh boy, here we go, a flag with a lot of things to look at and a lot of symbolism.

Okay, first of all, the flag is basically just a flag with the coat of arms.

The backdrop is royal blue with red stripes trimming the top and bottom, a white disc in the center with the coat of arms.

The blue and white represent the People's union party and the red represents the United Democratic party of Belize, the two major political parties of the country.

The coat of arms contains two dudes, a mestizo guy holding an axe and a black guy holding a paddle to indicate the major demographical ethnicities of Belize.

Keep in mind, Belize and Malta are the only sovereign nations to have humans depicted on their flag.

Behind the men is a mahogany tree and a shield supported by the hands of the men, tierced per pall inverted which means divided into 3 parts, upside down in a Y-shape.

And the first, left argent - a paddle and a squaring axe,

And the second one to the right - a beating axe and a crosscut saw.

And the last one on the bottom - a sailing ship.

These items illustrate the historical foundation of Belize, being a nation founded upon logging and the seafaring residents.

Around the men are 50 leaves connected by a circle branch signifying the year 1950, when the People's Union Party was established and took power.

Under the men, you have the nation's motto on a curled parchment:
"Sub umbra floreo", which means "Under the shade I flourish".

Now, that's a cool motto, under the shade I flourish, I mean, who wants to be out in the hot humid sun all day.

Also, I would like to take this moment to announce that this was the longest time we ever spent explaining a flag here on Geography Now!

Thanks Belize! You just blew Afghanistan out of the water!

Uhh, oh I, I didn't mean, I, I still....

Here's where Belize is located! Nailed it!

Alright, Belize's geographical location is very unique because it's technically kind of considered the gateway between the Caribbean and the Central American region.

First of all, Belize is located on the east coast of the Central American region of North America, east of the very end tip of Mexico and Guatemala with the Caribbean Sea to the east.

Although it looks like to the untrained eye, the west border of Belize is actually not a straight line

And at about 2/3 of the mark heading north from the southern tip around the town of Banque viejo del Carmen, the borderline tilts ever so slightly at about a 5 degree angle and continues up until the northern river in Mexico.

Belize has over 400 islands, islets and cays along its coast in the Caribbean including one of the largest and inhabited ones, Ambergris Cay.

Which, if it weren't for that one small little bicoastal separating creek, it would technically be an exclave attached to Mexico's Costa Mesa peninsula.

exclave

ěk'sklāv"

noun

1. A part of a country that is isolated from the main part and is surrounded by foreign territory.

By the way, for those who don't know, Ambergris is an incredibly rare and expensive substance used in perfumes basically made out of aged waxy buoyant flammable sperm whale vomit.

ambergris

noun

1. A waxy grayish substance from the intestines of sperm whales that was used as a fixative and a fragrance in the manufacture of perfumes. It is found floating at sea or washed ashore and was formerly extracted from whale carcasses.

Hey everybody, I'm a sperm whale. Cha ching!

A lot of the cays and islets are actually home to world-famous resorts and beaches that tourists, especially from English-speaking nations, flock to for vacation getaways.

The capital is Belmopan located in the Cayo district near the center of the country.

The capital used to be Belize City, which to this day is still the largest city and center hub for all commercial and economic activity.

However, cute motion graphic, after extensive damage done by hurricane Hattie back in the late 60's, Belize literally built an entirely new capital about 80 km/ 50 miles inland.

They chose a really interesting and kind of morbid spot though because apparently it's only about 16 km away from the Crystal maiden of Actun Tunichil Muknal cave.

Also known as the cave with sparkling calcified skeletons of children, that were kind of, yeah read up on ancient Mayan culture.

In fact, Belize is home to over 900 ancient Mayan sites speckled all over.

In fact the tallest building in Belize is a Mayan temple - the Caracole Mayan ruins.

The town cost only 24 million dollars to build, or after inflation rates today would only be about 73 million dollars.

That's actually kinda cheap considering that many airports alone cost several times more than that.

Belize is also interesting because it's one of the only 3 non-island nations to be part of CARICOM or the Caribbean Community.

Ohhh...that would've made such a great transition to the demographics, but we have to stay with the format.

Here's what the landscape looks like...

When entering Belize, you won't believe your eyes...hahahahahahaha!

No, but seriously, to put it simply, Belize is a tropical wonderland.

Because of the low population density, a huge portion of the land, about 60% especially inland is forest, most of which is undisturbed.

This makes an ideal home to over 5,000 species of plants and hundreds of different animals including monkeys, leopards, snakes, frogs, armadillos, bearsharktopuses (debatable), tucans, coatimundis, tapirs, scarlet macaws and tree otters, and kinkajous,

Not kinky Jews, kinkajous, y'all nasties.

kinky

adjective

1. Tightly twisted or curled.
2. Showing or appealing to bizarre or deviant tastes, especially of a sexual or erotic nature

Belize is also home to the first and only jaguar preservation reserve in the world, Cockscomb Wildlife Sanctuary, and that's not even including the coast.

In fact, Belize has the second largest Barrier Reef in the world after Australia's Great Barrier Reef and is a hotspot for scuba enthusiasts,

Speaking of which, one spot that Belize is absolutely famous for is the big blue hole located on the Lighthouse Reef Atoll about 70 km/40 miles off the mainland.

And this spot is a huge circular sub-marine sink-hole that goes down for about a 120 meters / 400 feet.

Where you can go into the hole and you'll be greeted by several colorful species of fish, like parrot fish, angel fish, lion fish, trumpet fish, balloon fish, bearsharktopus fish (debatable).

Chances are if you can think of any noun, it's probably a fish, and it's probably in the waters of Belize.

Despite the abundance of fish and fishing being a huge part of the industry, Belize is actually very concerned about maintaining the reefs and has actually become the first country in the world to ban bottom trawling or sea floor fishnet dragging.

In terms of agriculture, about 20% of the land is covered in cultivated land, even though the potential for more is actually totally available.

And to this day, bananas and plantains alone make up about 15% of all exports, agricultural exports all together make about 40%.

Inland, to the south you reach the Maya Mountains, the highest area of the country, home to the highest point - Doley's Delight, as well as numerous ancient Mayan sites hidden amongst the hills.

Back in the 19th century, New World excavation was like the hottest thing to do that everyone was jumping on

And Belize was a favourite spot amongst many numerous British archeologists.

But the British surprisingly aren't the largest white minority in Belize.

You'll never believe who it is actually, it's actually kind of funny.

To make things short, Belize is small but incredibly mixed.

The country has a population of about 340,000 people, about half of the country identifies as ethnically mestizo, about 25% identifies as creole or Afro-Belizean and then you have about 12% that identifies as indigenous Mayan.

Yes people, that's right, Mayans still exist, they didn't die out, you're thinking about the Olmecs.

Then you have about 6% identifying as Garinagu or people who are mixed between black and Amerindian.

About 4% are Indian, like from India – Indian, and here's where things get really funny.

Another 4% of the population is actually German or technically German-speaking Russian Mennonites.

That's right, Mennonites, not to be confused with the Amish, although they do look very similar and have similar values, there is a difference.

Originally they are descended from Mennonites that started in the Russian Empire in the late 1800's that moved to Canada, then to the U.S., then to Mexico and then finally in the 1950's settled in Belize.

Altogether, there are about 12,000 Mennonites, most of whom are ethnically white and speak Plattdeutsch or a dialect of German.

Funnier still, in addition, there are 2,000 or so non-white people that have converted to Mennonitism, making it one of the few places in the world where you can see black and mestizo people donning the traditional plain trademark clothing of the Mennonite community.

Belize is also interesting, too, in the fact that it is the only country Central America that speaks English as an official language and a lot of people in Belize though speak Belizean Creole,

Which is basically a heavily Caribbean influenced accent of the English language with distinct vocabulary word switches and written in a very basic phonetical structure.

For example, the word "language" is written "langwij".

When we get to the Haiti video, you'll notice that they basically did the exact same thing but with French.

Each region is kind of distinct in its populace, for example in the south in Stann Creek, you have high populations of Garifunas who speak and dress differently from the people in the north.

Like in Corozal and Orange Walk, which by the way has a high population of Mayan people.

Closer to the coast you have the Creoles and inland, don't be surprised to find the Mennonites.

Eventually Belize gained its self-governing autonomous status in 20th century and full independence in 1981, but still remains a Commonwealth country of the UK.

Speaking of ties to other countries.

Belize is, without a doubt, a joyful little kipper.

It's funny though, because diplomatically Belize is kind of technically closer to their Caribbean neighbor nations, but geographically they're still kind of surrounded by and attached to Central America.

This circumstance factors heavily in how Belize plays on the playground.

They have a ton of memberships into multilateral alliances, such as CARICOM, Interpol, the ACF, IMF, UNESCO, WTO, WEF (debatable), U.N., IFC and many more.

Basically if you can think of an acronym, Belize is probably part of it.

Nonetheless, recently they've been working harder to invest in the Central American ties to complement the historical ties that they've had to the Caribbean.

Spanish is commonly spoken as a second language to most of the population as interactions between their neighbors are common.

Nicaragua and Mexico are close friends of Belize as they all have developed bilateral agreements fairly well and conduct business on a relatively well level with each other.

Guatemala, however, has a little bone to pick with Belize as they have disputes over territorial claims, as in, they believe all of Belize should belong to Guatemala.

In 1981 they recognized Belize's independence, however decades later the dispute still lingers ever so slightly to the minds of Guatemalans.

Belize is also one of the few countries that recognizes Taiwan as an independent sovereign state.

It all started with some Taiwanese Belizean guy named William Quinto who was into politics, yadi yadi yada... they built ties with Taiwan.

When it comes to their best friends, more or less they might consider the U.S. and the UK.

As a former colony and Commonwealth, the UK still keeps a close embrace on Belize and in fact, Prince Harry even visited in 2012 on a Commonwealth tour.

In honor, the Belizeans renamed a boulevard in the capital as Her majesty Queen Elizabeth the II Boulevard.

The U.S. has been, and still is, the largest economic aid provider and investor especially in funds and business.

Doing business in Belize is actually surprisingly easy and only requires a few steps for registration and licensing, allowing Americans to focus on utilizing Belize's tactical position and policies for growth on both countries.

Wow, I actually wrote that, dang, I'm getting better at this.

In your face Mr. Clinton Berger, who gave me F on my English test on the first day of school!

Granted, I didn't do the summer reading...but still!

In conclusion, Belize may be both a Caribbean and Central American nation, but in all honesty it really kind of isn't neither one either.

I mean where else are you gonna find black Mennonites wearing bonnets speaking German with tucans in their backyards and English-speaking Mayans diving into 400-foot deep holes.

Pl-ease, it's Be-lize. Stay tuned, Benin is coming up next!