

# Essay on belize

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Located in the north eastern part of Central America, Belize is famed for being the only English speaking country in Central America even though Spanish and Kriol are also widely used for official purposes. The country borders Guatemala and Mexico to the west and south respectively. The island's size is close to 23, 000 square kilometers, and with a population of about 300, 000 according to the 2010 census, it is ranked least densely populated in Central America (Belize Statistical Office, 2013). The 3. 15% population growth rate, however, makes it the second highest in this region after the Cayman Islands (Fullman & Mainwood, 2006). Known for its rich marine species with diverse ecosystems, the country has a place in an elite group of leading Mesoamerican Biological locations with an increasing interest and visits by world marine biologists that form a notable fraction of regular tourists.

Slavery, Spanish and British influences form a significant part of Belize's history with the country having experienced one of the shortest wars in 1798 known as ' The Battle of St. George's Caye' that lasted for as few weeks in the month of September that year (Fullman & Mainwood, 2006). The settlement as it was initially referred, was explored by the Spanish who declared it their colony but did not settle there. British pirates known as Baymen later came to the region and chose to settle in Belize for its ideal geographical location to their Piracy activities since from Belize, they could easily raid Spanish ships in the region. A deal was later struck with the Spanish giving the British the right to lawful settle in the area and harvest wood in exchange for an agreement to bring to an end their piracy activities (Fullman & Mainwood, 2006).

The timber business that flourished after Baymen officially took control of the area, attracted slavery at one point making Belize the most lucrative slave markets with record pay for slaves. The name Belize came into being after the British granted the colony self-government that started in 1964 making George Price the first Prime minister. British Honduras formally became Belize in 1973 (and the name Belize formally came to effect). Guatemala, however, declined to recognize the country's 1981 declaration of independence and laid claim on the territory prompting Britain to keep about 1500 troops in the new nation as a measure against imminent invasion by Guatemala.

Given the Belizean population is predominantly of Kriol (Creole), Maya and Garinagu ethnicities, the three principal cultures jointly form the larger Belizean way of life with Creole being dominant. Creoles are descendants of black slaves that were brought to Belize by Baymen for the sole purpose of logging. They constituted 60% of Belizean population up to 1980 when an influx of people from Central America reduced this composition of Creoles to a bear 25% (Belize Statistical Office, 2013). The Maya people are of Native American descent from Mexico's south and Central America's north while the Garifuna are a product of the Carib Arawak and West African people (Peedle, 1999). Other ethnicities in Belize are; Mestizo, of Spanish and Native American backgrounds and the Mennonites of German descent.

Belizean culture is generally that of courtesy and greeting total strangers is a societal norm. Often, they spend a reasonable amount of time chatting with those not strange to them without much regard to time. As a people, they believe in spiritual healing and Obeah, a form of spiritual activity equivalent

of voodoo or plain magic. Even though Obeah practices have declined, Belizeans still have some families strongly tied to this form of sorcery. Traditionally, Obeah practitioners would bury a bottle of the said 'evil' underneath a tree close to the house. English is the most spoken language in Belize which makes the country comparatively closer to her Caribbean neighbors than the surrounding Spanish speaking nations. Spanish and Creole are the other languages spoken in Belize (Peedle, 1999). One outstanding Belizean cultural practice is the traditional Sambai Manatee; a unique Creole dance that has managed to survive through times from the days of slavery. The dance was a celebration of the union of different tribes in Belize City during Christmas. Being a fertility dance, the celebration marks a time when boys and girls are considered sexually mature.

Belize economy is predominately based on petroleum and crude oil, agricultural products and tourism as the leading foreign exchange earners with construction recently forming a significant part of the country's economy. The Belize dollar symbolized as BZ\$ is the country's currency. The country has several resources primary of which are; industrial minerals and crude oil, a product which the country exports 480 cubic meters of each day. Sugar and is the country's main crop accounting for nearly 50% of the total exports while the banana industry employs most Belizeans (Pariser & Pariser, 1998).

The country's economy is run by private enterprises with recent government challenges being improvement in revenue collection; a challenge that the government is yet to overcome. From 1999, construction and tourism industries became key economic drivers pushing growth to 4%, but with the

most expensive electricity in the region, this growth has not been sustained (Pariser & Pariser, 1998). Presently, main trading partners to Belize are Mexico, United States the EU and Central America. Given the degree of involvement by private enterprises in the Belize economy, the largest electricity distributor is a Canadian owned BEL, a company that is 70% held by Fortis upon invitation input of private management after the nation faced several financial challenges with the prior utility company (Pariser & Pariser, 1998).

The government has recently had policy changes that advocate for the marketing of Belize as a tourist destination of choice to help improve the tourism industry and subsequent earnings from the sector. With the rich bio diversity in rich flora and fauna of Belize, perfect climate, over 400 Cayes, safe diving areas and incredible fishing grounds, the government has embarked on aggress (Pariser & Pariser, 1998). This campaign, if successful, will significantly increase Belize's earnings from tourism with visitors from as far as the Asia.

Being a member of the commonwealth, Belize has a British style parliamentary government structure with a cabinet headed by the Prime Minister of Belize who is under the authority of queen of England. The queen, in this case, Elizabeth II, is represented by the governor General in who carries among other duties the appointment of candidates to the senate. The national assembly comprises of the senate and House of Representatives with the latter having 31 members while constituents of the former are 12 and appointed by The Governor- General. The senate debates and approves bills passed by the 31 member House (Streissguth, 2010).

Belize has only two political parties; the left wing People United Party (PUP) rightwing United Democratic Party (UDP) with several other small parties that have not won significant seats at any level of government over the years democratic elections (Jeter, 1995). Jurisprudence is on the basis of English common laws with an independent judiciary whose members are appointed. The precondition of innocence until proven guilty is a basic legal philosophy in Belize with criminal cases requiring proof beyond a reasonable doubt, as is the case in Common law.

There is a local government structure that is composed of four authorities of city, town, village and community councils. This governance structure ensures that services are closer to the people. The country has an equity policy that ensures resources is shared among local communities in the ratio of their population with representation to the senate also equitably shared among the ethnic groups within Belize during an appointment by the Governor- General (Streissguth, 2010).

Concisely, in as much as migration by mainly Creoles to the United states and the United Kingdom for better lives that have altered the ethnic composition of indigenous Belizeans reducing this once dominant community to the majority, the Creoles in Belize have kept their cultural heritage and maintained their unique identities. Mestizo ethic group, on the other hand has seen a rise in numbers following refugee migrations from nearby Guatemala and Honduras making this community one of the largest in Belize. From the study into Belize, it evident that country has put in place notable policy to help improve its economy by investing in tourism, a move

that will over time see its growth to prosperity as it remains a beacon of democracy in central America.

## References

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