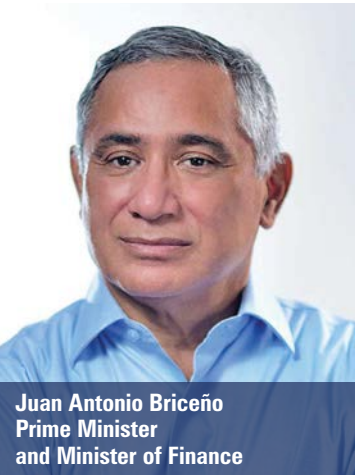




Sun-kissed paradise reopens to the world

The removal of all entry requirements post-pandemic has breathtaking Belize ready for a surge of arrivals

Blessed with an array of gorgeous natural assets including a sun-soaked coastline dotted with exotic islands, golden sands, lush rainforests, eco-friendly new dive sites, ancient Mayan sites, and the world’s second largest barrier reef, Belize is an increasingly popular destination for tourists with an adventurous streak who seek more from their vacation.



Juan Antonio Briceño
Prime Minister
and Minister of Finance

Often overlooked in favor of dominant neighbor Mexico, Belize is working hard to make a name for itself in traditional and emerging segments of the tourism sector, including eco-tourism and music and cultural-themed immersive experiences that bolster its image as a welcoming and safe destination for international visitors.

The investor-friendly govern-

ment has recently embarked on an ambitious reform process to modernize and consolidate business laws and processes, with a view to diversifying its economy into areas such as tourism.

“We are a nation with a very small population at just over 430,000 citizens, but we are beautiful, friendly and warm people, open to visitors because we love our country and we are proud of what we have,” Juan Antonio Briceño, Belize’s Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, states proudly.

“Belize bridges two regions and offers endless opportunities for everyone. We have a strategic location and bountiful natural terrestrial and marine resources, as well as a very young and vibrant population. The government is generating lots of opportunities for investors to invest successfully in Belize and, at the same time, also creating many opportunities for our people.”

Magnificent Mayan sites showcase Belize’s world-class heritage assets

Ancient architecture and natural wonders charm

Belize not only blends an array of natural wonders and centuries of tradition and culture with warm-spirited people, but boasts a wonderful range of underwater ecosystems, particularly the eye-catching sinkhole, Blue Hole Natural Monument.

Famous for being the largest geological formation of its kind in the world, the collapsed cave system is considered by experts to have formed above ground around 10,000 years ago. Encircled by a beautiful ring of coral in the sparkling, shallow waters of the Lighthouse Reef Atoll, the monument’s star attraction is the incredible Great Blue Hole, which is roughly 1,000 feet (330 meters) across and more than 400 feet (130 meters) deep.

Just as impressive is the Belize Barrier Reef, which sits only a few kilometers from Belize’s coastline and forms part of the larger Mesoamerican Barrier Reef, second in size only to Australia’s Great Barrier Reef. Designated an UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1996, the reef teems with hundreds of species of coral and fish, making it an ideal spot for divers, snorkelers and biologists from across the globe.

Back on dry land, ancient Maya temples hidden among tropical rainforest attract and intrigue visitors in equal measure, whether in low or high season. Indeed, tourism chiefs underline that it is not uncommon to come across ancient pieces of pottery or discover a distant hill is actually a temple.

All the ancient sites are managed by the Institute of Archaeology and have interpretive centers, as well as trained guides fluent in different languages. “From all our research and analysis, people want a life-f fulfilling experience and they want to immerse themselves in a destination like Belize that offers so much diversity of experiences in one product,” states Minister of Tourism Anthony Mahler.

“They want to learn, they want to experience, and they want to share our cultures. Adventure tourism and experiential tourism are high on the priority list for us in terms of projecting Belize globally, and specifically in North America, since we have international airlines serving many cities flying into the country.”

Investment in luxury developments aims to attract well-heeled visitors

Vision of private islands, five-star hotels and high-end villa and lodge accommodation moves closer

The countdown is well and truly on for Belize’s National Sustainable Tourism Master Plan (NSTMP) 2030, with only seven years remaining until target objectives are assessed for the final time and progress measured.

“The vision of the NSTMP is for Belize (as a destination) to be a recognized embodiment, within its international marketplaces as a unique, authentic, sustainable and competitive world-class destination,” notes the Belize Tourism Board (BTB).

“The strategic goals of the NSTMP 2030 are to provide: Leadership which will support the Belizean stakeholders in taking leadership over sustainable tourism development; optimization of socio-economic benefits from tourism; sustainable tourism planned development; and compe-

titiveness in achieving world-class destination status.”

The overriding objective of the NSTMP 2030 is to more than double overnight tourist arrivals while enhancing average length of stay and daily expenditure. This includes a focus on upscale private island developments as well as more traditional high-end, luxury, five-star hotel, exclusive villa and lodge accommodation.

“Luxury and very-low to low density mix development use business models for private islands that cater to very exclusive clientele,” the NSTMP 2030 says. Investment in beach boutique hotels is also required so Belize can offer “high-end to luxury and very low to low-density coastal accommodation facilities with beach access, catering to the needs of exclusive clientele looking to

relax and enjoy pristine beaches and complementary services.”

Travelers lucky enough to be able to afford private jets or helicopters can take advantage of a “Luxury Tourism” programme which offers a streamlined immigration and arrivals process for private aviation passengers. The programme aims to provide outstanding, exclusive, and convenient tourism services and experiences to tourists.

Other tourism segment niches are also being explored, according to Briceño. “We are looking at special areas like medical tourism, conference center development or sport tourism,” he says. “We have the advantage of being small and compact, but with many opportunities and features that people want to experience, or wish to invest in.”



Belize’s stunning natural beauty is complemented by a culture rich in tradition

Natural treasures entice and enthrall

Minister Mahler reveals exactly why Belize’s tourism portfolio is the strongest in the wider region

Please sum up the essence of Belize, its culture and people, what makes it so unique?

In a word: Amazing. In another: Diverse. Belize is a very diverse, small, English-speaking country in Central America. We have some of the world’s most pristine marine resources and the second-largest barrier reef.

We have three of the four atolls in the Caribbean, the Blue Hole Natural Monument, an extensive cave network and rainforests with rich and abundant flora and fauna. In this compact area, there are some of the best natural assets and multicultural people.

We also have a rich ancient history with the Maya culture and a large concentration of archaeological sites all across the country; whether it be natural caves or infrastructure like temples; accessible in the northern, southern, eastern, and western areas.

While 2021 saw global tourism and travel struggling, this year’s rebound is set to catapult the industry back to pre-pandemic levels. How would you describe the resilience of your tourism sector?

“Belize has some of the world’s most pristine marine resources and the second-largest barrier reef. We also have a rich ancient history with the Maya culture and archaeological sites.”

Anthony Mahler, Minister of Tourism and Diaspora Relations



Anthony Mahler
Minister of Tourism
and Diaspora Relations

rebound, you’re talking about a 50 percent projection for 2022; when you’re looking at Belize, it’s about 85 percent.

What are some of the niches that you are now targeting to further develop your tourism offering and to target the experience-seekers and environmentally conscious travelers of today?

The priority areas for us at the moment are adventure, experiential, weddings, food and culture.

While the global recovery is somewhere around 50-60 percent; we’re hovering towards 85-90 percent already. That is with the borders being fully re-opened, and from what we’ve done with the airport and cruise sector; it has taken at least six or seven months for us to really see an impact.

In terms of overnight arrivals, our main priority, from when we took over office, is to ensure that we had air routes into Belize. We negotiated with legacy carriers, ultra-low-cost carriers, and low-cost carriers. Today, the capacity in Belize is on par — or a little bit more than — the capacity in 2019.

We still have some outstanding roads to be rebuilt and to be reinstalled. We have also worked with the cruise lines to ensure that the health and safety protocols are in place for visitors to come and enjoy Belize in a safe way.

We have a very resilient private sector in the country. We have been impacted by hurricanes, SARS, the September 11th attacks, Ebola, we have gone through the global financial crisis, and the industry has rebounded.

When you compare the global

How important is the U.S. travel market for Belize from a historic perspective and what are the latest trends and developments?

More than two-thirds of the people who come to Belize arrive from the U.S. We have very robust airline roads into Belize, with flights from Miami, Houston, Dallas, Denver, Seattle, Orlando, Los Angeles, New York, and several others. A portion comes from Canada and a smaller portion comes by road because we share a border with Mexico and are a popular destination for Mexicans.

What is your message to the 400,000 Belizean diaspora in the U.S.?

If we have a respectful dialogue with Belizeans in the diaspora, and we assist them in terms of returning and building their homes or businesses, they will play an important part in the growth and development of our nation.

I say to them: Come home. Come retire. Come and invest. Come to Belize and create your second home. We want you to be a part of this journey as we continue to build our amazing country.

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Foreign investment partners sought

The government has adopted a series of pro-business measures to attract FDI in a broad range of sectors

Belize has endured a challenging decade when it comes to attracting lucrative foreign direct investment (FDI), with the country not performing as well as some of its peers in Central and South America or the Caribbean.

Valuable financial and professional services support from leading foreign partners aims to reverse this trend, with The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) recently approving an \$8 million loan to promote Belize’s FDI and trade performance through a series of measures. The funding is aimed “at streamlining trade and investment procedures and providing tools for small and medium-sized firms to join global value chains”.

“The project will reduce trade and investment permit approval times through automatized, simplified, and standardized processes [and] seeks to attract more FDI projects by strengthening Belize’s investment promotion institutions,” IDB explained.

As Belize’s national development agency for investment and export promotion, Beltraide spearheads government efforts to attract FDI in various sectors and industries. The award-winning organization is a dynamic one-stop-shop and works to entice key investment partners seeking favorable returns on investments.

Beltraide recently collaborated with DFC (Development Finance Corporation) to implement the Belize Enterprise Revolving Fund (BERF), through which economic diversification is targeted via the bolstering of the competitiveness of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). According to Beltraide’s Executive Director, Leroy Almendarez, the current priority areas of investment for the government are tourism, agriculture, renewable energies and business process outsourcing (BPO).



Leroy Almendarez
Executive Director, Beltraide

“We are looking to position Belize as an investment hub, not only for FDI, but also for local investment as well. Whatever incentives we put in place must attract local and foreign investors,” the senior executive states. “We are addressing and making the necessary investment to establish the enabling environment for local and foreign investors.

“When you apply for an investment incentive, whether it’s a fiscal incentive or a designated processing area, incentives are provided. The process has been shortened and streamlined as it used to take a long time, and potential investors used to get frustrated. That has now been reduced and the legislation is now being amended.”

The adoption of a National Investment Policy and Strategy (NIPS) that has been benchmarked against other countries aims to position Belize as a successful investment destination through a series of specific policy pillars. “Over the next three years or so, NIPS will make us even more competitive, because it includes digitization and economic diplomacy,” Almendarez explains. “There are other policy, legislative and procedural changes. We are looking at registering a business,



Mark Lizarraga
Chairman, BTL

starting a business, getting access to electricity, taking care of minority interests or dealing with liquidity or insolvency, and we’re focusing not only on large enterprises, but also on SMEs.”

Telecoms sector boosts connectivity

Belize’s portfolio of competitive advantages include its uniqueness as the only English-speaking country in Central America and

decent infrastructure, including a modern, fast and reliable telecoms network that played a crucial role in the national fight against COVID-19.

Infrastructure and mobile services provided by Belize Telemedia Limited (BTL) — the country’s leading telecommunications provider and supplier of the quickest Internet services — enabled people to keep one step ahead of the pandemic and work remotely



Belize’s business-friendly policies allow enterprises of all sizes to flourish.

with minimum disruption when scores of offices and businesses were closed. In addition, it allowed schoolchildren to perform online learning and participate in tasks and activities that minimized the impact to their core educational experiences.

“The importance of the connectivity that BTL offers manifested itself during the pandemic and throughout the recovery period. With our modern infrastructure,

consisting of the only fiber to the home network and 4G LTE, advanced mobile coverage spans over 90 percent of the country,” BTL’s proud Chairman, Mark Lizarraga, states.

BTL’s technology plays an increasingly important role in national socioeconomic development, including in the fast-growing BPO and agricultural sectors. Lizarraga notes his company is prepared to contribute to the significant

advancement in the agricultural sector through the use of digital applications and technologies that can facilitate cooperation across value chains, support farmers and offer opportunities for innovative SMEs for a more efficient, sustainable and competitive industry.

Turning to the rich potential of the BPO sector, he adds: “As a relatively new player in the BPO industry, Belize has tremendous opportunity to grow. BTL welcomes the move to establish more call centers in Belize, particularly as we have the technology, infrastructure, equipment, international bandwidth capacity with redundancy, and the human resources.

“We are very satisfied with our contribution to the BPO industry. Belize is rapidly expanding in a sector that has achieved significant growth in the past few years. Our country has a very high call center and remote agents’ capacity making it an ideal investment opportunity. We have thousands of young people providing services to customers all over the world.

“There is a myriad of opportunities for investment here. BTL is the backbone of connectivity and open to forging new partnerships to successfully expand our product offerings and contribute to the development of Belize.”

“We are looking to position Belize as an investment hub, not only for FDI, but also for local investment as well.”

Leroy Almendarez, Executive Director, Beltraide

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