



BELIZE FOUNDATION for RESEARCH and ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

INFO PACKET - PLANNING YOUR TRIP BELIZE, CENTRAL AMERICA

With BFREE, you will be totally immersed in the culture and environment surrounding you as you experience an active tropical biological field station.

BFREE Mission

BFREE was founded in 1995 with the primary purpose of developing and implementing a conservation program for the Bladen Nature Reserve. To achieve this goal, BFREE established a biological field station strategically located in the foothills of the Maya Mountains, adjacent to the reserve. The organization is registered in the US as a 501c3 nonprofit with a local chapter in Belize.

BFREE's mission is "to conserve the biodiversity and cultural heritage of Belize." As the only field station in this biologically significant area, we seek to achieve our mission of conservation through research and environmental education programs. We provide logistical support and facilities to visiting scientists and students, promote and facilitate research and conservation of tropical forests, develop and implementing environmental educational programs for students from Belize and other nations, and provide for and assist in the enhancement of alternative livelihoods for local community members.

Support for BFREE comes from private donations, grants, and income generated from the visitation to the BFREE field station. BFREE has an ongoing relationship with over 45 universities, colleges, and high schools in the US and Canada, as well as the University of Belize and other local institutions.

Working with multiple stakeholders, BFREE has increased awareness of the Bladen Nature Reserve by highlighting its conservation value and biological significance to ensure that the reserve is recognized as a core conservation area within the national protected areas system, and is preserved for future generations in its undisturbed and natural state. BFREE aims to help conserve the Bladen Nature Reserve, one of the last remaining unspoiled wilderness areas of its kind.

BFREE Landscape

The 1,153 acre BFREE property is entirely covered in tropical broadleaf forest and is strategically located at the foothills of the Maya Mountains in southern Belize at the primary access point to the Bladen Nature Reserve. BFREE borders four protected areas: including the Bladen Nature Reserve, Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary, Deep River Forest Reserve and Maya Mountain Forest Reserve, which are all part of the larger Maya Mountain block of 14 protected areas covering over 1.5 million acres of continuous tropical forest. The land sits about 60 meters above sea level on a rich alluvial soil matrix. Habitat types include a variety of tropical forest types and aquatic systems including marshes streams, ponds and the Bladen River. Average tree canopy height is about 25 meters with emergent trees reaching 45-50 meters. Average rainfall is 140 inches per year. Wildlife is abundant, and it is not unusual to view a troop of Howler Monkeys or a flock of Scarlet Macaws from the dining room.

BFREE Facilities

Approximately 40 acres of the land is under some type of development including the field station facilities, a 20-acre certified organic shade-grown cacao and coffee orchard, a 2-acre organic garden, and an extensive trail network.

Facilities include: bunkhouse (sleeps 24), private cabins (3), kitchen/dining room (seats 36), staff housing (5 buildings), Rainforest Conservation Lab, Hicatee Conservation and Research Center (HCRC), staff office, composting bathroom facilities, helicopter landing site, laundry facilities, library, herbarium, and workshop, and a canopy observation tower.

Power and water: BFREE is powered by solar electricity. Several solar arrays provide power to the different structures. Water is provided via a well and individual rainwater catchment systems throughout the facilities.

Access to the property is a 10-km unpaved road that connects to Belize's Southern Highway.

For further information on BFREE, you can visit the website at www.bfreebz.org.

PLANNING YOUR TRIP

LUGGAGE AND PACKING:

Below are some guidelines to help prepare you for your trip to Belize. The moist climate is hard on electronics and power is not guaranteed, therefore we recommend you leave any non-essential items at home. Pack extra bulbs and batteries for flashlights or cameras. Any expensive jewelry or other valuables should also be left at home.

Luggage

Internal frame hiking backpacks are the most convenient, comfortable way to pack. If you do not have access to this type, please limit luggage to what you can carry by yourself in one load.

Clothing

Bring clothing that is practical, comfortable and socially appropriate. Generally clothing in Belize is casual; however in cities and towns clothing is always clean and neat. *Avoid wearing excessively revealing or immodest clothing.* The climate in Belize can range from 70-90 degrees Fahrenheit during the daytime to 50-60 degrees during the nighttime. Bring lightweight partially synthetic fabrics that are easy to wash and quick to dry. Heavy blue jeans do not dry well in humid weather. For hiking and field activities, bring clothing that can get wet and muddy. The best, safest defense against the insects and elements is to cover up!

Footwear

Footwear should be comfortable, already broken in, and suited to the terrain. Remember to include a pair of water shoes or sandals that can get wet. Teva, KEEN, Choco, or Crocs all make great shoes for this. A pair of lightweight hiking boots or tennis shoes is also handy.

Flashlights/Headlamps

One flashlight and one headlamp each are essential for walking around BFREE after dark and in early morning hours. We recommend having at least one headlamp which allows you to have your hands free in order to take photos etc. and one flashlight. Much of the amazing wildlife of Belize is best viewed at night, therefore, a headlamp and flashlight with a strong beam is the optimum illumination device. Black Diamond and Petzel make great lights with strong beams. If these are too expensive for your budget, choose one with the strongest beam. Pack plenty of extra batteries!

MONEY

Currency

The Belizean dollar is exchanged at a fixed rate with the US dollar at (\$1US = \$2BZ). US dollars are widely accepted everywhere, but small denominations are best (\$20s and below). ATMs and cash machines are available at the airport, but are not available in most of the places we travel with students. Credit cards are not widely accepted except in tourist areas. Traveler's checks are difficult to cash away from major towns, so it is

important that you also carry adequate cash between stops to town. Do not expect to use personal checks.

Tipping

BFREE staff work very hard to provide our guests with the most comfortable and enjoyable experience as possible. We encourage our guests to tip all staff that are helpful during their visits. You can tip directly or leave with the manager onsite who will distribute tips evenly among staff.

As you enter or leave the airport in Belize, baggage handlers are usually tipped a dollar US per piece. For a group entering with a great many bags, a lower rate per piece is acceptable.

COMMUNICATIONS AND RELATED SERVICES:

Calling Cards

You will have the opportunity to buy calling cards once you arrive in Belize. DO NOT BUY CALLING CARDS IN THE USA because they will not work in Belize. Calling rates from Belize are some of the highest in the world! But you can get calling cards that charge about \$0.50 US cents a minute to call the USA. Calling cards can be purchased in denominations of \$5BZ, \$10BZ, \$20BZ. It is recommended that you purchase a minimum of \$10BZ to call the USA.

Cell Phones

Cell phones work in populated areas but there are many places that they do not work. Most smartphones with an international plan will work for texting at BFREE. Check with your cell phone provider for information about international plans and rates.

Telephone - BFREE Phone: [011-501] -671-1299

To call direct to Belize from the US, dial 011 (gets you out of the US) + 501 (Belize country code) + the 7-digit telephone number. From Belize you can dial direct to most countries. To call the US from Belize, dial 00 (gets you out of Belize) + 1 (US country code) + area code + 7-digit number. To make international calls, you must call collect or use an international calling card. For collect calls, dial 115 for the operator. International operators speak English. BFREE has a reliable fixed cellular telephone system that you will be able to use to make and receive calls. You must have a Belizean phone card to use this phone.

Email

BFREE does not currently have public email service for use by guests or student groups. One should expect to have no email access while at BFREE. There are usually one or more internet cafés in major Belizean towns that charge around US\$5/hour.

Time

Belize's time is fixed all year round (there is no daylight savings). Depending on the daylight savings status in the US, Belize is either one or two hours behind Eastern Standard Time.

Electricity

Belizean electricity is 110V, 60Hz (same as the US). Appliances that can be used in the US can be used in Belize. No special adaptors are required. However, not every place you will stay has electricity. BFREE has solar electricity in every building, but only inverts the 12 V DC current to 110 V AC in some. Energy intensive appliances or tools are not recommended because they may overload BFREE's solar system.

HEALTH AND SAFETY:**Public health and sanitation**

Levels of public health in Belize compare favorably with those of developed countries. Although it is a tropical country, Belize has largely eradicated, controlled, or simply avoided the tropical diseases that plague other countries in the region: cholera, yellow fever, amoebic dysentery, and others. This being said, various tropical diseases are present at very low levels including malaria, dengue fever, Leishmaniasis, rabies, and skin parasites. AIDS is prevalent throughout the country.

All visitors to Belize should visit a reputable international travel clinic to receive the appropriate immunizations (or check with the World Health Organization www.who.int).

Tap water is generally safe to drink anywhere, but never drink from streams. If you are somewhat new to travel, you may experience brief stomach and intestinal upsets during the trip as your system adjusts to a different set of microorganisms. BFREE has filtered well water that is safe to drink. You can bring iodine tablets if you are particularly sensitive. There is no safe medication to protect you against this problem, but it generally passes quickly. Any time you have diarrhea, from whatever cause, keep

drinking fluids (with electrolyte powder if available) for proper rehydration and replacement of minerals.

Staying healthy pointers:

Chances are that you will stay healthy throughout your travels. To be on the safe side, here are some important tips to minimize the chance you will be ill on the trip. Refer to them as a reference during your trip, and use them as guidelines during any future travel.

- Avoid dehydration. Drink plenty of fluids, even if you do not feel particularly thirsty. Remember that alcohol and caffeine are both dehydrating agents. Lack of urination, concentrated (dark) urine, headache, exhaustion and sunken eyes can be important signs of dehydration. Oral rehydration salts (electrolyte powder) are good to have around for these situations. You can also make up your own oral rehydration mix by adding 8 level teaspoons of sugar and 1/2 level teaspoon of salt to one liter of water.
- In the tropics, solar radiation is far more intense than you may be used to. One can get debilitating sunburn even if the day is not especially sunny. Use sunscreen and clothing to minimize your exposure to UV radiation. At the beach, wear a T-shirt over your swimsuit when you are in the water, especially when snorkeling. When you are in the sun, keep drinking fluids and avoid alcohol.
- Pay attention to scrapes and cuts, as bacteria grow rapidly in tropical conditions. A small scratch that you would ignore at home can quickly become a serious infection in the tropics! Wash cuts with clean water and soap, apply disinfectant, and keep the wound clean. Inform a BFREE staff member at once at the first sign of infection (pain, swelling, redness, or discharge).
- If you start to get a sore area or blister on your feet, take action at once. Use moleskin, band aids, or padding to stop the rubbing. Change shoes to reduce friction. If you allow a blister to break, you may be unable to enjoy hikes, and you will be prone to infection in that area, so keep it clean until it heals.
- Avoid going barefoot, especially in remote human settlements, as you can pick up infections, parasites, insect stings, bites by other animals, and thorns.

- If you buy fresh fruit and vegetables, wash them before eating them. It is safe to eat fruit that has been peeled, as the interior of a fruit is sterile if the skin is intact.
- Wash your hands frequently, especially after using the bathroom and before eating.

Protecting yourself from mosquito bites:

We recommend that all BFREE visitors take utmost care to protect against mosquito bites while in the tropics. To ensure your health and comfort, we request that all those who travel to BFREE pack the following essential items which protect against bites by mosquitoes and other pests:

1. Mosquito net to be used throughout your travels. A single canopy mosquito bed net will work in essentially any setting you will encounter during your trip. Two options that are currently available on Amazon are Friendly Swede's Single canopy net or Emergency Zone's canopy mosquito net.
2. Light-weight long sleeved shirts and long pants (at least 2 of each). If budget allows, there is also mosquito repellent clothing that can be purchased through major outfitters like Columbia, REI.
3. Mosquito repellent

Also, check the latest recommendations from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) www.cdc.gov prior to your travels. They are a great source for up-to-date information as well as health and safety travel tips.

ALCOHOL AND DRUG POLICY

- Students may not bring outside alcohol to the BFREE field station.
- Do not offer BFREE staff alcohol, we adhere to a strict no drinking policy.
- BFREE does not tolerate drug use unless prescribed by a doctor. Drugs are illegal throughout Central America and the penalties can be severe.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL INFO

BFREE has two evacuation plans in cases of medical emergency:

In critical emergencies Astrum Helicopter Service will evacuate the patient from BFREE to the premier private clinic in the country.

Astrum Helicopter Service

Tel [011-501] -222-5100

Tel After hours 610-4381 or 670-5105

Belize Medical Associates

Tel [011-501]-223-0302; 223-0303; 223-0304

5791 St. Thomas St. Kings Park P.O. Box 1008

Belize City, Belize

www.belizemedical.com

bzemedasso@btl.net

The individual's emergency contact will be notified. If necessary, the individual will be flown to a hospital in Florida or Texas either by an international "life-flight" or on the next commercial jet.

- In non-critical emergencies, individuals will be driven out from BFREE to Punta Gorda Town or Independence Village (45 minutes from BFREE where the nearest emergency clinic is located) and driven or flown to Belize Medical Associates in Belize City (information above).

BFREE is not responsible for costs accrued during emergency medical evacuation or treatment.

RECOMMENDED PACKING CHECKLIST:

The following list is suggested for 8 days.

Travel Paperwork

- Passport
- Name, phone number, and fax number of your physician and a close relative
- List of credit card numbers/travelers checks and numbers to call to cancel the card/replace these in case of loss or theft.
- Copies of passport in several locations in case of loss of passport. (leave a copy with a relative or friend in USA and put one in your luggage)

Clothing Essentials

- 2 loose lightweight quick-dry long-sleeved shirts
- 2 or 3 pair lightweight loose long pants. *Avoid jeans which take too long to dry.*
- 3-4 lightweight cotton t-shirts or tank tops
- swimsuit

- sweatshirt or jacket for cool nights
- 1 week supply of socks and underwear
- Footwear - 1 pair of water shoes and 1 pair of comfortable hiking shoes or boots
- rain poncho
- Hat

Essential Accessories

- Flashlights and/or headlamp
- Batteries for headlamp/flashlight
- Mosquito Netting (A single canopy mosquito bed net will work in essentially any setting you will encounter during your trip. Two options that are currently available on Amazon are Friendly Swede's Single canopy net or Emergency Zone's canopy mosquito net.)
- Insect repellent - (The best defense against insects is to wear lightweight long-sleeve shirts and pants while at BFREE.)
- Reusable water bottle
- Toiletry kit: Include all of the items that you would normally use, please bring biodegradable soap and shampoo
- Small day pack or backpack for daytime excursions (can be your carryon bag)
- Feminine products (cycles are often disrupted during travel)
- Towel - lightweight ones are best
- Medical kit: each group must provide a complete medical kit. BFREE has a first aid kit, which is intended for emergency use only
- Personal first aid supplies: Band-Aids, moleskin (for blisters), Tylenol, Benadryl, a laxative, Imodium/Pepto bismol, anti-itch cream, a topical antibiotic cream, and an anti-fungal cream or powder if you are prone to foot fungus.
- Sunscreen – please use natural sunscreens because chemical sunscreens destroy the coral reef
- Ziploc baggies or dry bag (for keeping items clean and dry)

As a basic rule, if you cannot get along without it, bring a spare or maybe two. This applies to contact lenses and glasses, flashlights, and personal medications.

Optional

- Camera
- Binoculars
- Sunglasses, polarized lenses are best

- ❑ Mask, snorkel, and fins
- ❑ Shorts for wearing on the coast
- ❑ Pocketknife or “Leatherman” type tool (optional but handy; make sure you put in checked bag!)
- ❑ EmergenC - This will help keep your immune system strong and is good to add to bottled water to keep electrolytes in your system. Also helps prevent dehydration.
- ❑ 1 change of “nicer” clothes (slacks/skirt or sundress and button down shirt)

Check out websites listed below for items recommended:

- www.campmor.com (For hiking packs, camp towels, headlamps, binoculars)
- www.treehugger.com/health/10-safe-sunscreens-whole-family-summer.html
- www.drbronner.com

CONTACT INFO:

BFREE Field Station Address

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