

## Travel Guide: Getting to BFREE

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BFREE is located off the Southern Highway at Mile Marker 58. Please inform BFREE of your arrival and travel plans before traveling to BFREE. If your arrival date or time change, call the field station at 671-1299 to inform someone of the changes.

All visitors will need to hike a six-mile moderate level hike unless vehicle transportation has been arranged with BFREE in advance. The hike is across flat terrain in open pine savannah, oak-pine scrub, and moist tropical broadleaf forest from the highway to the Field Station. Guests may drive their own 4x4 vehicle from March 15 - May 15 after receiving approval from BFREE. If your visit is outside of March 15 - May 15, you will need to arrange transportation through BFREE for a fee of \$75USD each way or walk the entrance road free of charge.

Visitors traveling to BFREE should fly into the Phillip W. Goldson International Airport. If you arrive in the late afternoon, we recommend arriving at least one day before arriving at BFREE and taking the public bus from the airport to your first destination and then again to the BFREE entrance road. The Tropical Education Center (TEC) adjacent to the Belize Zoo is a great accommodation located about 45 minutes south of the airport for your first night in Belize. Contact: [tec@belizezoo.org](mailto:tec@belizezoo.org)

To get to TEC, you must take a taxi from the airport to the bus stop. This will cost approximately \$20USD. You should have an additional \$20USD in cash for the bus ticket from the station to your first accommodation and again the following day to BFREE. Two bus lines traverse the Southern Highway, Novelo's/Southern Transport or James Bus Line. Both Southern Transport and James Bus Line depart from Belize City to Punta Gorda throughout the day. Both bus lines make stops in Belmopan, Dangriga, and Independence before reaching their destinations and will pick you up at any point along their route. Tell the bus conductor that you would like to get off at the Tropical Education Center.

### **Renting a Car**

If you are renting a car at the airport and driving to BFREE, it will take you about 3.5 - 4 hours from the Phillip W. Goldson International Airport to arrive at the BFREE Entrance Road. If you plan to drive the Entrance Road, you must rent a 4-wheel drive vehicle. All the main highways are paved, two-lane, and well signposted. A four-wheel-drive vehicle is not necessary unless you plan to get way off the highways. Insurance is mandatory.

The George Price Highway (formerly called the Western Highway) is the highway from Belize City to Belmopan, San Ignacio, Benque, and the western border. The maximum speed limit is 50 mph (80 kph). The Burrell Boom Road is a highway that connects the Philip Goldson Highway to the George Price Highway. It's a shorter route when driving from the airport to Cayo District. The Hummingbird Highway is the main highway from Belmopan to Dangriga. The maximum speed limit is 50 mph (80 kph), but with many curves and some one-lane bridges, it's not safe to drive the maximum speed limit on much of this highway. If driving to Dangriga, this is the best route because it's very scenic. The Southern Highway is the highway from the Dangriga turn-off to Punta Gorda. The maximum speed limit is 50 mph (80 kph).

Maps will show another road, the Coastal Highway, that runs from the George Price Highway (about halfway between Belmopan & Belize City) to the Hummingbird Highway near Dangriga. It's not really a highway -- it's a gravel road through the bush, and there's nothing to see except trees and dust and nowhere to stop (no gas available). We do not recommend using this road. If traveling from Belize City to Dangriga, this is a shorter distance, but the road is not paved, so you won't be able to drive as fast as on the highway. The Coastal Highway is also used by large trucks that are sometimes reluctant to give way, and the road may be impassable in very wet conditions. Some rental companies will not allow vehicles on the road.

On the highways, be aware of unmarked speed bumps near towns and villages. In wet conditions, the pavement can get extremely slippery due to the type of paving material. Be aware of pedestrians and cyclists walking & riding ON THE HIGHWAY, not on the shoulder. Be careful of that, especially at night because lights and reflectors are seldom used. If driving at night, take more care because road lighting is poor (non-existent). The highways have white posts that act as mile markers.

### **Taking a Bus to BFREE**

If traveling from the Tropical Education Center, it should take about 3 hours. There is a 30-minute layover in Independence. You should remain on the bus. Often vendors will come on board to sell snacks. Once leaving Independence, it is about 30 minutes to the Bladen Nature Reserve and BFREE entrance road. The bus will pass through the villages of Bella Vista, Trio, and Bladen. Tell the bus conductor that you want to get off at "the Bladen Nature Reserve entrance road, three miles south of Bladen Bridge just north (200m) from Thomas Gomez's Sawmill." We are closest to mile marker 58. The Bladen Nature Reserve entrance road is on the west side of the highway (right side from Belmopan, left side from Punta Gorda) and is marked with both a white sign that says, "Bladen Nature Reserve," and a wooden sign that says, "BFREE."

### **Domestic Flight to BFREE**

If you are planning to arrive at BFREE the same day of your international travel, it is recommended that you book an in-country flight with Maya Island Air. Your in-country flight with Maya Island Air can be booked online, and your final destination should be the Savannah Airstrip. Ensure there is enough time after landing in Belize City to go through customs, pick up your luggage and check into domestic flights.

### **Private Parking at the Gomez Sawmill (Mon.-Fri. only):**

Once at mile marker 58 on the Southern Highway, you will see the Bladen Nature Reserve entrance road on the highway's west side (right side from Belmopan, left side from Punta Gorda). It is marked with a white sign that says, "Bladen Nature Reserve," and a wooden sign that says, "BFREE." From the north, drive past the entrance 200m to the Thomas Gomez's Sawmill. The Sawmill is a lumber mill where BFREE vehicles are parked. There is a locked gate that you will need to walk around and up the driveway to the unpainted wood house. Please introduce yourself and tell them you are traveling to BFREE and would like to park your car. You will need to pay the guard \$5US per day for parking in cash. BFREE nor the Thomas Gomez Sawmill is responsible for any valuables left in the vehicle. Once you have parked, gather your belongings, apply sunscreen, make sure your water bottles are filled and walk the 200m along the Southern Highway to the BFREE entrance road. Follow the description above for hiking the entrance road.

### **Meeting a BFREE Vehicle at the Entrance Road**

If you are meeting a BFREE vehicle for the ride-in, it is best to get dropped directly at the BFREE entrance road. Please inform the driver that you will be getting off at BFREE/Bladen Nature Reserve.

### **Hiking the BFREE Entrance Road**

All groups are required to hike the six-mile entrance road upon arrival to and departure from BFREE unless transportation has been arranged. Apply sunscreen and have a full water bottle before you begin. It is a six-mile moderate level hike across flat terrain in open pine savannah, oak-pine scrub, and moist tropical broadleaf forest. From the Southern Highway junction, you will see the Maya Mountains rise from the savanna in the distance; BFREE is located just against the mountains.

The greatest challenges during this hike can be the intense mid-day tropical sun and the mud. It takes between 2-3 hours to walk the entrance road depending on the season, the road's condition, and you. Be sure to bring water, wear a hat and apply sunscreen. About three-fourths of the way into the entrance road, you will pass into the Bladen Nature Reserve, where you may meet the BNR park wardens at their observation post. These friendly wardens will ask you to sign in to the logbook as you pass. As you pass the wardens, your surroundings will change to a broadleaf forest, and you will go down a clay slope. The bottom of this slope is the far extent of the Bladen River floodplain. Following the trail, another 15 minutes will put you at the edge of the Bladen River itself. Across the river is BFREE. If the river looks low, walk/wade across. If the river looks high and impassable (fast-moving and muddy brown), you should wait patiently across the river until someone comes to get you. Once you cross the river, you will have reached the BFREE private reserve.