



Toucan Ridge Ecology
and Education Society

FAQ



Mailing Address: P.O. Box 324 Belmopan Post Office, Belmopan, Cayo, Belize.

Physical Address: Mile 27.5 Hummingbird Highway, Stann Creek District, Belize.

Website: www.treesociety.org **Phone:** 610-5486 **Email:** info@treesociety.org

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Traveling to Belize

In order to make your trip to Belize go as smoothly as possible, we suggest the following tips.

Passport

To enter Belize you will need a passport valid for more than six months before its expiration date. It can take as many as 6 weeks to obtain a passport, so get ready in advance. Nationals of the United States, Canada, Mexico, European Union countries, Norway, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Venezuela and members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) don't need a visa to enter the country.

Tourists who aren't from the previously mentioned countries may be required to apply and pay for a tourist visa before coming to Belize and, in some cases, might have to acquire permission from Belize Immigration to enter the country. Visas can cost anywhere from USD\$100 to USD\$2,000 depending on your nationality. Belize allows visitors a maximum of one month's stay in the country before they require an extension obtained through the Belize Ministry of Defense and Immigration. Longer stays can be granted on a monthly basis for \$100 US per month, up to 6 months.

Vaccines and Prophylactics

We recommend the use of a travel clinic in preparing for travel to any foreign destination. These clinics will check the current recommendations for your destination country and then provide the appropriate vaccines and medications for such things as malaria prophylaxis. Although the incidence of malaria is very low in Belize, a prophylactic drug could be taken; this is a personal decision and that of your travel clinic doctor. As travelling anywhere in the world, Hepatitis A and B shots are recommended as well as up to date Tetanus, and Typhoid may be recommended if you will be in country for more than two weeks and traveling to remote villages. There is a low risk of dengue in the country but it is present. Unfortunately, there are no vaccines to be taken for dengue.

Flights

We recommend that you purchase your tickets online using any of the various travel websites (e.g. Travelocity.com or Hotwire.com). These will provide you with flight options in order of cost. Remember to shop around, as different sites will offer deals through various carriers.

From the U.S., most people can still find return flights for under \$700 USD from a major airport.



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From Canada, most can still find return flights for under \$800 USD from the big cities. There are direct flights with Air Canada from Canada to Belize out of Toronto and Calgary but these are seasonal and only available from end October to end April each year. West Jet did also have a direct route from Canada to Belize that was discontinued in 2023 but may return.

Some people choose to fly into/out of Cancun, Mexico. There is one daily ADO bus that goes from the Cancun airport all the way to Belize City or several daily ADO buses that can take you to Chetumal (Mexico town bordering Belize). The Tren Maya, currently being built (as of July 29th 2024), will also take passengers from the Cancun Airport all the way to the Chetumal Airport, a close jaunt to the Belize Northern Santa Elena border. Taxis from Chetumal can take you through the Mexico border to the Belize Customs and Immigrations area where you can then enter Belize on foot and take a taxi to the Corozol bus station for a 5-hour bus journey to the T.R.E.E.S Research Center

Be sure of your travel dates, as changing flights can be expensive or impossible for certain deals (e.g. hotwire does not allow any change of flights). Your destination will be the PHILIP S W GOLDSOHN INTL in Belize City.

Language

English is the official language of Belize and is spoken throughout the country, although only 4% of the population speak it as their first language. English is the primary language of public education, with Spanish taught in primary and secondary school as well. Bilingualism is very common. Literacy currently stands at nearly 80%.

All courses at T.R.E.E.S will be taught in English though French and Spanish are also spoken by the staff.

The Belizean Kriol, an English-based Kriol is spoken throughout the country as well as Spanish. Then there many other languages regularly spoken in specific areas of Belize., the breakdown of spoken languages is as follows: Spanish 46%, Creole 32.9%, Mayan dialects, 8.9%, English 3.9% (official language), Garifuna 3.4% (Carib), German (Germanic Plautdietsch, spoken by the Mennonites) 3.3%, other 1.4%.

Money

The Belize Dollar is the official currency of Belize. For several decades now the Belize Dollar has been tied to the U.S. dollar at an official rate of two Belize Dollars to one US dollar, thus, one U.S. dollar equals two Belize dollars. While not recommended as a day to day practice most establishments will accept American money, this even includes the little food stores, though \$1 US bills are no longer accepted in Belize. Also make sure your bill does not have any small tears as these are not accepted by the banks in Belize and therefore vendors usually will not accept them either.



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There is a bank machine in the Airport that will hand out Belize dollars as well as a Money Exchange office. There are also bank machines in the larger cities (Belmopan, Dangriga, Placencia, etc.). The Belize Bank ATM is the best for withdrawing cash from foreign cards though a 1% of the total withdrawal will be removed. We recommend travelling with some cash but there is no need to travel with large amounts as you can withdraw money from Belize Bank machines using foreign cards in all major towns.

Most larger stores, particularly tourist shops, will nearly always accept credit cards.

Telephone/Internet

Belize has two internet/telephone companies that both provide phone and Data (internet, 4G LTE) service. Only Digicell works at the T.R.E.E.S Research Center, and these can be purchased at T.R.E.E.S for \$15.00 USD (by ***advance notice** only). Make sure your phone is unlocked to take advantage of this service. Data plans can be purchased for \$6 US/GB of data and can also be purchased at T.R.E.E.S. Though Digicell does not work everywhere in rural areas, it does work in most of the country and will be the fastest and most reliable way to keep you connected on your trip. It is also significantly cheaper than paying for a roaming plan from your at-home network.

Other Precautions

There are some thefts in Belize; while most incidents are in Belize City and crime is not directly targeted at tourists we recommend that you take the usual precautions.

The first tip is to not look flashy, don't flaunt nice watches, purses, etc. Always carry your money and passport on your person when travelling. Although we have never had any incidences of thieving at T.R.E.E.S., these people are still around, and you can keep your passport and money in our safe when you arrive at the station, if you so desire.

Make a photocopy of the photo page of your passport and keep this on you when traveling, and in a separate place from your actual passport. This can aid in getting a new passport should you lose yours.

Bring your driver's licence but leave your school ID and unnecessary credit cards at home. If it is difficult to replace, if you don't need it, or if you can't afford to lose it, leave it at home. The only necessary documentation in Belize is your passport and driver's license if you decide to rent a car or drive for any reason.

If you take medication for any reason, be sure you have an adequate supply.



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We suggest that you bring plenty of insect repellent with DEET (25%), although it can be found quite easily in the country (but more expensive than home). One must remember that DEET eats plastic and 100 % DEET is not recommended for direct contact with skin. Citronella insect repellents seem to work quite well for the Botliss flies which are the most common biting insects at T.R.E.E.S.

If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact us.



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Traveling to T.R.E.E.S.

How do I get to T.R.E.E.S?

The T.R.E.E.S Research Center can be found at mile marker 27.5 of the Hummingbird Hwy in the Stann Creek District of Belize. We are centrally located and easily accessible from the highway so you can travel here easily on your own by public transit which is the most economical choice. However, we are easily accessible by car (4 x 4 not necessary) if you choose to rent a vehicle while in Belize. Guests travelling southbound from The Phillip Goldson International Airport via public transport should have a 1-hour bus ride from Belize City to Belmopan which costs \$3.50 USD. However, you will need to take a taxi from the airport to the bus terminal in Belize City (\$25 US for two people). The bus ride from Belmopan to our centre is about 45 minutes and costs \$2.25 USD. The car ride travelling southbound is approximately 1.5 hrs from Belize City and if you choose to hire a taxi all the way from the airport you will be charged between \$160 and \$240 USD.

If you are coming from the south (i.e., Dangriga) we are about 2 miles north of Middlesex. From the bus terminal take a bus that is northbound to Belmopan or Belize City. The ride takes around 45 minutes and should cost \$2.25 USD. If you are arriving from the Dangriga airport we suggest that you take a taxi to the bus terminal which is about 10 minutes away and should not cost more than \$7.50 USD. Again, most conductors know where we are located, but if not, we are 2 miles north of Middlesex.

What's the environment like at T.R.E.E.S?

The dominant ecosystem present at our site is Lowland Broadleaf Forest. Dominant plant species associated with this habitat and geology include Cohune Palm, Tree Ferns, a multitude of bromeliads and other epiphytes, many lianas and vines especially philodendrons, and a variety of hardwood tree species such as Ironwood, Mahogany, and Sapodilla. Habitat types represented include a combination of primary and secondary growth moist broadleaf forest, moist broadleaf riparian forest, an organic fruit orchard, an old overgrown orchard and pasture, and mixed forested edge and open edge habitat immediately surrounding the center. Dry Creek, a small river, meanders for about 1 km through the length of the property and is fed by an assortment of mountain tributaries scattered throughout the site, providing ample freshwater habitat for aquatic and semi-aquatic species. Over 10 km of trails run through the property and connect on the neighbouring property and into the Forest Reserve.

Where do I sleep?



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At T.R.E.E.S there are five (5) sleeping arrangements available to guests; these include our private Jungle Cabins (studio and family-style), Fully Furnished Casita and Mayflower, Jungle Bunkhouses, a glamping orchard screenhouse with ½ bathroom (toilet and sink only), and camping. The studio Jungle Cabins are stand-alone cabins ideally suited for guests that prefer privacy. The family-style Jungle Cabins are great for family and friend groups that want to share a common deck but sleep in separate rooms. All of the jungle cabins can bunk up to 5 individuals (and some can sleep up to 6). Beds can be alternately arranged into King-sized options for couples (1 couple per cabin, plus one additional individual). Our beds are all fitted with comfortable mattresses to guarantee a good night's sleep. Each cabin comes with a large deck with hammocks, tables, and chairs overlooking the luscious jungle or the beautiful Maya Mountains and also equipped with fire alarms, fire extinguishers, fans, and bedding. Jungle cabins have shared toilet and shower facilities which are not inside the cabins but are only a short walk from all cabins. All showers are hot/cold water and toilets are flush toilets. The two Jungle Bunkhouses can sleep up to 10 and 12 people in bunkbeds with comfortable mattresses and all of the same amenities as the private Jungle Cabins. Guests staying in the Jungle Cabins or Jungle Bunkhouses can order meals from our on-site restaurant the Toucan Café or prepare basic simple meals in the communal kitchenette at the buffet table area where guests have access to a fridge, toaster oven, coffee maker, kettle, and microwave. Coffee and tea is provided throughout the day free of charge to all guests and is available at the communal kitchenette area.

The Casita, a small fully furnished house, has two single beds in a bedroom (that can be rearranged into a King-sized bed) and a double futon in the living room. Mayflower has two separate bedrooms with two single beds/one king-sized bed per room, and a double futon in the living room. Both of these cabins are ideal for instructors and group leaders that wish to be away from their group in the evenings or eco-tourists that want a little more luxury in the jungle. Both Casita and Mayflower have full bathrooms (hot shower, flush toilet), separate bedrooms and living rooms, and a small, equipped kitchenette (propane stovetop, refrigerator, coffee maker, toaster, kettle). Up to 4 guests can be accommodated in Casita (2 in the bedroom and 2 on a double futon in the main living room) and up to 6 guests can be accommodated in Mayflower (2 per each bedroom and 2 on the double futon).

For guests looking for the camping experience, T.R.E.E.S offers both glamping at the furnished Swanka Shack, and camping at Camp Toucanet. Both are located in our organic orchard and about a 10-minute walk from the main campus. The Swanka Shack has two twin beds (or one king bed) in a fully screened platform with a ½ bathroom (toilet and sink). Camp Toucanet is equipped with 4 tin-roofed raised platforms, to keep you dry and comfortable even in inclement weather. There is also a bathroom building with two composting toilets, an outdoor sink, picnic table, and fire pit. You will need to bring your own tent as T.R.E.E.S does not have tents available for rent.



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What are the meal arrangements?

The menus will differ depending on groups and season and specific menus can be created depending on your group needs. For group bookings we do catering and we cater to all diet types and restrictions including vegetarian, vegan, lactose intolerance, celiac, etc. Our catering menus are composed of a variety of dishes, from local Belizean classics to international classics, to just simple comfort food. For individuals there is an on-site restaurant called the Toucan Café and guests can order all meals at any point during the day from our unique menu that caters to all restrictions.

Catered meals are served buffet-style in the main dining area that can host up to 60 guests. Fresh juice, coffee, and tea are available at all times for groups upon request. **All guests also have access to unlimited purified drinking water both in the Main Hall and at the shower building down by the cabins.** Our center is a licensed facility, and we offer beer and cocktails at Belizean prices and we also sell soft drinks such as Coke and Sprite. Smoothies as well as a variety of creative snacks can be purchased as well from our Toucan Café.

Interns, volunteers, and eco-tourists on a budget can prepare basic simple meals in the communal kitchenette at the buffet table area where guests have access to a fridge, toaster oven, coffee maker, kettle, and microwave. Coffee and tea is provided throughout the day free of charge to all guests and is available at the communal kitchenette area as well as in all the cabins with kitchenettes (Casita and Mayflower).

How can I connect to the outside world?

We are surprisingly well-connected to the outside world for being in the jungle in a developing country. Though we do offer free hi-speed unlimited internet (Wifi) for guests in the Main Hall, there is a limit to the speed when large groups are on-site and dozens of people are connected so please respect others by limiting heavy internet usage like video chatting, YouTube, etc., when others are in the Main Hall. Our phone service is reliable, and guests can always call out for a fee of \$1.00 USD/minute (even internationally), or receive unlimited incoming calls free of charge. Guests can also call Skype to Landline for \$0.10 USD/minute. At this time there is no Wifi at the cabins, giving guests a chance to unwind and disconnect.

If you expect to have high data usage needs on a consistent regular work hour basis (i.e., remote work) or you wish to have internet in your own cabin, then we suggest you plan to purchase your own Digicell SIM card to go in your international (unlocked) phone, which can be purchased at T.R.E.E.S for \$15.00 US. Make sure your phone is unlocked to take advantage of this service. Data plans can be purchased for \$6 US/GB of data and we sell credit for these plans at T.R.E.E.S though we will need advance notice if you would like a SIM card on the day of your arrival



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What additional services does T.R.E.E.S offer?

In addition to our ecological and educational activities offered at the center which can be found on our website, we also employ professional biologists who can be hired to teach aspects of courses, either via lectures or through field and lab experiments. We also offer additional services such as Event Hosting and Eco-Tourism. Full rental of our facility is available and ideal for weddings, family gatherings, elementary and high school outings, professional retreats, conferences, and more. We have activities for all tastes for guests who wish to experience the wonders of the Maya Mountains with the most picturesque back-drop the country has to offer. There is a well-designed trail system, two jungle swimming holes, a variety of tours available on-site and at nearby attractions, a volleyball field, soccer field, board games, etc. We also have a yoga platform and events stage and we can arrange to have some of the best local musicians in the country play for your event.

Our facility is registered with the Belize Tourism Board and we are open to eco-tourists, both eco-tour groups and individuals. All of the activities and educational opportunities we offer at the center can be enjoyed by tourists. Because our lodging and meal rates are very reasonable and we are centrally located within Belize, we are also a great location to stay for groups and individuals wanting to take day trips to major attractions throughout Belize and still come back to a delicious home-cooked meal and your same comfortable bed each night. We also offer laundry services for \$7.50 USD per wash/dry/fold.

What health and safety measures does T.R.E.E.S have in place?

To ensure your quick recovery in the rare case of a serious emergency we ask that all visitors to our center provide proof of adequate travel medical insurance, specifically with emergency air evacuation coverage. Though hospitals in Belize are very adequate for dealing with routine injuries (including snake bite), major emergencies are better handled outside of Belize.

Your health and safety are very important to us at T.R.E.E.S and as such we have the following measures in place:

- We have a First Aid Station that is always fully stocked and all field staff and managers have up-to-date first aid certification.
- Field staff and managers are also equipped with First Aid kits when in the field with guests.
- All of the cabins and communal facilities are equipped with smoke detectors and fire extinguishers.
- We have an up-to-date emergency preparedness plan as well as evacuation plans if need be that is available at the office and can be sent electronically upon request.



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We also recommend that all guests bring their own First Aid kits (including Band-Aids), sunscreen, painkillers/fever reducers like Tylenol/Advil, sunburn relief cream, allergy medication, bug repellent, and AfterBite to make their stay at T.R.E.E.S as enjoyable as possible.

What are the rates?

We have both individual rates (lodging and meals separate for 1 – 5 people) and group package rates (groups of 6 people or more with food and lodging included). All of our individual rates can be found on our website, including rates for accommodations, meals, and available activities and individual booking can be done directly through our reservations platform: www.treesociety.org/accommodation/ T.R.E.E.S biologists can be hired on-site to assist with teaching at a flat rate of \$150 US/day or off-site at other locations in Belize for \$200 USD/day which includes travel expenses. We also have a variety of on-site activities available to guests staying at T.R.E.E.S, ranging from bird and bat mist-netting workshops to guided waterfall hikes to village tours and local cooking workshops. An activity guide can be downloaded from our website.

We will also arrange all your off-site activities and transportation upon request through our Canadian partner company Ecorana Environmental Ltd. If you or your group requires multiple off-site excursions to be organized, we charge a \$50 USD flat-rate travel consulting fee. Rates for off-site excursions and transportation are dependent on the activity and the distance so please contact us directly for pricing. We offer up to 25% discount for Belizean residents/companies and up to 50% discount to Belizean NGOs and

volunteers/students depending on whether or not other clients are on-site at the same time. These discounts are applied to accommodations only for individuals and both meals and accommodations for groups.

How do I pay for my stay?

We have several methods of payment available for clients paying from outside of Belize and within Belize:

- Wire transfer from your financial institution to our Canadian or US bank account
- Paypal to our Canadian bank account (sent to registration@ecorana.ca)
- Personal cheque or money order sent by registered mail to our home office in Vancouver, B.C., to be deposited in our Canadian account with mailing address:
 - Mathieu Charette, 3601 Hillcrest Ave., North Vancouver, B.C., V7R 4B7, Canada
- Canadian clients can also pay by direct deposit into our TD Canada Trust bank account or by Interac e-transfer (sent to registration@ecorana.ca) if you have online banking with almost any Canadian bank. This payment will be in Canadian currency and you must request our Sales Representative to convert your invoice to CAD\$.
- Clients within Belize can pay us by cheque or by direct deposit into our Belize Bank account or in cash on site (Belize Dollars or U.S. Dollars accepted).



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Detailed banking information (including account numbers) will be sent along with your invoice depending on your location and desired mode of payment. We are pleased to announce that we can take Credit Card payments via Stripe and PayPal but these payments incur a 5.5% service charge.

What should I bring besides my usual personal belongings?

Pack light but bring everything you may need. Goods purchased in Belize (such as batteries and film) may be much more expensive and of inferior quality to those you are accustomed to purchasing. We supply bedding (sheets, pillows, and blankets) but guests are encouraged to bring their own towels. We do not supply bath products (soap, shampoo, conditioner). Many field stations and some other types of rustic accommodations in Belize do not supply bedding. Make sure you check with all of your accommodation providers to ensure you are bringing everything you may need. Cabins at T.R.E.E.S have screens as will most other accommodations. However, some people feel more comfortable sleeping under a mosquito net and we recommend bringing a bed net to anyone that wishes. There are hooks above all of the beds for hanging these nets. We have extra nets available at T.R.E.E.S as well to be installed if anyone really feels they need one.

Remember, you will be limited to one checked bag on most American airlines and two carry-on bags. We recommend packing light clothes. In most seasons (wet and dry) we recommend gear and clothes that dry quickly, either the wetness of the rainy season or the humidity of the jungle even during the dry season causes things to go moldy rapidly. Long pants and long-sleeved shirts are great at keeping the biting flies away and we usually recommend wearing pants at all times at T.R.E.E.S even in the hot season.

Flash rains do occur at any time of the year up in the mountains, even during the dry season, so we highly suggest that you bring some boots to work in the jungle as well as some rain gear, at least a fast-drying rain jacket and quick dry pants.

Personal:

- Passport (+ additional photocopy of passport)
- Plane tickets
- Personal spending/Emergency funds
- Rain gear
- Personal Toiletries/Medication
- Aloe Vera or other skin care cream
- Insect repellent (bug spray)
- Sturdy hiking shoes/boots
- Sandals and summer clothes
- Bathing Suit
- Long pants (preferably light, quick-dry material)



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- Beach towel
- Regular Towel for showers
- At least one warm shirt
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Flip flops for shower

Field Gear: (Workshops & Internships)

- Rain (rubber) boots and/or Tevas or other hiking sandals that can be used in the water
- At least one quick-drying long sleeved shirt
- Headlamp/flashlight (important for Bat Workshops, herp night walks, and other night-time excursions)
- Bat Gloves (if working with bats)
- Binoculars and/or Camera
- A Rite-in-the-Rain book with waterproof paper to use as a field journal
- USB thumb drive and/or own laptop computer depending on the needs of your course/workshop
- Rubber boots
- Waterproof phone case or watch (turtle tracking/cayes)
- Laptop
- Mosquito net for head and/or bug jacket
- Neck Buff/bandana
- Small day pack
- Foot powder
- Fleece jacket or wool sweater (especially if travelling between Oct – Feb)
- Mask, fins, snorkel, rash guard (if planning on going to the Cayes)
- Small personal First Aid Kit
- Multi-tool
- Long sleeved shirts preferably with a collar (for protection from the sun and bugs). Silk shirts work well and dry quickly. – minimum 4
- Lightweight quick dry long pants – minimum 4
- Good lightweight hiking/approach shoes (ankle support recommended)
 - Preferably waterproof since we traverse through a shallow creek for some projects. The humidity makes air drying difficult.
- Wide brimmed sunhat (to keep the sun off your face and neck)
- Long socks or liners – practically impossible to bring too many pairs.
- T-shirts and short sleeved button shirts (for layering)
- **Books (adults, children, and science texts) to donate to our community library* (Optional)**
- **Field and/or lab equipment to donate to our field station, including rubber boots* (Optional)**
- **Sports equipment, arts and crafts, games, etc. to donate for community programs* (Optional)**