

Belize (British Honduras)

Central America

Teaching the Bahá'í Faith

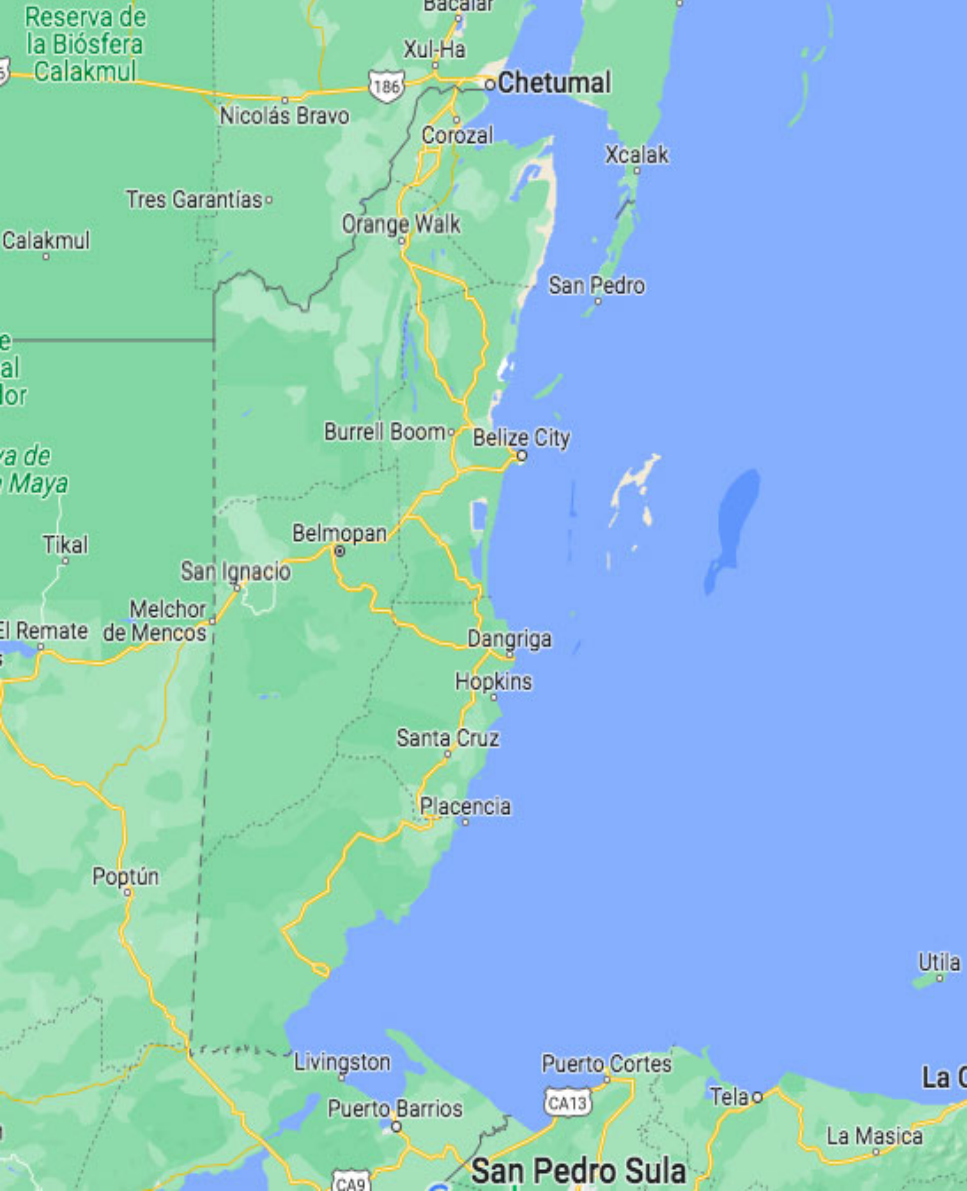
Bahá'í Geography - Belize

Belize (British Honduras)

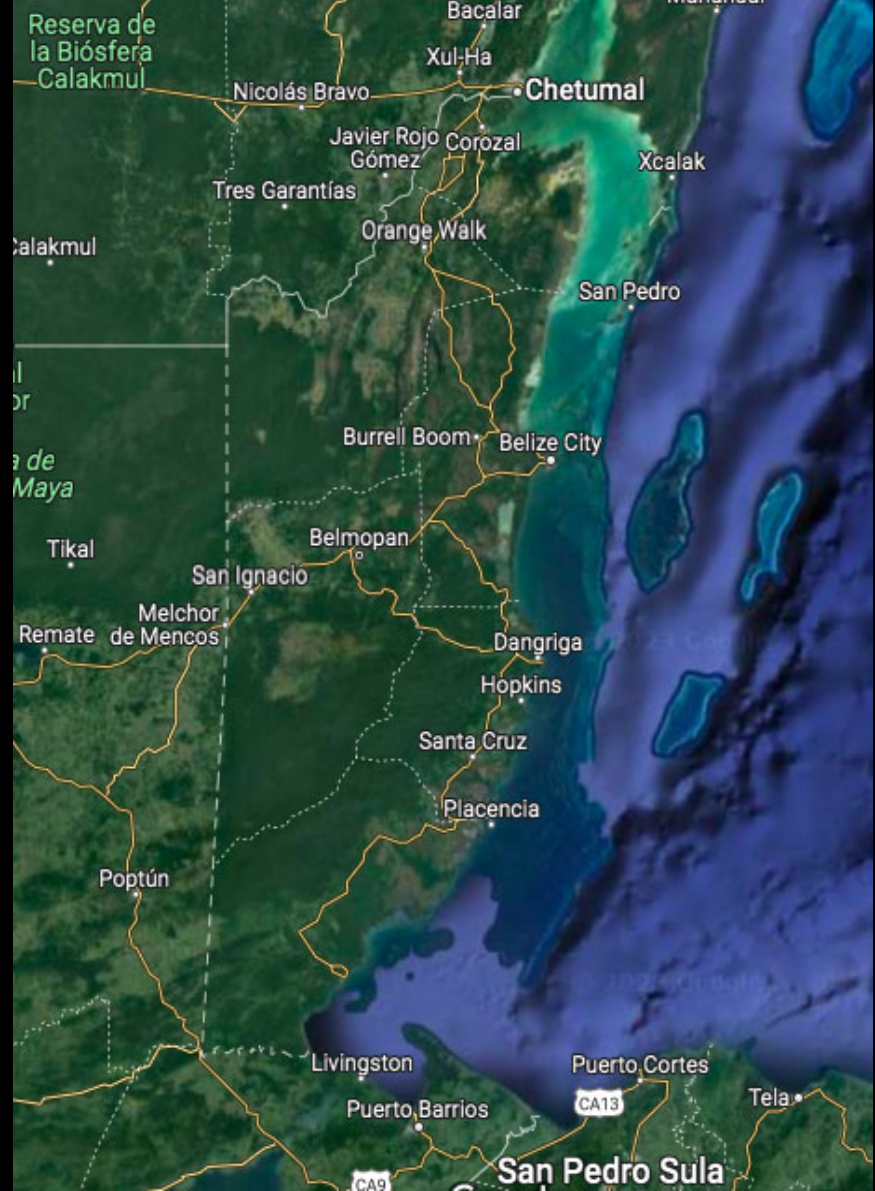
Belize is a country on the Caribbean coast of Central America, with Mexico to the north and Guatemala to the west and south. It is 290 km long and 110 km wide, with an area of 22,970 km², of which 60 % is lush forest.

Belize in Central America





Belize





Belize
forest



Belize
forest



Belize (British Honduras)

From 1840 to 1981, it was the crown colony of British Honduras, and is member of the British Commonwealth. This gives it strong cultural ties with the Caribbean Islands. It was part of the Maya civilisation between 1500 BC and 1200 AD, with English settlers arriving in 1638 and a permanent settlement from 1716. Slaves were brought from Africa to cut logwood and mahogany trees until abolition in 1833.

Belize

The capital is Belmopan and the main city is Belize City on the coast. The population is 442,000 with a mix of races and languages, mainly English.

Belmopan

new
capital
of
Belize

(1972)



Belize

Belize has an extensive barrier reef and three large atolls, making it a centre for coral reef research and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Belize

coral
cays
and
reefs



Belize

coral
cays
and
reefs



Belize

coral
cays
and
reefs



Belize

coral
cays
and
reefs



Belize

coral
cays
and
reefs



Belize

coral
reefs



Knights of Bahá'u'lláh

Shirley Warde (1901-1991) was an actress and writer who became a Bahá'í with her family in 1932. She wrote radio programmes with Bill and Marguerite Sears, Marion Holley, the Ioas family, Marzieh Gail and others, and put articles about the Faith into newspapers and on radio shows. In 1946 she pioneered to Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, but after attacks on the Faith returned to California in 1949. She pioneered to British Honduras in October 1953, not knowing that Cora Oliver was also going there.



Shirley
Warde



Knights of Bahá'u'lláh

Cora Oliver (1902-1997) joined the Faith in 1930 and served on the Local Spiritual Assembly in Washington, D.C. She pioneered to Panama in 1939, forming the first LSA in 1945, and was elected to the regional National Spiritual Assembly of Central America, Mexico and the Antilles in 1952. Cora reached British Honduras on 16 September 1953. She only returned to the United States in 1973.

Cora Oliver



Shirley Warde

"Belize in those days was truly a cultural shock, with its mostly wooden houses on stilts, its open sewerage canals, alley and yard areas in the back of the better front homes jammed with little more than hovels, yet its charm evident in the pleasant, often large, homes of the wealthier populace living on the shores of the city while the narrow streets with no sidewalks swarmed with bicycles, and mule and carts, a few trucks, fewer taxis and a very few private cars..."

Belize
City



Belize
City



Knights of Bahá'u'lláh

Through a Belizian lawyer Cora Oliver had met in Jamaica, they got to meet people, and Shirley Warde organised a musical variety show to raise money for a day nursery. Several of those they met eventually became Bahá'ís.

Shirley Warde

"Cora and I were both trying to teach the Faith, of course, all the time but finding it difficult.... We... talked with people everywhere, for the Belizians are noted for their friendliness. But we met little response to our great message. The reason was obvious for the populace was then divided into various church groups, all schools being run by the churches, most social life revolving around them as well as all cultural activities. It took great courage, therefore, to step out of your whole life pattern."

(Shirley Warde, quoted in Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 307)

Knights of Bahá'u'lláh

With only 30,000 people in Belize City, everyone know what everyone else did, and rumour spread like wildfire. The 'two American ladies' represented a strange Eastern religion that did not believe that Jesus was God incarnate, and therefore it was claimed they did not believe in God. In 1955, 'God works in mysterious ways'. At a unity feast, after saying the Tablet of Ahmad three times each evening for 19 days, there were three declarations.

Shirley Warde

"The less sophisticated people began to attend, women who had stalls at the market, their friends and others we encountered in shops, offices in our daily activities. ...out of them came several fine Bahá'ís... We were often tested in those days to see if we believed the equality we taught. A fisherman or meat vendor would hold out a dirty hand to be shaken, I never hesitated, and a young Mayan man was attracted because we gave him water from a glass out of our own shelf rather than a tin from the kitchen."

Belize
City
harbour



Belize
City
harbour



Knights of Bahá'u'lláh

By 1958, with 11 Bahá'ís in the community, they formed their first Local Spiritual Assembly. Shirley went out to the villages with a tape recorder to collect Folk songs and stories from the old people who were dying out, making friends and giving the message, but it was purely proclamation effort. After attending the World Congress in London in 1963, they began teaching in the Western District. When another pioneer had bought a car, they opened every village on the Western Highway in one weekend.

Belize

in the
jungle



Shirley Warde

"In San Ignacio itself we drove along the back street, saw a young woman sitting in her doorway and started talking to her. Her heart was waiting for the message and in about half an hour she was ready to enroll. In the center of the town we met a man I knew... and he asked us to tell him about the Faith. He did a lot of subsequent reading before enrolling, while another man... signed his card then and there after a short discussion...."

(Shirley Warde, quoted in Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 309-310)

Belize
a main
road



Shirley Warde

"We... turned back towards Belize, stopping at every village on the highway where at any house we saw people on the verandas or in the yard. Bahá'u'lláh must have been guiding us because those we enrolled that day, although not visited for months afterwards, have remained the key people in each of those villages which today all have local Assemblies and many believers."

(Shirley Warde, quoted in Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 309-310)

Belize
in the
villages



Belize
in the
villages



Shirley Warde

Shirley later served on the National Spiritual Assembly of Belize when it was formed in 1967. By 1970, Belize had 25 Local Spiritual Assemblies and almost 1,250 believers.

Shirley passed away at her pioneer post in 1991.

Belize

Photos
by
A. Dahl
1971-72

