



# CCSA PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK

## 2014 Belize Biology Program

This guide is provided to assist you in planning your trip. Enclosed you will find helpful information on a variety of topics.

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## GENERAL INFORMATION-

We urge you to read this handbook carefully and bring it with you. We also advise you to take the time before the trip to do some research to make your sightseeing more meaningful. Your local library and the Internet are great resources! We suggest that you begin with the CCSA website [www.ccsa.cc](http://www.ccsa.cc) and reading all the knowledge base information in your account and also utilizing the Travel Tools section.

## YOUR PASSPORT-

In order to go on your trip, you will need a passport. Information on how United States citizens can obtain a passport may be found on the U.S. Department of State's website <http://travel.state.gov/passport/>. The State Department reports that it normally takes about 4-6 weeks to obtain a passport once the application has been received.

When you receive your passport, you should immediately sign it on the appropriate page since it is not valid unless signed by the bearer. Also, complete the information requested on the inside front cover. In case of an accident or other circumstance, it may be necessary to contact the designated agent or next-of-kin. Especially, **keep your passport safe** and never loan it to a friend or stranger under any circumstance.

**\*\*Please be certain that you have provided one copy of your passport to CCSA\*\***

The U.S. Department of State encourages you to register your trip with the local in-country U.S. Embassy or Consulate before you leave. This is done through the State Department's travel registration website <https://step.state.gov/step/>. Registration enables U.S. officials to contact you in an emergency and to notify your family or other persons that you identify, if necessary.

If your passport becomes lost or stolen, report this IMMEDIATELY to the CCSA director, to the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate, or to the local police. We recommend that you make two additional copies of your passport -- leave one copy with family or friends and keep one in your suitcase. If you can supply the consulate with a photocopy of the passport, it may quicken the replacement process.

## CLOTHES AND BAGGAGE-

Don't try to pack your entire wardrobe! A good rule of thumb is to put everything you plan to take on the bed, then put a third of it back in the drawers. You will be bringing home more than you take, so it is a good idea to pack as little as possible while still providing a few basic outfits. Once you know your airline itinerary, **we advise that you contact your airline carrier regarding checked and carry-on luggage restrictions**. You will be required to carry your luggage within the airport so pack what you can comfortably manage yourself.

**We strongly recommend that you visit the Transportation Security Administration's website [www.tsa.gov/travelers](http://www.tsa.gov/travelers) for a current list of permitted and prohibited carry-on items.**

Remember to keep your passport and any other items you might need (medicine, glasses, contact lens case, film) in your carry-on luggage. But remember to pack **light** – you'll be bringing souvenirs home!

You may find that the cost of laundry facilities is more expensive abroad than in the U.S. Helpful hint for short-term programs (two weeks): Wash some of your clothes in your sink.

Casual wear is fine for attending class and for the majority of field trips. Your professor will inform you if you need to dress in a particular manner. It is a good idea to have one nice outfit for special visits or religious services.

It is **very important** to take at least one very comfortable pair of walking shoes. If you can't walk four or five

miles in the shoes you plan to take, leave them at home. It is a good idea to have two pairs of comfortable shoes and to alternate wearing them. This helps keep the feet in good health, a critical factor since you will be walking everywhere to catch public transportation. **Past participants have stated that this point cannot be over-emphasized.**

## **CAMERAS AND FILM-**

Taking pictures abroad will add a pleasurable and memorable dimension to your travels and studies. In order to avoid frustrations while taking photos abroad or having poorly developed pictures when you arrive home, you may wish to consider the following photo tips:

**Camera:** Check your camera thoroughly before you leave. Make sure that batteries are fresh (you may want to take a spare set). If your picture-taking is infrequent, you may want to read your camera manual to review all of the camera functions and controls.

Traveling With Your Digital Camera:

Traveling with a digital camera is a bit easier than with a film camera because the digital storage cards for cameras are not subject to the fog from X-rays from baggage scanning. Plus the other good thing about them is that you can see a preview of your image immediately and know if you have a picture that you can use or not.

Carry-On Luggage:

It is always a better idea to carry on your digital camera in your camera bag since chances of it being dropped or mishandled are reduced. The camera bag can go through the scanner at Security with no worry.

Suggestions for What to Bring Along:

- Camera bag with instruction book if at all unfamiliar with camera operation;
- Camera battery charger that is 220V rated for international current and the appropriate plug adaptor;
- Portable storage unit for downloading your images from the camera memory cards onto its hard drive for archiving and so you can reuse the memory card.
- Extra camera memory cards to use between downloads;
- If you are using a digital SLR, bring an extra lens, if appropriate;
- Extra camera batteries especially if the weather is cool or cold.
- Don't count on buying batteries when you arrive, prices can be very high.

**Film:** Take plenty of film with you. Depending upon your photographic likes and habits, you may wish to take rolls of film with different film speeds (e.g., ASA/ISO ratings from 100 to 1000). The fast 1000 ASA/ISO speed will come in handy in dark or interior situations where a flash is impractical or not allowed. Consider whether you want to take slides, prints, or both.

Travel Tips for Film

Traveling With Your Film:

The International Imaging Industry Association (13A) advises travelers to always pack all film in your carry-on luggage. When you do so store them in a mesh bag or a clear zip-lock bag so that visual inspection can be easily done.

## **Photo Etiquette and Rules**

Be a good traveler and observe local rules regarding picture taking. In some historic places (mostly cathedrals and palaces), photography is not allowed unless you have a special permit. Where picture taking is allowed and appropriate, be patient and don't let photographic enthusiasm make you a pushy and impolite tourist.

Depending on the exchange rate, developing film is usually more expensive abroad than in the U.S. However, you may wish to develop your film overseas to make sure that your camera is working properly. Or better yet, use a digital camera and know that you have captured the images you wish to

have for the future.

## **AIR TRANSPORTATION, SECURITY & GETTING THROUGH CUSTOMS-**

Security officials in your U.S. city of departure may ask you numerous questions. Don't be nervous! Instead, take comfort in the fact that this process is for your own safety.

**\*\*Do NOT leave your luggage unattended at any time\*\***

Upon arrival at your destination, proceed to the passport control area. You will be asked questions regarding the purpose and length of your trip. Explain that you are part of a travel/study program. Answer questions openly; do not joke with the officials. Proceed to the baggage claim area to pick up your luggage. Remembering your flight number is helpful in locating the proper baggage carousel. Carts are usually available to carry your luggage.

Going into another country requires that you pass through their Customs checkpoint. After picking up your baggage, proceed through Customs. If you have something to declare, follow the appropriate signs (often a red dot). Otherwise, if you have nothing to declare, follow the appropriate signs (usually a green dot). Please exercise courtesy and patience with Customs officials. They may ask to check that you have not brought anything illegal into the country. If they do not question you, continue walking. Although it sounds confusing, you'll find your way. If you become separated from the group, don't panic – **just look for someone holding a CCSA sign as you go through the international arrival gate.**

When you return to the U.S., you must also clear U.S. Customs. You will be given a Customs declaration form on the plane on the return flight (a sample form can found at <http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/vacation/> -- click on Sample Customs Declaration Form). You may declare orally all items acquired abroad and brought back with you duty free, whether purchased or given to you as gifts, **if** their total value does not exceed \$800. If the total value exceeds \$800, you will be required to provide a written declaration of the articles acquired and pay a duty tax.

## **PERSONAL SAFETY & SECURITY OF MONEY & BELONGINGS-**

The CCSA Board of Trustees, the program director(s), and their agents and suppliers of transportation have planned to take special precautions for the safety and welfare of participants. Obviously, none of these can provide guarantees covering circumstances beyond their control. You are responsible for learning fire and other safety instructions of every locality you visit. You are advised to follow any special instruction relative to safety that may be provided during the orientation conducted after you arrive. CCSA advises participants to exercise caution regarding any involvement in local political activities.

If you are planning personal travel, make yourself aware of crime information in areas you will be visiting including the safety of buses, trains and other forms of public transportation. We recommend that you begin by using the Internet for the most current information on issues such as safety, transportation, etc. You may wish to start your search in the Travel Tools section of the CCSA website (<http://www.ccsa.cc>). By selecting the Health & Safety icon, you can access the websites for the U.S. State Department (including direct links to Travel Warnings, Road Safety, and Information for Students) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Health Information for International Travelers).

Throughout your stay, carefully secure your money and personal belongings. Busy city streets, tourist attractions, and public transport stations are the haunts of pickpockets, purse-snatchers and thieves. Please be cautious by following these guidelines:

1. Keep your room door locked, even if you are just going down the hall for a few minutes (not applicable to home-stays).
2. Button or pin your billfold and passport in an inside coat pocket or buy a money belt. (Remember to

- keep a copy of your passport in a separate location.)
3. Never leave your purse or other belongings or packages unattended at any time.
  4. Do not hang your purse or coat on the back of chairs in public places.
  5. Do not leave bags under or at the side of seats and tables.
  6. Do not leave your purse unzipped or open on counters at fast food restaurants or in vulnerable places.
  7. In all cases, be alert in public transport stations and observe those around you.

**Traveling in pairs or groups is highly recommended, and special instructions will be provided during the orientation about situations and locations that should be avoided to enhance the safety of participants. Caution is always advised!**

**Participants must advise the program director in writing if they plan independent travel that may necessitate their absence overnight.** This is necessary in order for participants to be contacted by the director(s) or the faculty members in case of emergencies or so persons attempting to contact them can be informed of their time of return.

### **GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCT-**

CCSA expects participants to display maturity and to respect the rights of their fellow students, faculty and other CCSA staff. Immature and inconsiderate behavior will not be tolerated. CCSA seeks to reinforce the positive images maintained in the past by encouraging its students to exhibit a pleasant, courteous and cooperative attitude.

The following rules must be observed **throughout the program**:

1. Loud and boisterous behavior that infringes upon the rights of other students to enjoy quiet and privacy in the residence hall/hotels or causes a disturbance to the residents of the area adjacent to the housing site is prohibited.
2. **Outsiders are only permitted in the lobby/public area of your place of accommodation if it has one – otherwise no visitors allowed.**
3. No more than two people may occupy a double room and a student may not impose a third party on his/her roommate.
4. Defacing or destroying furniture, facilities or other property is prohibited.

Any other rules and regulations of each accommodation site will be announced or posted upon arrival.

Quiet hours begin at 11:00 p.m. daily (unless otherwise stated) and must be strictly observed.

While you may lawfully consume alcoholic beverages if you are over the host country's legal drinking age, public drunkenness is illegal and intoxication is absolutely no defense against any charge of misbehavior. In other words, you are expected to adhere to appropriate standards of behavior at all times and having "one too many" is no excuse. (Please refer to the Program-Specific Information, Safety Section for the legal drinking age of your host country. Also refer to the alcohol/health and safety question in the Health Questions and Answers section of this handbook.)

Please be advised that CCSA will **NOT** permit the consumption of alcoholic beverages on the bus during transfers or excursions. The penalties for possession and use of illegal drugs are severe; any violations will be subject to the jurisdiction of the host country authorities applying host country law.

You are reminded that you are bound by the Code of Conduct contained within the CCSA application which states: *I hereby agree that in consideration of my being permitted to participate in this CCSA program, I will be subject to the supervision and authority of the faculty and/or director in charge; that standards of conduct will be stipulated by the faculty and/or director that I will meet; and that I will display maturity and responsibility as a representative of my college or university. I also understand and agree that the faculty and/or director in charge has the authority to make decisions regarding my continued participation in the program if they*

*determine that my conduct warrants disciplinary action or if they determine that my continued participation, for whatever reason, poses an immediate risk of harm to me or to others.*

### **GRADE APPEAL PROCESS-**

1. Students are strongly urged to discuss their concerns first with the faculty member assigning the grade.
2. Failing a resolution of the disagreement with the faculty member, in the event the student and the faculty member(s) are from the same institution, the student may appeal the grade in accordance with processes delineated at that institution. In such a case, CCSA requests to be informed of such action both at the time of initiation and at its conclusion, and will provide any relevant information as requested by either party.
3. In the event the student and the faculty member are from different institutions and the grade has not yet been recorded at the student's home school, the student may appeal to the CCSA Executive Director. This appeal must be made in writing.
4. If the grade has not yet been recorded at a CCSA school, the student's grade shall be recorded as an incomplete, pending the Executive Director's decision.
5. If the grade has been recorded at a CCSA school, the student must utilize that school's appeal process unless the school, by means of its CCSA representative to the board, requests CCSA in writing to participate in the appeal process, in which case the student may appeal to the CCSA Executive Director in writing.
6. The Executive Director shall conduct a preliminary investigation to determine the basic grounds on which the appeal is being brought and in the event sufficient grounds are found to warrant further consideration refer the appeal to the Chair of the CCSA Academic Committee for review by the committee as a whole or by a subcommittee of three members of the Board of Trustees. The Executive Director will also notify both the faculty member in question and the CCSA representative at the student's member school that a grade appeal has been brought.
7. The process to be followed by this committee is as follows:
  - a. Receive a committee charge from the Executive Director in which shall be included information regarding the current status of the grade.
  - b. Review all documentation.
  - c. Request additional documentation from either the professor and/or the student in either interview or written form as deemed necessary by the committee.
  - d. Review these submissions and if possible, make a recommendation that would lead to a resolution at the faculty-student level.
  - e. If unresolved, make a written report to include a recommendation to the Executive Director.
8. Upon completion of the preliminary investigation by the Executive Director or the receipt of the report of the advisory committee, the Executive Director shall render a decision that shall be final with respect to CCSA and notify in writing the student, the representative at the student's CCSA institution, and the faculty member.

### **SUGGESTIONS AND EVALUATIONS OF CCSA PROGRAMS-**

Participants are encouraged to make suggestions to the Executive Director, program director(s) or to a faculty member for changes, additions or improvements to this study abroad program at any time. A formal evaluation form will be distributed and collected prior to your return to the U.S. The CCSA Board of Trustees evaluates each program upon its conclusion, seeking ways to enhance the educational and travel content.

## **SAFETY TIPS FOR TRAVELERS-**

### **Specific Advice for Women Travelers**

Women traveling abroad may encounter unexpected difficulties if not prepared. Although violence against women is higher in the U.S. than in many other countries, the uninformed female could be at greater risk for unpleasant or even dangerous situations if she does not take the time to prepare herself. Language and cultural differences may compound the problem. For example, in many cultures direct eye contact by women may be regarded as inappropriate.

U.S. students need to be aware that different attitudes about women may exist in other countries. It is not uncommon for the lifestyle of American women to be considered as "free and loose" in comparison to what is acceptable in many other countries. This image may be further reinforced by negative stereotypes often seen in American television shows and movies. In addition to preconceived notions, interpretations about behavior, amount of eye contact, use of body language, style of dress, use of make-up, and personal distance between individuals may be profoundly different from country to country. Further information about cultural differences and women's issues can be found at Studyabroad.com (<http://www.studyabroad.com/guides/handbook/handbook4.html>).

Therefore, it is vital that women prepare themselves for possible situations that could range from sexual comments or harassment to the extreme of physically threatening behavior. It is important to learn about the customs, religion and appropriate dress for women before a visit is made to another country. The traveler should read as much as possible about the country to be visited before leaving home. Internet sites about the country are another good resource for the traveler. The goal is to be knowledgeable, prepared and safe.

### **Safety tips for the woman traveler:**

1. Follow examples of culturally appropriate dress and behavior. Watch the women of the country you are visiting.
2. Do not dress provocatively and do not wear a lot of jewelry. You want to blend in with the public. You will be less of a target for harassment or inappropriate remarks.
3. If you need help with directions and if you have a choice, ask a woman. Do not be afraid to ask other women for advice or assistance. Older women are also helpful in reprimanding men who harass you.
4. If you are in an area where you do not see other women, then leave the area.
5. Sit near other women on public transportation.
6. Always choose an aisle seat so you won't get pinned in.
7. Project a confident attitude. Walk as if you know where you are going and what you are doing.
8. If someone is bothering you, be assertive. Tell them in a calm, serious manner to stop. Be direct and speak clearly and emphatically.

### **Safety tips for all travelers:**

1. Don't do anything you wouldn't do at home.
2. Know how to use the local phones. Even if you have a phone card, always carry correct change for a phone call.
3. No matter where you are, always know where the exits are located.
4. Never go out alone in a strange environment, especially at night. If you have to go out alone, take a cab from door to door. Do NOT accept rides from people you do not know.
5. If a situation doesn't feel right or you have a "gut feeling", remove yourself as quickly as possible and/or ask for assistance.
6. If you must walk someplace, go with a group and leave with the group. Do NOT walk alone.

7. Know your surroundings. Get a map of the local area. Study it before setting out so you know where you are going. Having to study it on the street makes it obvious that you are unsure of where you want to be and invites strangers to approach you.
8. Be cautious in public restrooms.
9. Be alert for staged distractions in public. That is a time to be more vigilant with personal belongings.
10. Do not tell strangers where you are staying.
11. When returning to your room, check the windows to be sure they are locked. Always lock your door.
12. If you are staying in a hotel and you feel uneasy about someone in the lobby watching you get on the elevator, press several different floors so they don't know where you got off.
13. If someone gets into an elevator with you who makes you feel uneasy, get off.

Please visit the U.S. Department of State's website for information on safety issues ([http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety\\_1747.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety_1747.html)). The information contains helpful precautions to minimize the chance of becoming a victim of terrorism and also provides other safety tips for Americans traveling overseas.

## **GENERAL HEALTH QUESTIONS & Answers for the Study Abroad Participant-**

The Cooperative Center for Study Abroad (CCSA) schedules academic study abroad programs in a variety of different locations. The experience of studying abroad can enrich your personal life and academic career and should not be marred by preventable problems. Becoming ill while you are traveling abroad is just as likely to occur as it would if you had stayed home. Whether or not you do may depend on your knowing what health risks are involved while you are traveling, following sound medical advice and making pre-departure preparations.

### **Do I need to get any special immunizations before I travel abroad?**

Before you travel you should make sure that all routine immunizations are up to date based on the recommendations approved by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practice (<http://www.cdc.gov/nip/recs/adult-schedule.htm>). Routine immunizations are those immunizations that will protect you against many diseases that are still common in many parts of the world.

It is advisable to discuss your need for protection against tetanus with your personal physician. Tetanus boosters are recommended every 10 years after the initial series and it is easy to forget when it was last administered. Tetanus is an infection of the nervous tissue caused by a contaminated wound or injury. Cuts, abrasions and scrapes are not uncommon when you are traveling. Should you suffer any minor injury, keeping the area clean and protected from contamination is very important.

In addition to the routine immunizations, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provide a listing of recommended immunizations. Vaccinations on this list are recommended to protect individuals from illnesses present in other parts of the world. According to the CDC (<http://www.cdc.gov>), which vaccinations you need depends on a number of factors including your destination, whether you will be spending time in rural areas, the season of the year you are traveling, your age, health status, and previous immunizations. Information about recommended vaccinations specific to the locations of CCSA Programs may be found on the CDC website as well as in the CCSA site-specific student handbook. CCSA recommends that you meet with your personal physician at least 4–6 weeks prior to departure on your selected study abroad program to determine your vaccination needs.

### **What health risks do I need to be aware of before I travel abroad?**

Certain health risks are universal, while others may be specific to geographic areas. In general, in most developed countries, health risks related to infectious diseases may be no greater than those you would



encounter while traveling in the U.S. However, in less developed regions and countries, standards of sanitation and hygiene can vary greatly. The risk is generally much less in the more populated areas of these regions. The risk of infectious diseases is related to the exposure to water and food of uncertain quality.

### **I have had some mental health issues (such as anxiety and depression) in the past. Can I still study abroad?**

Traveling and study abroad presents many new stressors that may exacerbate or amplify any mental health issues that exist. Developing a self-awareness of these stressors will assist you in identifying coping strategies that will be effective when confronted with the stressors. Stressors associated with travel and study abroad include:

- separation from the familiar support system of family and friends;
- travel stress on the body;
- adjustment to local culture; and
- strain of physically adapting to differences in housing, food and water.

In preparation for participation in the program, CCSA recommends all participants discuss these stressors and their mental health status with their personal physician or counselor.

### **What infectious diseases could I develop when traveling and what can I do to prevent them?**

The most common infectious diseases you could develop when traveling are related to either the GI tract or the respiratory system.

The most common of the infectious diseases one may acquire is "traveler's diarrhea". Diarrhea is actually a defense mechanism to protect your body against unaccustomed organisms. As such, it is usually self-limiting and should subside in 3-5 days. In the meantime, the most important thing that you can do is maintain your fluid intake to prevent dehydration. The best choices would include fruit and vegetable juices and clear soups that are high in mineral salts that may also be depleted. However, if the diarrhea is severe, you have a chronic health problem, you begin feeling progressively weaker or it does not subside within several days, it is recommended that you seek medical attention.

Hepatitis A (Infectious Hepatitis) is more common in North Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean. It is possible to contract the disease anywhere, including the U.S., where living conditions are crowded and unsanitary or if exposed to contaminated food or water. You may also contract Hepatitis A through eating of contaminated clams, oysters and other shellfish, especially if eaten raw.

In areas where sanitation is poor or in heavily populated locales where the risk of infectious disease is higher, it is recommended that only canned or bottled beverages or beverages made with boiled water be consumed. If the water is of questionable quality, iced drinks should be avoided. Choose only fresh fruits and vegetables, which can be peeled, and avoid food items sold from street vendors.

The most common respiratory illnesses are similar in symptoms to upper respiratory infections or a common cold that you may experience in the U.S. These symptoms may occur as a result of exposure to new types of viruses while traveling. The best treatment is to prevent the respiratory illnesses from occurring.

#### Infection Control Practices for Respiratory Illnesses

1. Individuals with symptoms of a respiratory illness (coughing, sneezing, runny nose) should take precautions not to spread the illness to other individuals.
2. If symptoms are accompanied by a fever, they should limit interactions outside the home until after the resolution of fever, provided respiratory symptoms are absent or improving.
3. Each individual with a respiratory illness should be advised to cover his or her mouth and nose with a facial tissue when coughing or sneezing. Soiled tissues must be disposed of properly.

4. Sharing of eating utensils, towels and bedding between individuals with respiratory illnesses and others should be avoided.
5. Preventive practices to prevent the transmission of any illness include careful and frequent **hand washing** using either soap and water or waterless alcohol-based sanitizers. Hand washing removes potentially infectious materials from the skin and helps prevent disease transmission. (Adapted from <http://cdc.gov/>)

### **I hear that the drinking age is different in other countries. Is there anything I need to know about alcohol and my health and safety?**

On your study abroad trip, you will experience many new social situations some of which may involve the consumption of alcohol. Alcohol is considered a legal drug and is readily available. Alcohol, when consumed responsibly, is generally not harmful for healthy people. Therefore, it is important to understand that alcohol is a psychoactive drug that affects the central nervous system (CNS). Although alcohol consumption produces a euphoric or "high" feeling, it actually causes depression of the CNS. As a result, even moderate drinking is not entirely without risk. You can put yourself at risk for health problems, relationship problems and threats to your physical safety. The less experienced you are, the greater the health and safety risk you are likely to incur.

Why are you, as a participant in a study abroad program, at risk for increased consumption ("binge" or high-risk drinking) of alcohol?

- Drinking age in the country you are visiting may be lower than at home
- Stress of adjustment to a new environment
- Easy availability and low cost of alcohol
- Peer pressure
- Pressure from local culture
- You may be a "novice drinker"
- Frequency of alcohol consumption in the local culture

In the U.S., alcohol consumption has been found to be related to situations involving increased physical violence, sexual harassment and assault. Behavioral effects of even moderate consumption may include irritability, moodiness, anxiety, loss of judgment, changes in behavior, impulsiveness or an inability to cope. Physical effects include alterations of muscle coordination, slowed reflexes, tremors, and, ultimately, a loss of consciousness. Alcohol can interact negatively with a large number of medications. For example, alcohol will have an even stronger sedative effect if consumed with any medications that also cause depression of the central nervous system such as medications to control pain or aid sleep. If alcohol is consumed frequently with medicines that you buy over the counter, such as acetaminophen, long-term health problems can develop. You should always check with your doctor or pharmacist before drinking any amount of alcohol if you are taking any medicines, prescription or otherwise.

### **If I am sexually active, am I at greater risk for infectious diseases?**

Accordingly to the World Health Organization:

"An estimated 333 million episodes of curable sexually transmitted infection (syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydial infections and trichomoniasis) occur annually throughout the world. They are important causes of infertility, illness and death. Nonetheless, some travelers continue to place themselves at risk of infection. In a few developed countries, a large proportion of sexually transmitted infections are now acquired during international travel."

Other diseases that can be sexually transmitted include infection with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) that causes AIDS and Hepatitis B virus (HBV). AIDS and HBV are considerably less an epidemic in some countries than in the U.S., and considerably more in others. In addition to transmission through sexual intercourse (both heterosexual and homosexual), needle-sharing, blood transfusion, injections or other invasive procedures increase the risk of acquiring HIV, HBV and other infections. Some countries may not have the

resources to adequately screen blood or provide sterile needles; thus, under certain circumstances, there may be greater risk for exposure to the HIV virus. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services states:

"Travelers are at risk if they use or allow the use of contaminated, unsterilized syringes or needles for any injections or other skin-piercing procedures, including acupuncture, use of illicit drugs, steroid injections, medical/dental procedure, ear piercing or tattooing."

Therefore, CCSA strongly recommends that participants avoid receiving tattoos, body piercing, etc. while abroad due to the concern of the lack of safety standards and the possibility of contracting Hepatitis B and/or HIV. Measures for preventing sexually transmitted infections are the same whether in the U.S. or traveling abroad. Participants should avoid multiple partners or sexual encounters with any individual whose HIV-infection status is unknown. If you are sexually active, ALWAYS use a latex condom. If you anticipate being sexually active while traveling, take a supply of condoms with you as conditions, manufacturing and storage of condoms in other countries may be questionable.

### **What if I have a prior health problem?**

If you have any pre-existing health conditions or have other health-related questions, you are strongly encouraged to discuss the appropriateness of your participation on the study abroad program with your personal physician prior to the trip. You will be asked to complete a special medical form as part of the application process. It is important that you provide accurate and complete physical and mental health information and any other personal data that is necessary in planning for a healthy study abroad experience. All information will be treated with strict confidentiality.

CCSA makes every reasonable effort to accommodate participants with disabilities, but many locales outside of the U.S. have not been altered to accommodate persons with disabilities. Moreover, certain CCSA programs have, as an essential element, field experiences that require considerable stamina.

If you have diabetes, are allergic to medications such as penicillin, or have any other physical condition that could require emergency care, carry some form of identification with you at all times (wallet identification card, medical alert bracelet or necklace). The specific problem and what must be done should be clearly stated in the event you are unable to communicate this information yourself.

### **Do I need to do anything special if I am taking medicines prescribed by my doctor?**

If you require regular medication or injections, be sure to check with your personal physician for any advice or recommendations. The program staff is concerned about the wellbeing of all participants but they are not trained healthcare professionals. It will be your responsibility to self-administer all personal medications.

If you need prescription medications regularly, take an adequate supply with you. Consult with your physician, pharmacist and insurance company to insure that you will have a sufficient supply of medication for the entire trip. A letter from your physician should accompany prescription medicines, providing a description of the problem and the name and dosage of the prescribed medication. If it becomes necessary to seek medical attention, this information will assist medical personnel in providing the most appropriate care. It is important that all prescription medications be left in their original container as carrying unlabeled medications can result in severe difficulties with immigration, customs and other law enforcement personnel.

The Center for Disease Control recommends, "Diabetics or other persons who require routine or frequent injections should carry a supply of syringes and needles sufficient to last their stay abroad." It may be illegal in some countries to carry needles and syringes without a prescription. You should carry a letter from your physician documenting your need for the needles and syringes.

### **What about other medicines that I sometimes take for simpler problems like a common cold?**

If you take specific "over-the-counter" medications for recurring problems, such as headaches, sinus problems, colds, skin conditions (mosquito bites, cuts, poison ivy, etc.), diarrhea or constipation, it is suggested that you

bring a supply of those medications with you. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration does not regulate "over-the-counter" medications in other countries. Therefore, medications may not be of the same purity (quality) as a similar medicine in the U.S. Additionally, these medicines may not contain the same chemical substances that you are accustomed to taking for a particular problem, which may alter your response to the medicine. Also, some U.S. "over-the-counter" medications may be prescription drugs in other countries. You should have a written statement from your personal physician that the medicine you are carrying is being used under a doctor's direction and is necessary for your physical well being while traveling. "Over-the-counter" medications should be left in the original container.

**Warning** Research has shown that medication sharing is relatively common among adolescents and adults. Any individual who receives a medication whether it be a prescription or over-the-counter drug via sharing does not receive the appropriate information about its actions and possible negative interactions with other medications, or any other associated risks. Sharing drugs that could possibly cause allergic reactions or serious side effects is of special concern. All participants are strongly encouraged NOT to request or offer any medications to others.

### **I have heard that air travel for extended periods of time can cause health problems. What precautions can I take?**

Airsickness is not common. However, if you have experienced airsickness in the past or have had significant problems with motion sickness, you may want to discuss this with your healthcare provider. Prescription and nonprescription medications are available to combat motion sickness. If you anticipate traveling in a boat (especially a small boat) while on your study abroad program and have had problems with motion sickness, you may want to have medications available to combat the problem. Ginger tablets, which are available over the counter, have been shown to be effective for some in preventing motion sickness associated with small boat travel.

If you have sinus or inner ear problems, the changes in altitude and the cabin pressure may intensify symptoms. It is recommended that you discuss with your healthcare provider the need for a decongestant while traveling. If you have had frequent sinus or ear infections, your healthcare provider may recommend bringing an antibiotic or a prescription for one with you on your trip.

The controlled cabin temperature, humidity and pressure may result in simple dehydration if fluid intake is not maintained. Drinking alcoholic beverages in excess while in flight will have an additive effect on the dehydration. Dehydration can cause the blood to be thicker, so individuals who have a history of blood clots should be especially careful that they drink adequate fluids. Also, adequate fluid intake is necessary to flush the kidneys and urinary tract. Individuals with a history of frequent urinary tract infections or kidney stones must be sure to drink adequate amounts of water while traveling. Normally 8-10 glasses of water are recommended each day. The amount should be adjusted depending on the length of the flight. Bottled water can be kept in your carry-on luggage or requested from the flight attendants.

Prolonged air travel can lead to slowed circulation in the legs, as well as stiffening of the joints for those with arthritis. Slowed circulation in the legs may lead to swelling, generalized discomfort and may increase the risk of blood clots in susceptible individuals. To prevent joint stiffening, avoid swelling and maintain adequate circulation in the legs, walk around the plane every 1-2 hours or try some simple leg exercises while you are in your seat. For example, extend your leg as straight as you can, given the limitations on space; hold the position and flex the foot to point the toes toward the head; extend the foot, pointing the toes toward the ground; lower the leg. Repeat with the other leg. Repeat 5-10 times every hour. Or, leaving the feet on the floor, alternate lifting the heels and holding to the count of five, then lift the toes to the count of five. Repeat 5-10 times per hour. Each of these exercises causes muscle contraction and relaxation, which aids the circulation in the legs.

### **Do I need to get special health insurance before I leave?**

A comprehensive group health insurance policy is provided to program participants as part of the program package. This health insurance is provided for the length of a participant's CCSA study abroad program. We

urge you to discuss with your insurance agent the amount of coverage extended through the policy provided by CCSA in combination with your personal medical insurance coverage as it relates to overseas travel. By doing so, you can make an educated decision regarding the potential need for additional insurance.

It is important for you to check with your own health insurance carrier to confirm whether your policy applies overseas, including provision for medical evacuation. It is recommended that you obtain in writing from your insurance company: (1) the extent of coverage that is extended during your travel abroad, and (2) the correct procedure for submitting claims. Ascertain whether your insurance company will make payment to the overseas hospital or doctor or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses you incur. Some insurance policies also include coverage for psychiatric treatment and for disposition of remains in the event of death.

Useful information on medical emergencies abroad, including overseas insurance programs, is provided in the Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs brochure, Medical Information for Americans Traveling Abroad, available via its Travel Publications page at [http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health\\_1185.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_1185.html).

### **What if I get sick while I am traveling abroad?**

If you begin to feel ill during the trip, it is important to inform the CCSA on-site director immediately. He/she will discuss with you whether you need to seek medical attention. If it does become necessary to seek medical attention, the on-site director will assist you in this process. If a medical emergency occurs, get medical attention immediately and then contact the CCSA on-site director. If the director is unavailable, contact your CCSA professor. CCSA suggests that you carry the phone number and address of the CCSA accommodation site with you at all times while you are abroad.

### **I don't exercise much but I am not a "couch potato". Do I need to do anything special to get ready for traveling abroad?**

You may consider yourself physically fit and prepared for the trip. You may believe that if you are going to be in an urban area with excellent local transportation you do not need to worry about preparing yourself physically. If you can walk at least three miles without stopping and climb 2-3 (long) flights of stairs without getting short of breath, you probably are fit enough to tolerate what you can expect to encounter on most study abroad programs. Yet, there is no better way to absorb the culture and experience the country you are in than to WALK! And how do you imagine you will get down or up from the underground station? And what about that historical cathedral or castle or palace – they didn't have elevators in 1600.

It is suggested that you **consider beginning an exercise program at least six weeks before your study abroad program** begins. If you have health problems or have not participated in an exercise program, you may need to consult your personal physician first for his/her advice. Maintain a regular schedule and exercise at least three times a week until you leave. You should try to increase your distance and/or the number of stairs each week. Your **goals should be to walk at least three miles without stopping and to climb two (long) flights of stairs**. You may find yourself walking five or more miles each day, so it would also be a good idea to break in those new walking shoes while you are exercising. If you wait until you arrive at your destination, those brand new shoes may equate to brand new blisters.

### **Besides exercising, what else do I need to do to get myself ready for the trip?**

The trip itself can cause stress that could have physical consequences. Being healthy when you begin your trip is as important as breaking in your shoes. The excitement of going abroad combined with final exams, holidays or just being with your family often means that you may be neglecting yourself. If you haven't been getting enough sleep, haven't been eating well and have been burning the candle at both ends, your immune system may have to work harder and you may be placing yourself at risk for getting sick.

You may not get sick before you leave home, but the moment you set foot on foreign soil it seems to happen. Consider their germs are different from our germs and you probably don't have a natural resistance to them. Your resistance to disease may have been further reduced by the long hours associated with traveling; the disruption in normal eating patterns, as well as the changes in climate and time zones. Changing time zones

disrupts your normal sleep and wake cycles. Upon arrival at your destination, it is recommended that you help your body adjust to the time change by staying awake a few more hours. This adds to your immediate fatigue and may further tax your immune system. To prepare you for the adjustments your body will have to make, the same day you begin the previously mentioned exercise program, you may want to consider beginning a vitamin supplement, working hard at eating three well-balanced meals every day and getting adequate sleep (7-8 hours) each night. It may take several days for your body to adjust to the time change and you may be tempted to try to extend the length of your days so you can experience all there is to experience. Therefore, it is advisable to include some short rest periods for the first few days after arrival. Meal times may not be a priority as you explore the new and exciting surroundings. Just as it was important to prepare yourself prior to your departure, it is just as important to maintain these habits now.

### **WHAT DO I NEED TO TAKE WITH ME?-**

It is very important that all medications, letters from your personal physician, etc. be packed in a bag that you will carry with you while you are traveling. Unfortunately, checked luggage sometimes does not arrive at the same time as you and any items that you need either during the trip or upon arrival should be carried with you.

Also, you will want to be prepared to handle any minor health problems or deal with any issues associated with pre-existing medical conditions as they occur during your travels. Being prepared with a "first aid kit" may save you significant time and frustration while traveling. A basic first aid kit of over-the-counter medications that you are accustomed to taking or possible supplies specific to your destination is recommended.

Things to include in a first aid kit:

- Prescription medications with an accompanying letter
  - Medical alert wallet ID card/bracelet/necklace
  - "Over-the-counter" medications; for example,
    - Anti-diarrheal medication
    - Medication for constipation
    - Decongestant for sinus or upper respiratory problems
    - Antihistamine, also for sinus type congestion
    - Anti-motion sickness medication
    - Medication for relief of pain and/or fever such as acetaminophen, aspirin, ibuprofen
    - Cough medication
    - Antacid
  - Band-aids in assorted sizes
  - Ointments for cuts, rashes, etc. (for example, Benadryl or hydrocortisone for poison ivy or insect bites; Neosporin or similar antibiotic ointment for cuts or scrapes)
  - Insect repellent
  - Sunscreen, at least SPF 15 or more
  - Waterless alcohol-based/antibacterial hand sanitizer
  - Disposable thermometer strips
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## **PROGRAM SPECIFIC Information-**

### **2014 Belize Biology Program**

#### **ABOUT BELIZE AND GUATEMALA-**

Belize lies on the eastern coastline of Central America, bordered on the north by Mexico, on the west and south by Guatemala, and on the east by the Caribbean Sea. The inner coastal waters are shallow and are sheltered by a line of coral reefs, dotted with islets called "cayes", extending almost the entire length of the country. There is a low coastal plain, much of it covered with mangrove swamp, but the land rises gradually towards the interior. Mountains, tableland, rivers and forest cover the mainland. The principle language of Belize is English, though many if not most people in the rural villages speak a local Mayan language or in the southern areas of Belize Spanish. For more information on Belize, please visit the State Department website at <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/belize.html>

Guatemala lies to the west and south of Belize; its primary northern border is with Mexico. A mountainous country that stretches between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, it is home both to unique rainforest habitat and was the center of the Mayan Empire. Our time in Guatemala will be spent in the interior in the vicinity of Flores and Tikal, within the Biotopo Butterfly Reserve and the Tikal National Park, one of the largest and best preserved of the ancient Mayan sites. The principal language of Guatemala is Spanish. For more information on Guatemala, please visit the State Department website at <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/guatemala.html>

#### **CLIMATE & CLOTHING-**

The climate of Belize and Guatemala is subtropical, with a brisk prevailing wind in coastal areas from the Caribbean Sea. Temperatures in coastal districts range from between 60-96 degrees F, and the humidity is nicely tempered by the sea breezes. The dry season usually extends from December to May. Tikal in Guatemala is located in the Peten district, where temperatures in May can be expected to be in the 90s with high humidity and evening temperatures only falling into the upper 70s. Clothing appropriate to strenuous physical activity, which wicks perspiration, dries quickly and protects from sun and insects is highly recommended.

#### **HOUSING AND MEALS-**

You will reside in multi-bedded rooms in field stations, cabins, and dormitory facilities. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are provided each day.

Gringo Perdido (May 13 - 17)  
<http://hotelgringoperdido.com/>

Blue Creek Rainforest Lodge (May 18 – 22)  
<http://izebelize.com/blue-creek/>

South Water Caye (May 23 – 28)  
<http://www.ize2belize.com/belize/ize/island/southwatercaye.html>

Because there are no vending machines at Blue Creek and South Water Caye, it is recommended that you bring snacks such as GORP.

#### **PHONING TO AND FROM BELIZE AND GUATEMALA-**

Remember to inform your family and friends that Belize and Guatemala are on Central Standard Time; bear in

mind that in summer the Central Time Zone in the US is for the most part on Daylight Savings time, so one hour ahead of standard time..

1 hour behind Eastern Standard Time  
1 hour ahead of Mountain Standard Time  
2 hours ahead of Pacific Standard Time

Listed below is the correct dialing sequence for calling directly from the U.S.:

International Access + Country Code + Number

011	502	Guatemala #
011	501	Belize #

Listed below is the correct dialing sequence for calling the U.S. directly from Belize:

International Access + Country Code + Area Code + Number

00	1	#	#
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Phone access will be extremely limited as you will be residing in remote areas. You will only be able to call in the case of an emergency. There are no phones at Blue Creek. However, you may call upon arrival into the Belize airport. While traveling between sites it may be possible to call, but again, phones are scarce and their access will be limited.

If someone needs to get in touch with you, it is best to provide the phone numbers below. **Please stress that these numbers are to be used ONLY for emergencies.** This way, families can get in touch if they absolutely need to.

Precede all numbers with 011 if dialing from the US:

502-5804-8639	Gringo Perdido
501-629-3372	Blue Creek Rainforest Station Manager, Ignacio Coe
501-580-2000	South Water Caye Field Station Manager

We suggest that your family members be provided with the CCSA office phone number: (615) 460-6575 or (800) 319-6015, and the fax number: (615) 460-6576.

## ENTRY REQUIREMENTS-

U.S. citizens need a passport for entry into Belize. U.S. citizens do not need visas for visits up to 30 days, but they must have an onward/return air ticket and proof of sufficient funds (at least \$60 per night).

If you are not a U.S. citizen, you should contact your home-country embassy in the United States, as well as the Belize embassy or consulate, to ascertain which documents are needed to enter Belize. You must also contact the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services to determine which documents are needed to re-enter the United States and whether your leaving the United States is likely to have an adverse effect upon your U.S. resident status.

Again, the U.S. Department of State encourages you to register your trip with the local in-country U.S. Embassy or Consulate before you leave. This is done through the State Department's travel registration website (<https://travelregistration.state.gov/librs/ui/>). Registration enables U.S. officials to contact you in an emergency and to notify your family or other persons that you identify, if necessary.



## **SAFETY-**

In both Guatemala and Belize, wide income disparities combined with underdeveloped security and judicial systems, typical of many developing countries, play a significant role in the safety of not just the nations' inhabitants but in the safety of tourists traveling there. In several program locations, all of which are situated in rural and often wild habitats, environmental hazards must also be taken seriously. While according to the US State Department website, there is no evidence that American citizens and tourists are specifically being targeted for criminal or violent behavior in either country, a wide-spread perception regarding the wealth of such tourists can make any traveler a target for opportunistic crime. Program participants are consequently, for their own safety and the well-being of the group as a whole, strongly recommended to stay with the group and especially not to venture out of our housing areas alone or in small groups after dark. Before leaving the group at any time, all participants must inform the program director of their intent and the expected duration of their absence. Additionally, common sense precautions, such as not using ATM machines in poorly-lit areas, not showing large amounts of cash (bearing in mind that large is a relative term in areas of endemic poverty), not flashing expensive equipment, safeguarding financial and personal information, and following the precautions given in the general section of this handbook for women travelers, should be taken.

The Guatemalan government sponsors a program called ASISTUR, run by its national tourism office INGUAT, the primary purpose of which is to ensure the safety and security of tourists and travelers. In the event that an emergency occurs while you are separated from the group, you can obtain the phone number for ASISTUR from any hotel; in the Peten region, where Tikal is located, the appropriate number to call is (+502) 5414-3594, with 502 being the country code.

The legal drinking age in both Belize and Guatemala is 18. Please refer to the General Information Guide under the Conduct Section for pertinent information regarding alcohol consumption.

A valid U.S. driver's license is accepted in Belize and Guatemala. Buses and private vehicles are the main mode of transportation; all program transportation is being provided by CCSA through its ground agents. There are no emergency numbers to call when serious problems are encountered, and there are very few public telephones along the road. Roads in Belize and Guatemala vary from two-lane paved roads to dirt tracks. For safety reasons, travelers should not stop to offer assistance to others whose vehicles have apparently broken down. DRIVING IS ON THE RIGHT-HAND SIDE OF THE STREET OR HIGHWAY. Speed limits are 55 miles per hour on most highways and 25 miles per hour on most other roads, but they are seldom obeyed or posted. Local traffic customs include: stopping in the middle of the road to talk to someone while blocking traffic, pulling to the far right in order to make a left turn, and tailgating at high speeds. *For the reasons just explained, you are advised **not** to try to drive an automobile while in Belize or Guatemala.*

Both Belize and Guatemala are hurricane-prone countries. Stay informed of regional weather forecasts.

## **HEALTH-**

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR ALLERGY/SINUS SUFFERERS WHO USE PRODUCTS CONTAINING PSEUDOEPHEDRINE.** This drug, which is the active ingredient in many allergy medications, including but not limited to Sudafed and products ending with a "D" designation, is illegal *to even be in possession of this medication* in Guatemala. Program participants are urged not to travel with medications containing pseudoephedrine, even those prescribed to them.

### **IMMUNIZATIONS SPECIFIC TO BELIZE**

Certain health risks are universal, while others may be specific to geographic areas. Health risks to be considered for international travelers to Belize include diseases carried by insects, ingested in food or water, those acquired through person-to-person contact, those acquired by prolonged swimming (Snorkeling or diving)

or over exposure to the heat and sun. *The Cooperative Center for Study Abroad (CCSA) strongly recommends that each individual student review the following information with his/her personal physician prior to making personal health care decisions.*

## **VACCINATION RECOMMENDATIONS**

The National Center for Infectious Diseases of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (<http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/destinationBelize.aspx>) recommends the following vaccines for travelers to Belize.

For maximum protection, vaccines should be given 4–6 weeks prior to trip departure.

Hepatitis A - or immune globulin (IG)

Hepatitis B

Typhoid - particularly if you are visiting developing countries in this region.

Influenza - Exists year-round in tropical areas

Rabies - is usually not recommended before short trips, however... Do not touch or feed any animals, including dogs and cats. Even animals that look like healthy pets can have rabies or other diseases. If you are bitten or scratched, wash the wound well with soap and water and go to a doctor immediately.

Routine Vaccinations should be up to date - As needed, booster doses for tetanus-diphtheria-pertussis (Tdap), measles, mumps and Rubella (MMR), chickenpox (Varicella) and polio vaccine for adults.

## **MALARIA RECOMMENDATIONS**

Malaria, considered a health risk in Belize, is caused by a parasite carried in the saliva of some mosquitoes. Malaria may be prevented by using antimalarial drugs and by using protective measures to avoid insect bites. You should purchase your antimalarial drugs before you leave the U.S.

Malaria symptoms, which include fever and flu-like illness, will occur at least 7-9 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito. Although any fever developing while traveling should be evaluated, it would be especially important to have prompt evaluation if a fever develops a week after visiting a high-risk area. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, travelers to Belize, should take one of the following antimalarial drugs:

Atovaquone and Proguanil HCL (Malarone)

Chloroquine (Aralen <sup>TM</sup>)

Doxycycline

Mefloquine HCL (Lariam)

Because choosing the best antimalarial drug is not the same for every traveler and because antimalarial drugs need to be initiated prior to arriving in a high-risk area, it is important to discuss this with your doctor or a travel health specialist at least a month prior to your trip. Although there is no risk for malaria in Belize City, for adequate prevention, it is important to begin the medication at the prescribed time and not break the course of pills during the trip.

## **OTHER DISEASE CARRIED BY INSECTS**

A variety of diseases carried by insects occur in this region. Protecting yourself against insect bites will help to prevent these diseases. Dengue fever outbreaks have increased in tropical countries and is an acute febrile illness with common symptoms including headache, muscle aches, joint pain, and rash. The rash usually appears as the fever subsides and lasts 2–4 days. Other signs and symptoms include flushed skin (usually during the first 24–48 hours), nausea, and vomiting. A small percentage develop a more serious form of Dengue including internal bleeding.

The population of sand flies is high on the islands and coastal regions of Belize. Typically the bite of the sand fly results in a small, red lesion that does not itch. However, some individuals may experience more widespread irritation with redness, localized swelling and itching. In addition, leishmaniasis, a parasitic disease transmitted by the bite of some species of sand flies could potentially result. The disease may manifest as either a cutaneous (skin) form or a visceral (internal organ) form. Although not specifically identified in Belize, it does occur in many countries in Latin and Central America and the Caribbean. Prevention is directed at reducing contact with sand flies. Although sand flies are primarily night time biters, disturbance of resting sand flies

during the day may result in bites. Sand fly activity may frequently go unnoticed because the sand fly is noiseless.

## **PREVENTION OF INSECT BITES**

The first line of defense against malaria, dengue fever and leishmaniasis, which are transmitted by insects, is to avoid getting bitten. Bites can occur during the daytime or night, therefore, it is important to protect against bites around the clock. Guidelines to prevent insect bites include:

1. Wear appropriate clothing; minimize exposure of the skin. Clothing should cover as much of the body as possible and be tolerable to the climate.
2. Permethrin can be used to treat outer clothing, shoes, tents, mosquito nets, and other gear to enhance protection. Clothing can be treated prior to trip.
3. Avoid using fragrant soaps, wearing perfume, or using aftershave that may attract insects.
4. Apply insect repellents containing a concentration of 30-35% DEET to exposed skin.
5. Use enough repellent to cover exposed skin or clothing. Do not apply repellent to skin that is under clothing. Heavy application is not necessary to achieve protection.
6. Do not apply repellent to cuts, wounds, or irritated skin.
7. After returning indoors, wash treated skin with soap and water.
8. Do not spray aerosol or pump products in enclosed areas; do not breathe in or spray products directly to the face. Spray your hands and then rub them carefully over the face, avoiding eyes and mouth.
10. If one or more skin sores (may be either painless or painful) develop even weeks to months after potential exposure to the bite of a sand fly the participant should consult with a physician for evaluation and treatment. When using a repellent with DEET, you should always use and reapply according to the label directions.

## **TRAVELERS' DIARRHEA & OTHER DISEASES CARRIED BY FOOD & WATER**

An episode of travelers' diarrhea usually begins abruptly during travel or soon after returning home. Usual duration is 4 days if untreated. Taking along an antimotility medication, such as loperamide as well as oral rehydration solution is strongly recommended to reduce cramps, duration and fluid loss. Your physician or travel health specialist can also prescribe an antibiotic for you take for treatment of travelers' diarrhea. Other diseases caused by organisms in food or water are cholera, typhoid fever, and hepatitis A can be the most serious of these illnesses. It is imperative that participants adhere to the guidelines found in the Health Questions and Answers for Participants to ensure food and drinking water are safe.

## **DISEASES ACQUIRED THROUGH PERSON-TO-PERSON CONTACT**

The prevalence of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) that causes AIDS and chronic Hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection is present in Belize (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). The most frequent mode of transmission for both viruses is through sexual activity with an infected individual. It is highly recommended that any contact or exchange of semen, blood, or vaginal fluids be avoided. Participants should either abstain from sexual activity entirely or practice safe sex measures. Latex condoms should be used for any sexual encounters. Review the Health Questions and Answers for additional information regarding HIV and HBV. Any contact with blood or body fluids from an individual whose HIV and HBV status is unknown should be avoided. If contact with blood or body fluids may occur, universal precautions, which include wearing of disposable gloves, should be practiced. Thorough hand-washing with an alcohol-based hand hygiene product after exposure should be practiced.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES & HEALTH**

### **Swimmer's Ear (Otitis externa)**

Swimmer's ear is an infection of the ear canal which is usually caused by different types of bacteria or fungi. It is common in individuals who spend a lot of time in the water. The excessive moisture in the ear can cause the skin to break down, allowing the bacteria or fungi to enter. The main symptom is ear pain which is worse when the earlobe or other exterior part of the ear is touched or moved. If the ear can be wiggled without pain then the ear infection is probably not Swimmer's Ear.

#### Prevention:

1. After spending time in the water, dry the ear with a towel and allow the water to drain by turning the head to the side. Q-tips are not recommended as they can cause damage to the skin of the ear canal, allowing bacteria to enter.
2. If you are susceptible to swimmer's ear, use a drying agent every time you go swimming. Commercially available alcohol-based products for swimmer's ear are available at your local drugstore to be purchased and brought with you or:
  - a. A squirt of rubbing alcohol. First, put your head down, with the affected ear up. Pull the ear upward and backward (to help straighten the canal) and squeeze a dropperful of alcohol into the ear canal. Wiggle your ear to get the alcohol to the bottom of the canal. Then tilt your head to the other side and let the alcohol drain out.
  - b. A kitchen solution. Eardrops of white vinegar or equal parts of alcohol and white vinegar will kill fungus and bacteria. Use it the same way you would alcohol.
3. Wear earplugs to keep the water out. Wax or silicone plugs that can be softened and shaped to fit your ear are available at most drugstores.

#### Swimmer's Itch

Swimmer's itch is a form of contact dermatitis which may be the result of exposure to a cyanobacteria (found in algae) or parasites that reside in water. Typically the localized symptoms may appear as a patchy red pinpoint skin rash associated with itching. The rash could develop into blisters 24-48 hours after exposure. Although, occurring rarely, systemic symptoms include fever, muscle aches and a poison ivy-like rash.

#### Prevention:

1. Keep exposed skin covered with an oily substance (sun tan lotion; baby oil) while in water.
2. Rinse off with fresh water as soon as possible after exposure.
3. Cyanobacteria is a lipid based toxin that can stick to clothing. Don't wear contaminated clothing over without washing.

#### Treatment:

Treatment focuses on symptom relief and depends on the severity of the skin rash. Topical agents such as anti-inflammatory agents (Cortisone; Benadryl), anti-itch agents (Benadryl) and drying agents (Caladryl; Calamine) may be helpful. Itching should be controlled as extensive scratching can cause damage to the skin and allow a skin infection to develop. Medical evaluation is encouraged if symptoms do not subside after 3-4 days, a skin infection develops or the individual develops systemic symptoms.

#### Over Exposure to Heat and Sun

Belize is located in tropical climates. Therefore, health risks associated with the heat and sun exposure are greater than in the continental United States. It is critical that the participant take precautions to protect against dehydration and/or heat exhaustion. Young and healthy individuals can succumb to heat if they participate in strenuous physical activities during hot weather. People can reduce their risk for heat-related illness by frequently drinking water or nonalcoholic fluids; wearing lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing; and reducing or eliminating strenuous activities or doing them during cooler parts of the day.

#### Important Tips To Remember:

1. Drink more fluids (nonalcoholic), regardless of your activity level. Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink. Remember to drink fluids that are safe.
2. Don't drink liquids that contain caffeine, alcohol, or large amounts of sugar—these actually cause you to lose more body fluid. Also, avoid very cold drinks, because they can cause stomach cramps.
3. If you are involved in strenuous activity (hiking, etc.) drink two to four glasses of cool, nonalcoholic fluids each hour. A sports beverage can replace the salt and minerals you lose in sweat.
4. Try to rest often in shady areas.
5. Protect yourself from the sun by wearing a wide-brimmed hat (also keeps you cooler) and sun-glasses and by putting on sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher (the most effective products say "broad spectrum" or "UVA/UVB protection" on their labels). Reapply sunscreen on a regular basis. Apply to all exposed skin areas.

#### References:

American Osteopathic College of Dermatology (<http://aocd.org/>)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (website provided above)  
MD Travel Health (<http://mdtravelhealth.com/>)

## **MONEY AND EXTRA EXPENSES-**

Participants should budget approximately \$200 - \$300 for *pre-departure* vaccinations and medications. Additionally, approximately \$150 should be budgeted for textbooks and other required course materials.

All meals and course-related activities are included in the program price; however, students may wish to bring \$200 - \$250 for personal expenses such as snacks, drinks souvenirs, etc. This amount is entirely dependent upon each student's spending habits. Be certain to take enough extra money to cover your spending; it would be wise to establish a budget for these optional expenses.

The Belize dollar (BZ\$) is tied to the US dollar at a rate of BZ\$2 to US\$1. Notes come in denominations of 2, 5, 10, 20 50 and 100 (bluenote) dollars. Coins come in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 25 (shilling), 50 cents and 1 dollar. The currency of Guatemala is the the Guatemalan Quetzal; currently there are @ 7-8 Quetzals to a US dollar. You may find it helpful to take a pocket calculator to convert currency exchanges.

Given that most meals are provided for the duration of the program and that prices for snacks and purchases are generally relatively inexpensive, it is not recommended that participants exchange more than perhaps \$50-100 at a time. Generally, it is recommended that cash rather than credit cards be used in making purchases.

Perhaps the best advice when determining how best to exchange money is: Don't rely on one method. A combination of cash, traveler's checks, and credit card seems to work best. Have backup traveler's checks in case the cards cannot be used. You should not hesitate to take some traveler's checks in U.S. dollars since the local banks will readily cash them for you for a fee. Keep a list of the serial numbers of your traveler's checks in a safe and separate place so that you can identify them for a refund should they be lost or stolen. It's important to keep traveler's checks in a waterproof pouch, as they are considered void if they get wet.

Before you leave the U.S., exchange enough cash (approximately \$100 for Belize, \$50 for Guatemala) to pay incidentals, such as snacks, for the first day or two. You can exchange money at larger banks, some airports and websites such as [www.foreignmoney.com](http://www.foreignmoney.com) (CCSA does not endorse this agency).

Banks in Belize are generally open Monday through Thursday from 8:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. and Friday, 8:00 am. – 4:00 p.m.; hours may vary by bank and destination. Banking hours are longer in Guatemala. **Note: It is not possible to access U.S. bank accounts through automated teller machines in Belize. Travelers can obtain cash advances from local banks, Monday through Friday, using major international credit cards or traveler's checks.**

Most hotels, resorts, restaurants, tour operators and shops will accept U.S. currency, traveler's checks or credit cards (MasterCard and Visa; American Express is not accepted widely in either country). When using your credit cards in Belize, most establishments will add a 5% service charge to your bill. Always make sure you understand which dollar rate – Belize or U.S. dollars - is being quoted.

Remember to tell your card issuer that you will be traveling, and ask about fees, daily limits, and other possible pitfalls. Ask your bank for assurance (in writing) that your card and password **will** be accepted in Belize. CCSA suggests that you also verify that your ATM card is **NOT** a debit card. Debit cards can be used without entering a password and, hence, present an even greater risk if stolen. Also, should you have an alphabetic PIN, familiarize yourself with the corresponding keypad numbers, as alphabetic characters do not always appear on keypads world-wide.

As there is always potential for credit card fraud, be sure to exercise due caution in the use and handling of your credit cards at all times. It is important to be aware that in both countries, credit card receipts still often print your full credit card number on the receipt, making it good practice to try to ensure that your credit card never leaves your line of sight, that you gather and safeguard your receipts, and that where possible you pay with cash rather than via credit card. You may wish to check with the bank that issued your card for information and advice concerning proper safeguards and methods of reporting misuse. You should also get a 24-hour emergency telephone number to call – not an 800 number since they do not work when calling from Britain – of the bank that issued your credit card so you can cancel it in the event it is stolen. We also suggest keeping a copy of any credit cards you are taking with you in case they are lost or stolen. Make sure you have signed the back of your credit card before you depart the U.S.

**Most importantly, don't wait until the last minute to consider your financial needs.**

### **SHOPPING & GOODS AND SERVICES TAX (GST)-**

On July 1, 2006, a new 10% Goods and Services Tax (GST) went into effect in Belize. The GST will apply to most goods and services, including some real estate transactions and all hotel and tourism charges. Exceptions are certain food items, including rice, flour, bread, fresh fruits and vegetables, chicken, and fish.

The GST is similar to a value added tax in that the tax will be included in the price of goods and service before purchases, rather than added on at the sales point at time of purchase.

Remember to keep your receipts; when you come home, you may have to list everything and its price for customs.

### **HOLIDAY INFORMATION-**

Commonwealth Day, May 24, is observed as a holiday in Belize and, consequently, banks will be closed.

### **TIPPING GUIDE-**

In Belize, restaurants do not add service charges, which frequently replace tipping at other popular vacation destinations. Diners are therefore encouraged to tip servers between 10-15% of the total bill. Wait staff at smaller, inexpensive restaurants generally expect only 10%. But tip more if you receive exceptional service. Tipping should reflect your evaluation of the services received and may fluctuate accordingly.

Upscale hotels and resorts may add a 10% service charge to guests' bills. This gratuity goes to the bellhop, maid, and porter who assisted you. Additional tipping is not required. If your bill does not show this surcharge or you feel staffers have gone out of their way to accommodate you, then definitely leave a tip of several dollars to express your gratitude.

### **ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES-**

Although most of the electricity is provided by diesel/generator sets, the power is stable at 110 volts A.C., which is the same as in the United States. Electricity is limited at all sites. **Use of electric curlers or blow dryers is not permitted, and use of electrical razors is discouraged.**

### **CLASSES-**

Your class will meet several times per week. Some lectures will be held in a classroom setting. Other informal lectures will take place as you travel.

Information used in this handbook was taken from various websites: U.S. Department of State, Island Expeditions, Government of Belize, Belize Report, Belize Tourism Board, LowTax.net, and Belize.com.



## SUGGESTED PACKING CHECKLIST-

You will be staying at field stations run by International Zoological Expeditions (IZE). They have provided the following checklist of items to pack. Items marked by an \* are an "absolute must". The field stations are located in remote areas. There will be **no** opportunities to purchase personal items or clothing while at these field stations, and you should not count on opportunities to purchase items while in transit between stations. **Pack everything you will need!**

### Clothes

Trousers: 1 or 2 pair (zip-out legs are best; nylon is best since it dries rapidly)	Shorts: 5-7 pair (nylon best)
Underwear (cotton is best)	Shirts (at least one long-sleeve)
Socks (cotton is best)	Sturdy hiking boots (NOT LEATHER)
Sneakers for walking in water (NOT LEATHER)	Sneakers for normal use
Sandals	Poncho or rain jacket
Hat (for protection from sun)	Bandannas: 4
Lycra running pants or dive skins (if sensitive to the sun or cold)	Bathing suits: minimum of 2
Towels: 4	Washcloths: 4
Shower shoes	Robe/cover-up
Lightweight jacket	Beach towel

### Medicine and Toiletries (pack all toiletries in zip-lock plastic bags; no curling irons or blow dryers)

Soap (liquid; biodegradable)	Shampoo/rinse/conditioner
Shaving gear ( <b>disposable razor - not in carry-on</b> )	Comb/brush
Toothbrush/toothpaste/floss	Small mirror
Deodorant	Quick clean wipes
Prescription medicines	Swim ear drops or peroxide
Waterless alcohol-based/antibacterial hand sanitizer	Disposable thermometer strips
Kleenex	Sanitary napkins/tampons
Over the counter medications (in original containers)	Band-aids
Hydrogen peroxide and rubbing alcohol	Benadryl
Aspirin	Anti-diarrhea medicine
Anti-fungal medicine for athlete's foot	

### Equipment

Light sleeping bag or 2 sets of sheets/pillow cases*	2 Underwater flashlights* or headlamps with extra batteries
Zip-lock/plastic bags for wet clothes (whole box)*	Mask, fins and snorkel*
Sunscreen—SPF 15+ (don't underestimate the danger)**	Canteen or water bottle*
Sunglasses*	Disposable underwater camera
Photo equipment/extra film	Mosquito netting*
Insect repellent (get 30 % or higher DEET available)	Binoculars
Leather gloves for climbing	Booties or heavy socks
Clothesline rope & clothes pins (to dry clothes)	Mesh bag (to hang wet clothes in)
Pocket knife ( <b>not in carry-on</b> )	Alarm clock (battery operated)/battery
Back pack/carry all bag	Diary/journal and pen
Sewing kit ( <b>no scissors in carry on</b> )	Notebook for class
Radio/ipod/mp3 player/headphones/batteries	Dive gloves or cotton work gloves
Pocket guide/maps for Belize	

### Important things to carry on the plane with you

<b>PASSPORT/VISA* (make copies and keep separate)</b>	Plane ticket*
Local currency (~\$100)	Credit card
Traveler's checks (keep receipts separate)	Prescriptions/medicine
Glasses/contact lenses/solutions	Reading material
Snacks (crackers, cookies, dried fruits, trail mix, etc. – avoid milk-based items since they spoil)	Money belt
Flashlight and rain gear in carryon luggage	

**REMINDER: Keep your airline ticket and passport in a safe place. You will need them to return home.**