



British
High Commission
Belmopan

BELIZE

BEREAVEMENT PACK/INFORMATION

Prepared by British High Commission, Belmopan

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BEREAVEMENT INFORMATION

The death of a relative or friend is normally a traumatic experience, but if it happens abroad, the distress can be made worse by practical problems and the uncertainty of what to do next or whom to contact for advice.

The Consular Directorate of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and our High Commission in Belize are ready to help in any way that we can. You should be aware that the Belizean procedures and facilities differ significantly to those in the United Kingdom and that, while we understand your need for arrangements to be made quickly, this will not always be possible.

STANDARD PROCEDURES

The police are normally notified when the death of a foreign national occurs, but we are seldom notified as promptly as we would like.

Following the death of a British National in Belize, the next of kin or a formally appointed representative must decide whether to:

- Repatriate the deceased to the UK, or
- Have a local burial, or
- Have a local cremation and the ashes repatriated to the UK or
- Have a local cremation and the ashes scattered in Belize.

If the deceased was covered by travel insurance, it is important for the next of kin to contact the insurance company without delay. If there is no insurance cover, the cost of repatriation or burial will need to be met by the family. Neither the Foreign and Commonwealth Office nor the British High Commission in Belmopan has a budget to meet these costs.

If the next of kin is in the UK, they will be able to liaise directly with our colleagues in Consular Directorate in London, informing them of how they wish to proceed with the burial arrangements and details of who is taking responsibility for the costs involved.

It is important to remember that if the deceased was travelling with a tour operator, they can be a valuable source of assistance and advice.

DEATH FROM NATURAL CAUSES

If the person who died was travelling with a tour company, the company will often contact the next of kin. If the death of a British national in Belize is reported to us, and you are not present, we will ask the UK police to tell you as soon as possible. If you are not in the UK, we will ask our consular staff in the country where you are to do this. We will do everything we can to make sure that, as the next of kin, you do not hear about the death first from the media although we cannot always influence this. In exceptional circumstances, this may mean having to tell you about the death over the phone.

DEATH IN SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES

As well as the support we can offer if someone dies from natural causes, where there is evidence of suspicious circumstances, we can suggest the best way to raise concerns with the local authorities.

We can also offer basic information about the local police and legal system. We can provide you with a list of [local lawyers](#) and, where possible, details of support groups. In all cases where you, as next of kin, have concerns about the circumstances surrounding the death, we suggest you get professional legal advice.

We cannot investigate deaths and, in many countries, investigating authorities and the courts may refuse to answer enquiries including from British consular staff. In these circumstances, it is very important to consider appointing a local lawyer who can look after your interests in court and follow any trial for you.

We will consider making appropriate representations to the local authorities if there are concerns that the investigation is not being carried out in line with local procedures; if there are justified complaints about discrimination against the deceased or their family; or where we judge that a local delay or decision creates significant distress for the bereaved, ensuring that we do not interfere in the investigation or judicial processes in Belize.

Your choices:

The first step should be to appoint a Funeral Director. The last page of this information pack contains a list of national and international funeral directors in Belize.

REPATRIATION

The repatriation of remains to another country lies under mortuaries' or funeral directors' responsibility. If the deceased is covered by travel insurance, the insurance company will normally have a standing agreement with an international funeral director in the UK to arrange repatriation.

If the deceased is not covered by insurance, it is the next of kin's responsibility to appoint either a local or international funeral director to make the necessary arrangements for repatriation. A list of [funeral directors in Belize](#) is available on our website.

Local Funeral Directors are equipped to carry out repatriation procedures and should be able to arrange a locally registered death certificate, a certificate of embalming, and a certificate giving permission to transfer the deceased to the UK, which are all requirements for repatriation.

Locally issued certificates are in English and therefore translations are not necessary. The time taken for repatriation can depend on availability of cargo space on international airlines and local bureaucratic formalities.

LOCAL CREMATION

Funeral Directors can help with arranging the cremation. A local death certificate, a letter from Next of Kin giving permission to cremate, copy of the deceased's passport and passport are required in order to carry out the cremation. If the next of kin chooses to have a local cremation and take back the ashes to the UK, they can do so with minimum bureaucracy. The local undertaker will be able to arrange the necessary paperwork and certificates for the return of the ashes to the UK. It is advised that enquiries are made with the carrying airline concerning any procedure that may be in place.

LOCAL BURIAL

A private burial can be arranged through a local undertaker who can apply on your behalf to the Local Authorities for permission to burial in the local cemetery. A fee will be charged for this service.

If private funds are not forthcoming or a next of kin cannot be identified within a certain period, the local mortuary will look to undertake a pauper's burial on behalf of the state.

Things you need to know

MORTUARY STORAGE

The body will normally be held at a local hospital mortuary. Standards of storage vary. There are facilities with temperature controlled storage, but in rural areas, this may not be available. Although we will do everything we can to ensure the deceased is placed in appropriate storage, we cannot guarantee the condition of the body. We can arrange for the next of kin to view the deceased but you should be aware that conditions can be different to the UK.

Mortuary Facilities

Each regional hospital in Belize has a morgue but the cold storage facility is very basic.

Hospital	Telephone Number
Northern Regional Hospital	+ 501 322 2072
Orange Walk Town	+ 501 322 0871
Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital	+ 501 223 1548
Belize City	+ 501 223 1564
	+ 501 223 1593
	+ 501 223 1639
Western Regional Hospital	+ 501 822 2263
Belmopan	+ 501 822 2264
Southern Regional Hospital	+ 501 522 3832
Dangriga	+ 501 522 3833

AUTOPSIES (POST MORTEM)

A Post Mortem will be conducted when there is a doubt as to how the deceased died. If the death occurs in the presence of a doctor, then a Post Mortem may not be necessary.

Autopsies are carried out by appointed certified forensic doctors / pathologists. This can happen without the authorisation of the next of kin and may take place as soon as the deceased reaches the morgue. However, the authorities may be able to accommodate any special request made by the next of kin.

During an autopsy, organs and/or tissues can be removed for testing, including toxicological studies, at the discretion of the pathologist without the consent of the next of kin. We understand that this can be upsetting and we will do everything that we can to keep you informed and prepare you. Please also note that forensic analysis such as toxicology testing can take up to two years pending an accurate cause of death and completion of the post mortem report.

Any removed organ will be disposed of if the family does not make a request in writing for their return. However, if the organs are suspected to be infected with a contagious disease, they would usually be incinerated and it would be rare for approval to be granted.

The autopsy report is usually available after the post mortem is carried out. The next of kin can request directly to the morgue or by writing to the Consulate and we can request an autopsy report on your behalf. In some instances we have experienced great delays in getting the autopsy report. Some pathologists will charge for carrying out an autopsy.

INQUESTS

The police take the lead on investigations into deaths as a result of road traffic accidents or under suspicious circumstances and a Coroner's Inquest will be carried out in the Magistrate Court in the zone in which the death occurred.

The next of kin may obtain a copy of the report by making a formal request to the Police which may sometimes need to be done through a privately commissioned local lawyer.

If the circumstances of the death were not unusual, identification and registration of the death is permitted and the body will be released for repatriation or cremation within a few days. However, if the police are not satisfied after a preliminary examination of the facts, an autopsy may be required.

In cases of sudden or unexpected death whether by accident or misadventure or where a person dies unattended, the police will prepare an initial report of their findings. If the death was caused by

a criminal act, the police will conduct an investigation. It will then be the decision of the Department of Public Prosecution whether to prosecute. This could result in a delay of the release of the body.

UK CORONERS

When a body is repatriated to England or Wales, a coroner will hold an inquest only if the death was violent or unnatural, or if the death was sudden and the cause unknown or the cause was not listed on the death certificate. Coroners do not generally have access to judicial files from other countries; consequently they may order a post-mortem as part of the inquest.

Coroners can request copies of post-mortem and police reports from the Belize authorities via the FCO in London. However, these are sometimes only provided once any judicial proceeding has been completed. In some instances this can be a lengthy process.

In Scotland, the Scottish Executive is the responsible authority. However, they are not obliged to hold an inquest into the cause of death. Coroners in Northern Ireland are also not obliged to hold an inquest into cause of death. However, the next of kin can apply for a judicial review if no inquest is held.

RELEASE OF INFORMATION

Obtaining information concerning a death other than post-mortem and police reports can be restricted. Requests for this information should be made through a legal representative. Please see our lists of local lawyers if you would like more information.

CLOTHING AND PERSONAL BELONGINGS

The deceased's clothing is normally destroyed during the post mortem examination. If death was as a result of foul play, the clothing may be retained as evidence and not returned until the court case is finished.

Personal belongings found on the deceased at the time of death are either handed over to the family if they are present, or taken by the police to be handed over to the court.

The British High Commission does not take responsibility for repatriating the deceased's personal possessions. The Next of Kin should make arrangements for the return of personal effects and assets pertaining to their estate. Please see our list of local lawyers.

REGISTRATION OF THE DEATH

As Belize is a member of the Commonwealth, only a local death certificate will be issued. The British High Commission does not undertake to register the death of a British national in Belize.

It is mandatory that any death occurring in Belize must be registered with the Belize Vital Statistics Unit within one month of the death occurring. At the time of registering the death, you may apply for a copy of the registration.

The Vital Statistics Unit

25 Gabourel Lane

Belize City

Tel: +501 223 7405 or 223 5625

Email: vitalstatsbz@yahoo.com

A medical doctor will certify the death of your loved one and will give you a "Medical Death Certificate". You will need to provide documents from yourself and the person who died which show your names, dates of birth and passport details. You will also have to inform the local authorities if the person suffered from an infectious condition such as hepatitis or HIV, so they are prepared when dealing with the body.

Local death certificates may be issued within 24 hours of death. If an autopsy is needed, the death certificate will only be issued after the initial forensic report. Once a local death certificate is obtained, the next of kin may apply for a death certificate in the UK. More information is available on our website: <https://www.gov.uk/register-a-death/y/overseas>

BRITISH PASSPORT CANCELLATION

In order to avoid identity fraud, a deceased person's passport along with form D01 should be sent to the British High Commission for cancellation. The next of kin can request the passport to be returned. Likewise if the passport has been lost or mislaid, relatives should contact us for instructions on reporting the loss of the passport.

LEGAL AID

Consular staff cannot give legal advice, but they can provide you with a list of lawyers should you wish to approach them for services. The British High Commission cannot pay legal fees or give a

guarantee to a lawyer that you will pay them. A list of English-speaking lawyers in Belize is available on our website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/list-of-lawyers>

COMPENSATION

Belize does not operate a Local Compensation Scheme for Victims of Crimes.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL FUNERAL DIRECTORS

** Please note that the listing of the companies below does not represent FCO endorsement of their services.*

Coye's Funeral Home

74 Freetown Road

Belize City

+ 501 224 4330/0274

coyesfuneralhome@btl.net

Homeland Developments Ltd

Freetown/Slaughterhouse Road

Belize City

+501 223 5513

Lamb Family Funerals

15 Nargusta Street

Belize City

+ 501 626 5732

La Nueva Funeraria Moderna

11 4th Avenue

Corozal Town

+501 422 2976

For a list of International Funeral Directors, please see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-funeral-directors-in-the-uk>