



Safe Restart of Cruise Operations in Belize

Health and Safety Protocols • 2021 Volume 1

Honorable Anthony

Mahler:

Minister of Tourism and Diaspora

Relations



Dear Tourism Stakeholders,

“ As we move forward with the vaccination of our tourism industry and Cruise Line partners gear up to sail in the Caribbean, there seems to be some light at the end of the tunnel for reopening of the cruise industry. The outlook appears much more positive than it has for the past year.

It is vital that we are adequately prepared for the return of our guests, and the key to our success lies in developing a strategic framework to ensure a safe and secure experience for passengers, crew and the destination. On this premise, Belize has developed its cruise re-opening protocols based on international best practices used in Europe and Asia where hundreds of thousands of cruise passengers have enjoyed safe sailing.

We look forward to welcoming cruise passengers back to our shores and we are confident that Belize's diverse attractions and rich culture will ensure a remarkable experience for our guests. It is with great enthusiasm that I present to you the first edition of the "Safe Restart of Cruise Operations in Belize: Health and Safety Protocols.

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Abbreviations and Definitions

ABBREVIATIONS

- **MTDR**- Ministry of Tourism and Diaspora Relations
- **BTB**- Belize Tourism Board
- **MOHW**- Ministry of Health and Wellness
- **BPA**- Belize Port Authority
- **CDC**-Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- **CLIA**- Cruise Lines International Association
- **FCCA**- Florida Caribbean Cruise Association
- **IMO**- International Maritime Organization
- **PPE**- Personal Protective Equipment
- **FSTV**- Fort Street Tourism Village
- **HC**- Harvest Caye
- **PCR test**- Polymerase Chain Reaction
- **MDH**- Maritime Declaration of Health
- **PLF**-Passenger Locator Form



DEFINITIONS

- **COVID-19**- Corona virus disease that is caused by the SARS-COV-2 virus and its variants.
- **Cruise Ship**- passenger ship employed in the carriage of passengers primarily on international voyages.
- **Cruise passenger**- passenger arriving in Belize from a foreign port and leaving Belize within 24 hours after arrival in the same cruise ship vessel by which they arrived.
- **Crew**- all employees of a foreign cruise ship
- **Schedule**- confirmed itinerary schedule of cruise ship expected arrival date, departure date, estimated passengers, ship name and port of call done with BTB via shipping agent.
- **Contracted Operator**- Licensed tour operator that has a direct contract with cruise lines to sell shore excursions
- **Independent Operator**- Licensed operator that sell shore excursions to cruise passengers independently.
- **Bubble**- This is a safe corridor identified as part of phased reopening approach for cruise that has ensured that all health and safety protocols are being met to mitigate spread of virus.
- **Shipping Agent**- licensed company that engages with cruise lines to facilitate operations to enter Belize and while in Belize.
- **Boarding Crew**- all Government entities that must board the Cruise ship for all necessary clearances prior to allowing disembarkation.



Objective

The objective of the Health and Safety Protocols is to help restart cruise operations in Belize safely. These guidelines outline the collaboration between cruise lines and the destination to implement health protocols and procedures which will charter the sector to reopen safely.



Introduction

Over the past four years, Belize has welcomed over 1 million cruise passengers annually to its shores. In 2019, prior to the pandemic, Belize received almost 1.2 million passengers with 68% of travelers stopping at Fort Street Tourism Village in the city and 32% stopping at Harvest Caye in the south. While 2020 aimed to be another great year, the no sail ban implemented by the CDC brought about a significant financial loss and devastating blow to employment in Belize.

In an effort to restart cruise operations, the Belize Cruise Taskforce has been collaborating with the Americas Cruise Taskforce and the Central American Cruise Subcommittee to develop destination specific Health and Safety Protocols in line with the conditional sail order, in addition to the guidance from the Healthy Sail Panel Recommendations and from consultations with local stakeholders.

As a result, these protocols outline the necessary adjustments and adaptations to be undertaken at each step of the cruise cycle from home port, to destination and return. It is crucial that all local stakeholders are trained to ensure that all protocols are being implemented to mitigate any possible spread of the COVID-19. The plan also outlines a phased approach for the reopening of the cruise industry to ensure Belize is in line with the requirements stipulated by the CDC. The Government of Belize ensures to work towards a full recovery of the cruise industry to Pre-Covid arrivals and enhance the product to become more competitive within the region.

Health and Safety Protocols for the Restart of Cruise Tourism

Overall, the reopening of cruise tourism will require changes in various operations and adjustments to meet enhanced health and safety protocols on cruise ships, ports, local sites, and transportation. The Health and Safety Protocols was prepared based on the four stages of the cruise travel experience outlined below:



1. Prior to Arrival

a. Scheduling

- US and Non- US Home Ports- the ship agent must submit a request for approval from BPA for a vessel to sail to Belize. They will be required to provide proof that each vessel meets all health and safety protocols on board such as social distancing upgrades to facilities, increased sanitizing stations, proper signage, enhanced technologies to reduce contact, and any other adjustments to sail safely.
- On multiple ship days at port, the arrival times of ships should be scheduled with staggered disembarkation to alleviate any potential congestion. The number of ships permitted to anchor must be limited upon reopening and then gradually increased as the vaccinations increase, cruise ship sailing experience increase and minimum community spread prevails/remains.

b. Capacities

- All ship capacities must be limited to the available square footage of the ship that will allow sufficient social distancing in all public areas.
- Capacities on ships can increase based on the progression of vaccinations and the rate of Covid within the populations at the ship's home port destinations and destinations on the itinerary.

1. Prior to Arrival

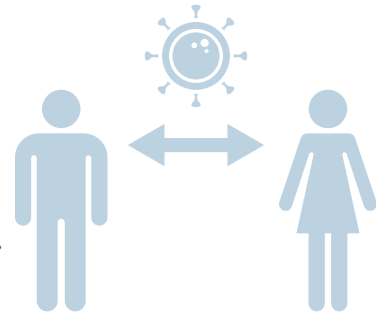
c. Testing and Health screening

- A PCR test or rapid antigen test should be provided or taken by all passengers within 72 hours prior to embarkation at the Home Port in addition to a secondary testing to all passengers should be done on the day of embarkation with below approved rapid antigen tests:
 - Abott (Panbio)
 - SD Biosensor
- Cruise passengers who can provide a vaccination card of full doses received 2 weeks prior to travel are no longer required to provide a negative test.
- All crew members will be required to take a mandatory PCR test prior to boarding and must quarantine for 10 days. Prior to starting duties, crew should be retested with a negative result from a rapid test. Crew embarking at other destinations must follow the same guidelines. Crew members can reference Annex 1 for airport arrival procedures in Belize.
- All cruise passengers and crew members boarding the ship must undergo a health screening to identify any symptoms consistent with Covid-19 or any other infectious diseases.
- Any cruise passenger or crew member that tests positive must be denied boarding.
- All crew members and passengers must be screened and monitored throughout the voyage with periodic testing for crew and testing for symptomatic passengers/ crew to provide a reasonable level of assurance that the virus is not circulating on board.

1. Prior to Arrival

d. General adjustments to enhance safety on board

- Only BPA approved ships will be allowed to sail into Belize.
- Ships must have enhanced medical capacity on board:
 1. Increase medical capacity of medical personal to guest/crew ratios to ensure preparedness for potential Covid-19 cases. (Reference Healthy Sail Plan for capacity recommendations)
 2. Increase the number of quarantine rooms, and necessary medical resources for treatment of any potential cases of crew and passengers.
 3. Develop a treatment plan with shore side operations.
 4. Establish an agreement with the port and local health authorities for transporting of critical passengers/crew to a designated health facility.



e. Communication and tracking of Health cases on board

- Ship agents must ensure to submit the Maritime Declaration of Health (MDH) within 24 hours prior to arrival, with updated communication minimum 1 night before arrival that should include the number of persons on board, any confirmed Covid-19 cases, the number of possible cases based on PLF.
- PLF must be completed with all close contacts identified from each positive case and they must all remain on board. Any passenger or crew with low risk exposure will still be required to complete the PLF and be monitored for symptoms over the next 14 days.
- Cruise line must also share decisions taken by member countries on the itinerary of the respective ship.
- Note the section on positive case for further guidelines.
- Communicate to all crew members and passengers the local protocols, laws and regulations which they must abide by while in Belize.



1. Prior to Arrival

f. Prior to disembarkation of Cruise Passengers and Crew

- Book tours with Gold Standard Tour Operators to remain within the approved bubble for the respective phased reopening.
- BTB will liaise with respective Tour Operators and cruise stakeholders as the bubble phase is expanded.



2. Upon Entry

g. Boarding for clearance for disembarkation

- Cruise lines will provide access to all Belizean Government entities (utilizing adequate PPE's) to provide ship clearances.
- MOHW will review the Maritime Declaration of Health before issuing green light for Government officers to board the ship.
- All Government officers must abide by the necessary health protocols onboard the ship and wear necessary PPE's.



3. Movement within Belize

h. Tender Operators

- Tender Operators must be Gold Standard-approved transport providers.
- Embarkation and disembarkation of passengers should be managed in an organized manner and should be done in a phased approach to avoid congregation of guests on the pier.
- Prior to boarding a tender vessel, all passengers' temperature should be scanned, any passenger that has a fever should not be allowed to disembark the ship.
- Tender operators should place signage or markers to adequately guide passengers to maintain social distancing requirements of 6 feet between families/ groups not travelling together.
- All passengers hands should be sanitized prior to embarking the tender vessel.
- All passengers and crew members must adhere to mandatory face mask protocol on the tender vessel.
- Tender Operators must provide a manifest of all passengers to BPA.
- Frequent cleaning and sanitization of tender vessels should be carried out throughout each day it is in use.
- Deep cleaning and sanitizing of tender vessels should be done at the end of every day the tender was in use.
- All employees working on a tender vessel should be screened daily for Covid-19 symptoms.



3. Movement within Belize

i. Port

- Mandatory face mask protocol must be adhered to by all passengers, crew, tenants and employees operating within the Port.
- Port managers should install proper signage and markers to adhere to social distancing requirements and should have personnel constantly enforcing these requirements.
- Port managers must install temperature scanners or stations in strategic locations throughout their facilities to constantly monitor passengers, crew, tenants and employees temperature.
- In the case of the Belize City Port (FSTV), the Port Manager will assign each ship a terminal to disembark. On multiple ship days, the ships will be assigned a specific terminal and passengers movements within the port will be restricted to eliminate any cross interaction from passengers of different ships. (Annex 2)
- In the case of Harvest Caye Port, only one vessel will be allowed.
- Port Managers will be required to modify loading areas to ensure that passengers going on tours are properly queued to maintain the social distancing requirement; where possible.
- As the bubble expands, Port Managers should allow Gold Standard Operators to sell tours to passengers on a rotational basis. Tour operators can only take passengers from the same ship to approved Gold Standard Sites.



3. Movement within Belize

i. Port

- Port should ensure all restaurants and gift shops have met Gold Standard certification.
- Security re-entry points to the ports/terminals should be expanded where possible, to prevent long lines and overcrowding of facilities.
- Hand washing and hand sanitizing stations should be installed throughout the facility for use by passengers, crew, tenants and employees.
- The Port should ensure to train tenants and staff on the Ports respective health and safety protocols to ensure they know how to handle symptomatic employees or passengers, the proper use of PPE's, proper cleaning and sanitization procedures, etc.
- Port Manager should ensure to execute sanitization of port facilities (public and tenant areas) at the end of each ship day.
- Reference Port Health and Safety Protocols implemented for reference. Annex 3 FSTV and Annex 4 Harvest Caye.



3. Movement within Belize

j. Shore Excursions

- Only Gold Standard Operators will be allowed to take passengers from the same ship within the approved bubble. During initial return to sailing only verified excursions will be approved to limit exposure in the destinations they visit.
- The BTB will work on developing the bubble alongside Tour Operators and Sites and ensure that all approved excursions meet the Gold Standard certification.
- Loading areas will be assigned to Tour Operators to ensure social distancing requirements are met.



k. Crew Change or disembarkation

- Any crew members arriving through the international airport (Philip Goldson International Airport) will be subject to the Health protocols being required at the time. (Annex 1)
- Any crew members who wishes to disembark will be required to adhere to same protocols outlined for the airport arrival to stay in country.

4. Symptomatic and Positive Covid-19 Cases

l. Symptomatic case

- Any passenger who appears to be symptomatic at the port or while on a tour will be returned to the cruise ship for testing.



m. Confirmed case

- If a passenger tests positive for Covid-19, contact tracing will be carried out and results must be shared with local Health authorities to expand on contact tracing of locals.
- If a passenger needs medical attention, the passenger will disembark and be transported to the designated medical facility depending on the current capacity of resources available in country. The cruise line is responsible for quarantine and medical costs incurred until the passenger can be repatriated home.
- If a passenger is asymptomatic or had contact with a positive case, they should remain isolated on board the ship.
- If a ship has more than 2% (of passenger/crew capacity) positive cases, MOHW will evaluate situation to determine if disembarkation will be permitted.

General Guidelines: Adapting Operations for Safety Best Practices

All establishments operating within the cruise bubble will be required to implement the best practices below:



Hand washing

- Reinforce constant handwashing and proper hygiene with staff and passengers. Hygiene best practices include: not touching the face, cover sneezes and coughs, and no hand shaking.



PPE usage

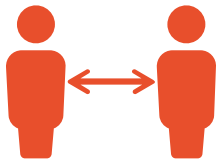
- Mask wearing is mandatory for all staff and passengers.
- Use of gloves should be considered for sanitizing and cleaning personnel.
- Use of PPE should be based on risk exposure of personnel.



Adjust operations

- Readjust employee shifts.
- Provide training to all staff on the response plans to handle symptomatic staff and passengers.
- Provide training to all staff on health and safety protocols that should be utilized prior to and after a work shifts, including the reporting of any symptoms.

General Guidelines: Adapting Operations for Safety Best Practices



Social Distancing

- All establishments should ensure signage and space markers are installed to demarcate a minimum of 6 ft distancing to discourage congregation of crowds.
- Reconfigure seating areas and furniture to allow for social distancing.
- Install physical barriers such as transparent screens to provide proper separation between passengers and staff.



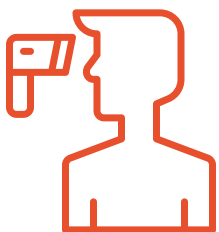
Low touch or touchless solutions

- Implement technology where possible to reduce contact with passengers such as online ticketing, check-in, payment methods, ordering, reviews, etc.



Sanitization

- Install hand sanitizing stations in strategic locations with a minimum of 60% alcohol content.
- Carry out frequent sanitizing of high touch surfaces.
- Ensure there is adequate signage installed for proper sanitizing protocols.



Health Screening procedures

- Implement procedures to monitor the health of staff and passengers.

ANNEXES



1) Airport Arrival Process

- For updated information on entry to Belize



2) Fort Street Tourism Village multiple Ship layout



3) Fort Street Tourism Village Health & Safety Protocols



4) Harvest Caye Health & Safety Protocols

 *click on icons for access to annexes*

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