



Safe Restart of Cruise Operations in Belize

Health and Safety Protocols • January 2022

Volume 3

Honorable Anthony

Mahler:

Minister of Tourism and Diaspora

Relations



Dear Tourism Stakeholders,

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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 third 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**-US. 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
- **PUI**- Person Under Investigation
- **WHO**- World Health Organization



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.
- **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 are legally mandated to process necessary clearances prior to issuance of Free Practique.

Objective

The objective of the Health and Safety Protocols is to help guide 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 operate safely.



Introduction

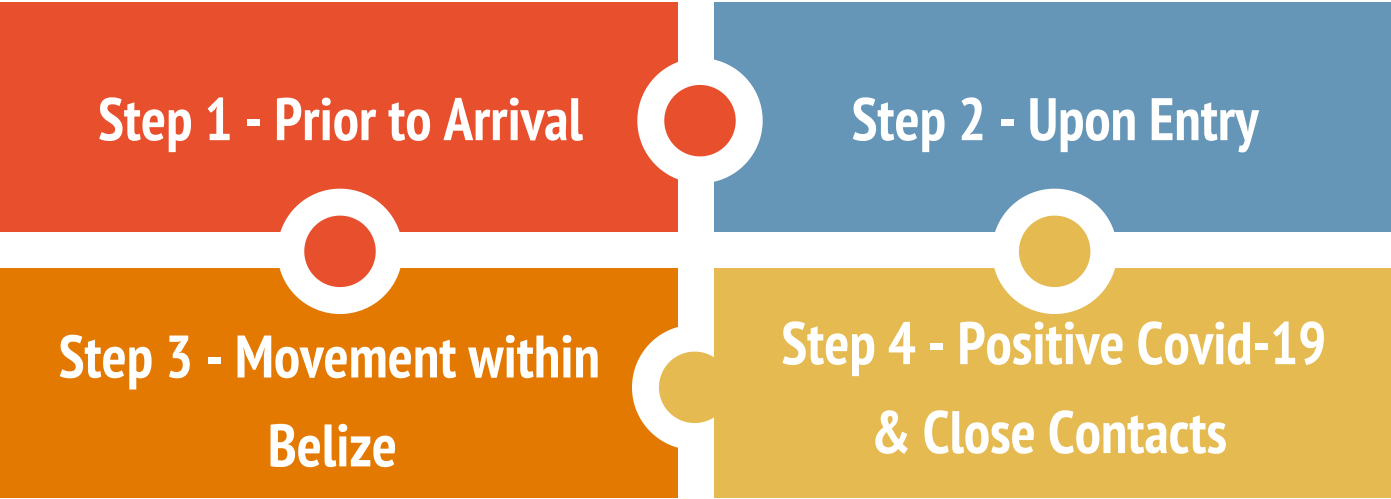
In 2019, prior to the pandemic, Belize received almost 1.2 million passengers with 68% of travelers stopping at Fort Street Tourism Village in Belize City and 32% stopping at Harvest Caye in the south. While 2020 aimed to be another great year, the no-sail ban implemented by the CDC brought about a significant financial loss and devastating blow to employment in Belize.

In an effort to restart cruise operations, the Belize Cruise Taskforce collaborated 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 and/or contain any possible spread of the COVID-19. The plan also outlines an approach for the continuous operations of the cruise industry to ensure Belize is in line with the requirements stipulated by the CDC and other regional health authorities. The Government of Belize commits 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 and then gradually increased as the vaccination coverage increases, cruise ship sailing experience increase and minimum community spread prevails/remains.

b. Capacities

- All ship capacities must be limited based on CDC guidelines which allow for sufficient social distancing in all public areas.
- Capacities on ships can increase based on the progression of vaccinations and the rate of Covid-19 within the ship's home port destinations and destinations on the itinerary.

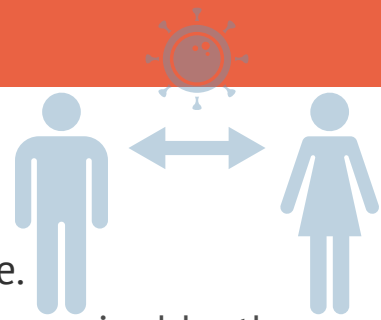
1. Prior to Arrival

c. Vaccination, Testing and Health screening

- All Crew Members shall be 100% vaccinated, as per WHO recommendations, prior to embarkation. Exceptions are permissible where crew members are on board in quarantine awaiting vaccination.
- It is recommended that all Cruise Passengers that are **eligible**, as per the WHO, be 100% Vaccinated prior to embarkation.
- A PCR test or rapid antigen test, that are approved by the WHO, should be provided or taken by all passengers within 72 hours prior to embarkation at the Home Port or within a timeframe recommended by the CDC.
- All crew members will be required to take a mandatory PCR test prior to boarding and must quarantine for 10 days, or as recommended by the CDC. Prior to starting duties, crew should be retested with a negative result from a PCR 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 that tests positive must be denied boarding, and close contacts shall be managed based on CDC guidelines.
- Any crew member that tests positive is required to immediately isolate whether at home port or onboard until full recovery.
- 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 and/or infection control mechanisms are effective. Additionally, subject to a regional agreement with the Cruise Lines, random testing (via rapid antigen tests) of passengers during voyages that operate beyond 4 days may be considered.

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, as required by the CDC, and may include, but not be limited to the following:
 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 and isolation 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.
 5. Establish COVID-19 testing capabilities, including PCR and Rapid Testing.

e. Communication and tracking of positive cases on board



- It is encouraged that all cruise ships have an onboard an Infectious Disease Prevention Officer that would be dedicated to focus on infection control management.
- 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 PUI Form, and the Date of Diagnosis of positive cases.
- The MOHW shall utilize a threshold of 4% COVID-19 infection rate amongst the total onboard population to determine whether additional information is required to monitor the epidemiological status on the ship. This threshold is not a threshold to determine denial of Free Practique.

1. Prior to Arrival

Cont'd (e.)

- If the 4% threshold is met, the MOHW may request additional data with regards to infections and exposure of crew and passengers, information on what infection control measures are being implemented to contain the outbreak.
- Cruise Lines, as necessary, must also share decisions taken by member countries on the itinerary of the respective ship, via submission of the Bill of Health.
- PUI Form 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 PUI Form and be monitored for symptoms over the next 14 days.
- 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.

f. Prior to disembarkation of Cruise Passengers and Crew

- Book tours with Gold Standard Tour Operators, only.
- Based on the epidemiological analysis of the status of infection onboard the MOHW may request additional measures upon disembarkation, such as limitation of crew onshore leave, and limitation to only essential crew for shoreside duties. Also, subject to a regional agreement by cruise lines, this may include 24 hour rapid antigen testing of essential crew prior to disembarkation at the port.



2. Upon Entry

g. Boarding for clearance for disembarkation

- Cruise lines will provide access to the Boarding Party (Customs, Immigration, BAHA, Ministry of Health and Wellness, and Belize Ports Authority), utilizing adequate PPE's, to provide ship clearances.
- Some Boarding Party agencies may carry out a virtual clearance process.
- 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, where possible, to avoid congregation of guests on the pier and to maintain social distancing measures.
- Tender operators should place signage or markers to adequately guide passengers to maintain social distancing requirements.
- 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, as per local regulations (i.e. no use of goggles).
- 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 within 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 managed. (Annex 2)
- 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.
- In conjunction with Ship Agents and Cruise Lines, an Evacuation Plan for Emergency Medical Transfers or Repatriation of passengers or crews must be established. This should include coordination with the relevant border control agencies.



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 should establish a system for constant communication of COVID-19 protocols to visitors and workers, during operations.
- 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

- Mandatory face mask protocol must be adhered to by all passengers and employees during shore excursions, where practical.
- Only Gold Standard Operators will be allowed to take passengers from the same ship on Tours.
- Fully vaccinated passengers will be eligible to go on any tour, unless otherwise indicated by the MOHW.
- There shall be no requirement for separation of vaccinated and unvaccinated passengers on tenders, mainland transfers or on tours.
- Unvaccinated passengers are allowed to go on regular contracted tours, and are able to move freely within the port, however, they are not allowed to walk freely outside of the port.
- Loading areas will be assigned to Tour Operators to ensure social distancing requirements are met.
- Manifests of tourists going on marine tours should be provided to the BPA and BTB.



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.

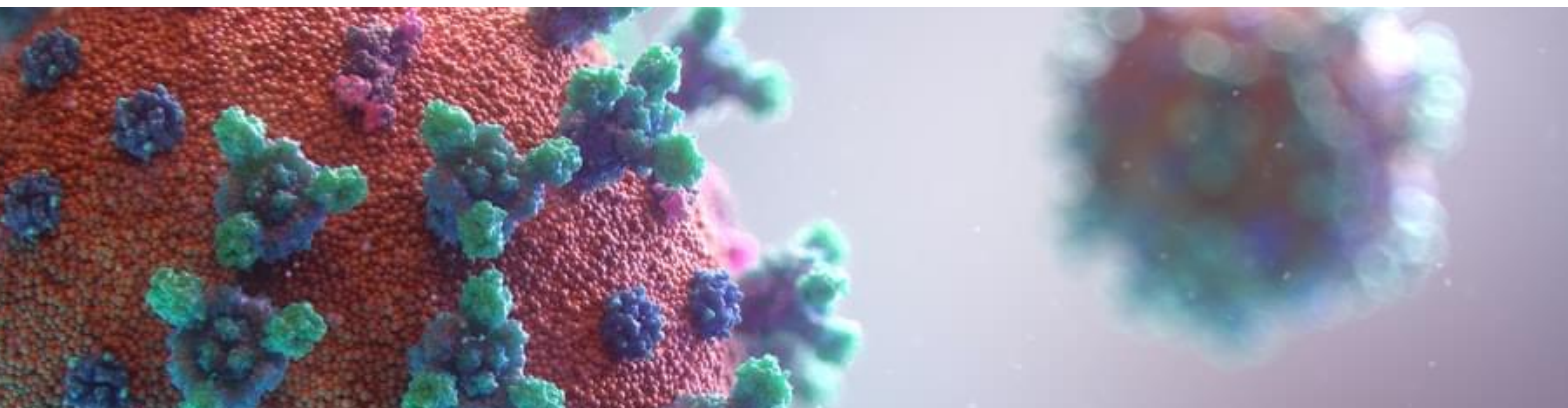
4. Symptomatic and Positive Covid-19 Cases

l. Symptomatic case

- Any passenger or crew 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 or crew 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 or crew needs emergency medical attention services, the respective shipping agent shall submit a Seaport Referral Form to the MOHW. Upon approval by the MOHW, the passenger will disembark and be transported to the designated medical facility or for immediate medical evacuation out of the country. The cruise line or cruise passenger is responsible for quarantine and medical costs incurred until the passenger or crew can be repatriated home.
- If a passenger or crew is asymptomatic or had contact with a positive case, they should remain isolated on board the ship.



General Guidelines: Adapting Operations for Safety Best Practices

All establishments operating 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

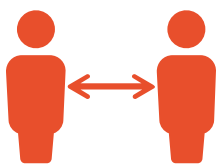
- Mask wearing is mandatory for all staff and passengers. Proper masks should be used.
- Use of gloves should be considered for sanitizing and cleaning personnel.
- Use of PPE should be based on risk exposure of personnel.



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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Americas Cruise Taskforce and Regional meetings

Regional draft Cruise Protocols