

Newsletter

of the Swiss Embassy in Mexico

June 2020

Ambassador's Welcoming Words



Ambassador Mayoraz with H.E. Sir Colville Norbert Young, Governor General of Belize, during his last visit to Belmopan in September 2019

Dear fellow citizens,
Dear friends of Switzerland,

First of all, I hope that you and your families are in good health and spirits despite the current situation. We are publishing this latest edition of the Embassy's Newsletter in very difficult times: the coronavirus pandemic has disturbed the entire world.

This overwhelming situation has forced the Embassy of Switzerland in Mexico and Belize to work in a crisis mode since mid-March. We have established as a fundamental premise to maintain the basic functioning of the representation and services to the Swiss community, particularly supporting all Swiss citizens located in Belize and Mexico, as well as the protection of our staff. Therefore, we set up a critical plan of action under three priority objectives:

The first priority objective has been the attention to Swiss tourists. This has been an important part of our work since, on a daily average, Mexico has a constant number of 3,000 Swiss tourists, and we have several dozen of tourists in Belize. By promoting through all our communication resources (social networks, website and constant recommendations) the registration of tourists to the Travel Admin App, as well with the valuable support of our five Honorary Consuls in Belize, Monterrey, Cancun, Guadalajara, and Queretaro, we could obtain a database to be in contact with Swiss tourists.

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We have worked continuously with the main emphasis on keeping Swiss people traveling in Mexico and Belize informed and updated, always recommending their prompt return to Switzerland due to the uncertainty of borders' closure – a scenario that became reality in the case of Belize starting on March 21. Because of this situation, we decided in the Embassy and with our Honorary Consul, John Searle, to contact personally each Swiss tourist in Belize to let them know about the situation, making relevant recommendations, and keeping them informed. A big thank to John! (Please read more about it in this edition of our Newsletter)

In Mexico, the situation occurred differently, as borders have remained open. Due to this situation, the Embassy's efforts focused on recommending and facilitating the return of tourists to Switzerland through existing commercial flights. Likewise, thanks to the good relations with other embassies, we have been collaborating in the return of nationals to Europe, mainly supporting Germans and Italians, in going back to their countries through the only direct flight to Switzerland operated by Edelweiss between the Caribbean city of Cancun and Zurich; and with France for a repatriation flight from Belize to Paris.

The second objective of the Embassy has been to keep close contact with the Swiss residents in Belize and Mexico. We have sent several communiqués to the approximately 5'500 Swiss nationals living in Mexico and 35 in Belize informing about the health situation and preventive measures implemented by Switzerland, Belize and Mexico, adding informational links from institutions handling the pandemic and, assiduously, putting ourselves at their service through social networks, phone and e-mail.

The third objective has been to protect the health of the Embassy employees as much as possible. At the beginning of the crisis, in addition to implementing Home Office, we developed a staff rotation system so that the number of people present at the office was reduced considerably. This system made possible to keep the Embassy physically open and available to public – unlike representations of other countries - , as well as being available online. In this context, the personal of the chancellery was always available to answer all questions and to ease the worries of the Swiss citizens anxious about this unprecedented situation. In the heyday, my colleagues answered more than a hundred queries a day.

The world of tomorrow will never be the same as the world we lived in before this crisis. Fortunately, Switzerland was able to manage the epidemic quite well, and several scientific studies consider our country one of the worldwide safest places in the current COVID-19 context.

However, each crisis is also an opportunity to rethink our habits, our way of working, traveling, consuming, etc. In that sense, in recent weeks the Embassy has also launched several virtual activities, through social media, webinars, and high-level dialogues with Mexican authorities through video calls in the fields of human rights or economy, for example.

To conclude, I want to underline that the Embassy is permanently on alert because the pandemic continues to be present in Mexico, Belize and in the region. We are here to assist and help anyone in need.

Take good care of you!

Eric Mayoraz
Ambassador of Switzerland
to Mexico and Belize

Human Rights and Development Small-scale Projects

An important pillar of the Swiss foreign policy is the promotion of the respect of human rights, peace and social welfare in all societies. For this reason, every year, the Embassy supports several Belizean NGOs by financing small-scale projects related to human rights and social development.

This year we support three very diverse and exciting projects in different parts of Belize:

- The NGO **Building People Movement** implements a project that focuses on empowering women by teaching them about domestic violence laws. Combatting gender-based violence – and especially violence against women – is a strong commitment of the Swiss government. Most incidents of violence against women occur in households, thus out of the public eye. For this reason, it is especially important that women know their rights and where to seek help.
- **Humana People to People's** projects aims at promoting cleaner, healthier and more environmentally friendly method of cooking meals by establishing firewood saving stoves and building capacity in the Toledo district.
- The **Young Women Christian Association's** project aims at women's empowerment in Belize and Belmopan cities by providing them employment opportunities, training them in budgeting and marketing and educating them on human and reproductive rights and health.

Our next call for projects opens at the beginning of November 2020. Non-governmental organizations working in human rights and development related fields in Belize, that are officially registered are welcome to contact the Swiss Embassy (mexicocity@eda.admin.ch) to present their organization and apply for the next call for projects.



Ambassador Mayoraz visiting the Young Women's Christian Association's childcare center in September 2019 during his visit to Belize.

Consular Protection in the Context of Covid-19

The coronavirus pandemic has disturbed the entire world. This overwhelming context has forced the implementation of a state of crisis in our representation in Belize from the moment the situation began to touch Belizean territory.

In Belize, the first case was detected in San Pedro on March 23. In the same period, just a few days before the confirmation of this first case, the Government announced restrictions on entry to the territory. The closure of the border (on March 22) and the airport (on March 23) drastically changed the panorama for the Swiss tourists who were in the country at the time.



John Searle at the Philip S.W. Goldson International Airport in Belize City with the Swiss travelers who were repatriated.

Since then, with the support of our Honorary Consul in Belize, Mr. John Searle, and our team based in Mexico, we focused our efforts on two main objectives: serving Swiss tourists stuck in Belize and keeping the Swiss resident population informed.

We managed to obtain direct contact with tourists through our Honorary Consul in Belize and the tourists' registration to the Travel Admin App, promoted through all our communication resources (social networks, email signatures, website, and constant recommendations). This database allowed us to contact each Swiss tourist in Belize personally to be aware of their situation, make the pertinent recommendations, and keep them updated.

An insight into the work of our Consulate during the Corona-Crisis

"Dear Embassy. My husband and I are on vacation here in beautiful Tulum, and we have learned about the closing of borders in Europe and other countries because of the pandemic. We are afraid we will not be able to leave Mexico, as our flight has been cancelled. We ask for your help to get us out of here!"

Emails like this one began arriving at the Consulate in early March and reached their maximum during the third week of March, in parallel with the confinement measures imposed first in Switzerland and a week later in Mexico. Hundreds of emails had to be answered by the team as soon as possible, in parallel with a flood of calls that for several days saturated our commuter and forced us to put common consular activities in the background.

With the new crisis rotation that left most of the staff working from home, even with reduced office hours at the Embassy, we have fortunately been able to ensure a relevant and rapid response to both stranded Swiss travelers and the Swiss-Mexican resident community. The routine of working in home office mode has become a new standard for us, although with the recent reopening process in Switzerland and little by little also in Mexico the demand for services with face-to-face attention at the Embassy is starting to approach again the pre-pandemic levels. In fact, a new wave of demand is emerging as well for those services that had been blocked during the past 3 months, as for many doubts that are arising over travelling to Switzerland and Mexico.

For all that, the team of the Consulate thanks you for your understanding; we are doing our best to minimize possible delays in our responses and processes during all these months of a new, changing and prolonged crisis, applying the highest standards in anti-pandemic measures in our facilities.

Before you call us, please check [the homepage of our representation](#), where you can find, in either German, French or Italian, a lot of relevant information on the subject of COVID-19 for both Mexico and Switzerland. In particular, our FAQs are often very helpful.

A few weeks after the first tsunami of emails, fortunately we also started receiving emails like this one, which were a great reward and incentive for our efforts:

“The Swiss Embassy in Mexico (for Mexico and Belize) was very helpful during the covid. They provided us with detailed information on our repatriation possibilities and answered our questions and concerns with attention. In a time of great uncertainty, it was a real relief to be able to be in regular contact with the Embassy and the Honorary Consul (John Searle), who were all impressively reactive.

My partner and I are very grateful for the Embassy of Switzerland’s work, and we would like to thank all those who have worked tirelessly during the last months.”

- Noëli Audi

The COVID-19 Crisis from the Perspective of John Searle, Honorary Consul of Switzerland



Since 2008, John Searle is the Honorary Consul of Switzerland in Belize, working closely with the staff at the Embassy of Switzerland to Mexico and Belize in Mexico City. As this interview shows, the current Covid-crisis has had also an unprecedented impact on his work.

What does your mandate as an Honorary Consul usually consist of and to what extent has the health crisis had an impact on your work?

Normally my work as Honorary Consul consists of providing information and assistance to people requesting information on obtaining a Schengen

Visa to visit Switzerland. In addition, I provide basic information to Swiss citizens who plan to visit Belize. I also coordinate with the Embassy in Mexico City to answer questions regarding the political and economic situation and sometimes legal questions on aspects of Belizean law they may need to clarify.

Since the Covid 19 crisis began in March, most of my work has been coordinating with the Embassy in Mexico City to verify how many Swiss visitors were in Belize, their locations, and their plans to get back home to Switzerland. I also had to touch base with the local Swiss community to check on how they were coping with the situation. This is one of the best parts of my job, as the community is small and over the years I have been able to get to know most of them very well.

As the first case of Covid 19 was announced and the Government decided to impose restrictions, my role evolved into being mostly a coordinator for the repatriation of Swiss visitors who were in Belize. The first few days were hectic in trying to get as many out before the

borders and airport were closed. With assistance from the Embassy, we were able to get most out through the border into Mexico where most went to Cancun to get flights back to Europe. Since then, we had a repatriation flight on May 11 when we were able to repatriate five persons. On June 4, I was able to assist with getting permission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Immigration Department to allow two more Swiss citizens to cross the border into Mexico so they could get a flight home from Mexico. Throughout the crisis, I have been in close coordination with the amazing team at the Embassy in Mexico City. There were times I wondered if they ever got any sleep! I know Belize is only a small part of their responsibility, but they were always ready and quick to respond to any of my questions...day or night! For that, I am very grateful. Thankfully, the situation has quieted down considerably as compared to the first couple of weeks of the crisis.

To what extent was the Swiss community affected by the outbreak of the crisis in Belize?

The local Swiss community has been affected in much the same way all other Belizeans were affected. Everyone has to comply with all the State of Emergency restrictions imposed by Government. A few residents had to reschedule their planned visits to Switzerland but overall, I believe, they have fared off well. In general, the Swiss community do not complain and seem to take things in stride, and for this, I am very happy!

In May and June, Prime Minister Dean Barrow announced a relaxation of the current measures while insisting that the country is not yet out of the woods. How do you see the next steps?

We are fast approaching June 30, which is the end date of the State of Emergency. The Prime Minister has indicated that he is not inclined to extend the date if the situation proceeds as it is currently. So how do we proceed from here? In my opinion, VERY CAUTIOUSLY! The last four confirmed cases of Covid 19 have all been imported; a repatriated cruise ship employee, a repatriated student from the USA, a border jumper from Honduras, and another cross border illegal entry case; which brings into sharp focus that we are still vulnerable and "not out of the woods yet". It is certain that the economy is suffering and there is a dire need to get it jump started. However, to open the International Airport and the borders without first having a reliable rapid test, or verification that the visitors have a negative test for Covid 19, or a positive test for Covid 19 antibodies, would be premature. Especially at a time when the countries around us, Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, as well as the United States, where most of our tourists come from, are all experiencing rising numbers of Covid 19 cases!

It is said that each crisis creates opportunities. What did Belizean society and companies learned during that crisis that could make them stronger in the future?

Belizeans have learned to be patient and to trust the science. In general, the Belizean population was compliant and even though the restrictions on movement and the curfew were stringent, everyone pulled together. In addition, many businesses also learned to adapt quickly. All the grocery stores were very busy even though there were new requirements for social distancing and hand washing. Some started online sales and home delivery services. In addition, a few entrepreneurs quickly started making masks, face shields, and Plexiglas barriers for banks, offices, and cashiers. So yes, crisis brought lessons and opportunities. It shows that Belizeans can adapt and recognize opportunities for success.

Meet our new Embassy Staff

During the past months, we had a quite change in our staff at the Embassy. Johann Thelen (economics and politics) and Julia Stüssi (culture) were both an essential part of our team during the past four years and have decided to tackle new challenges now. Their successors are Maïa Inzaurrealde and José María Macías Martínez respectively. Like every six months, we also welcome a new academic intern to our team.

Andrea Rhally – Academic intern



Andrea Rhally has been the academic intern at the Embassy since the beginning of January. As such, she has been a valuable support to the diplomatic Embassy staff before as well as during the covid-19-crisis.

What have been your main tasks in this embassy?

I like my work at the embassy because it is very diversified. I am in charge of the embassy's social media publications, and every month, I write the Mexican press release for Bern. I also had the opportunity to work on several projects, such as the events of Francophonie or *Feria Internacional de Culturas Amigas (FICA) 2020*. I also helped with Swiss delegations' visits we had at the beginning of the year, such as from the Federal Office of the Environment or the Federal Office of Public Health. All

these projects allowed me to deal with cultural, developmental, or public policy issues and to collaborate with several people from the fantastic team at the embassy.

How did you imagine life in Mexico, and how were you surprised?

I didn't have such high expectations coming to Mexico. I knew that life would be different from Switzerland, but having a Chilean mother and having lived in Canada, Bangladesh, Chile, or England, helped me to prepare for this internship. In addition, my godmother lives in Mexico. She and her family helped me a lot to have a support network at the beginning of my stay, and when the COVID situation complicated everything... That surprised me. I did not think I would spend a good part of my internship confined at home doing home office. But that is life, and you have to take advantage of every situation and experience.

What are your goals and/or next career steps?

My internship at the Embassy will continue until the end of 2020. Then, nothing is certain yet. I finished my Master's degree in international affairs at the Graduate Institute in Geneva, and this experience at the Embassy reinforces my interest in a diplomatic career. I might try to pass the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs' diplomatic examination in a couple of years. In the meantime, I would like to continue learning and discovering the world. It will be interesting to see what are going to be my options next year.

Maïa Inzaurrealde – Attachée for economic and political affairs

Since the beginning of February 2020, Maïa Inzaurrealde is part of the diplomatic staff at the Embassy.

How did you come to Mexico?

After obtaining my master's degree in political science, I was working for some time at the



Embassy of Switzerland in Colombia as an intern. During this experience, I went to Mexico to visit a friend. My first impression of CDMX was the large number of trees that were visible from the plane as we landed. I loved this city, its cultural offer, its climate, its gastronomy. After a second stay in the country, I decided to move to Mexico and look for a job here.

How long have you been in Mexico and what did you do before working at the Embassy?

When I arrived a year and a half ago, I worked for a year as a community manager at the Swiss School in Mexico. This was an unforgettable experience that allowed me to feel immediately at home thanks to my colleagues and superiors who gave me their trust from the beginning. Thanks to this experience, I managed to get

to know a part of the Swiss community in Mexico through events organized by the Swiss School and other Swiss institutions such as the Embassy, the Chamber of Commerce, Swiss Community Mexico, the Swiss Ladies, etc.

Where did your interest for diplomatic work come from?

Diplomatic work represents for me the perfect combination between politics and the discovery of new cultures. I have lived in several cities since I got my high school diploma in Switzerland and I think I became addicted to this feeling, this mixture of enthusiasm and nerves living the first few weeks, alone, in an unknown city. In the workplace, I really like the mediator role that the Embassy plays between my country and Mexico. On the one hand, I am in constant contact with Switzerland, and on the other hand, this position constantly forces me out of my comfort zone.

José María Macías Martínez – Cultural Attaché



José María Macías Martínez started his work at the Embassy in March, just before the start of the covid-19 crisis in Mexico.

Have you had any relationship with Switzerland before starting to work at the Embassy?

Switzerland has always been a captivating country for me. As a Mexican, my interest in its culture, plurality, history and nature have always been part of my life. My Swiss friends, my partner of Swiss origins have intensified my love for the country I now work for. I will never forget the first time I visited Switzerland when I was still young, the beauty of its landscapes and mountains brought tears to my eyes. I am very glad to be able to contribute with my experience in cultural management for Switzerland in Mexico and Belize.

Right after starting your work at the Embassy, the coronavirus crisis began. How have you experienced this and what have been the challenges in this context for your start at work?

Within a couple of weeks of starting my job at the Embassy, the quarantine began. Moving

from Oaxaca to Mexico City and having started this work only few days before this crisis began has been a very interesting challenge; for example, learning to meet my colleagues at distance and covering political issues besides culture. It has been a very particular beginning of work, but not for it valuable and with many learnings.

What projects are you particularly excited for when you can return to normal activities?

The cultural projects that will take place on the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and Mexico. I am pleased to be able to be part of this celebration as co-organizer because they will be activities that will give visibility to Swiss values, in addition to strengthening and encouraging stronger diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Farewells



After four years of intensive work in Mexico, our Consul, Ulrich Haug, will transfer – together with his wife and son – to Canada in July. During his time at the Embassy Mr. Haug was challenged with legal changes in consular matters, complicated renovation works of the Ambassador's official Residence, as well as important staff changes that caused additional workload. Finally, it is especially worth underlining Mr. Haug's genuine preoccupation for the staff's wellbeing and safety.

Mr. Haug's successor is Yvonne Zaugg who was previously Consul at the Embassy of Switzerland in Hanoi, Vietnam.



Also after almost four years in Mexico, our Vice-Consul, Daniela Rey Aponte, leaves Mexico in July together with her husband and two children. Their destination and home for the coming years will be Shanghai, China. During her time in Mexico, she not only managed these very work-intensive and turbulent times together with Mr. Haug, but also had at the same time her second child. Managing successfully professional and private challenges in such a smooth and elegant way, was unquestionably to a big extent on her own merit!

Her successor will be Sandro Hessami who has worked at the Embassy of Switzerland in Abuja, Nigeria, during the past years.

We thank both, Ulrich Haug and Daniela Rey Aponte, for the great collaboration during the past years at the Embassy, especially in the last months of the COVID crisis, and say goodbye to two much appreciated colleagues, friends and heads of the consular staff.

Useful links for Swiss abroad

Dear compatriots,

Many times people are in search of urgent information and call this Embassy by telephone or establish contact by e-mail in order to get answers. Often, however, it would be easier to click on the appropriate link to access the information needed. Therefore, we herewith feature some electronic links that could be beneficial for you and aim towards a more efficient solution finding.

Thereafter, you will find some of the proposed links:

Information concerning Covid-19:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/mexico/en/home/representations/embassy.html>

<https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/en/home/krankheiten/ausbrueche-epidemien-pandemien/aktuelle-ausbrueche-epidemien/novel-cov.html>

Of general utility:

The Law for the Swiss Abroad, which contains the rights and obligations of the Swiss outside their homeland (Auslandsschweizergesetz ASG):

<https://www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/20133127/index.html>

Emigration: For Swiss considering emigrating or returning to Switzerland:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/mexico/fr/home/vivre-a/retour.html>

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/mexico/de/home/leben-im-ausland/auswandern.html>

Information and advice for independent travelers by country

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/de/home/vertretungen-und-reisehinweise.html>

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/de/home/vertretungen-und-reisehinweise/belize/reisehinweise-fuerbelize.html>

Taxes and legal information

(For questions about the requisition of taxes):

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/de/home/leben-im-ausland/auswandern/ruhestand-im-ausland/steuern.html>

Journeys

Travel Admin App: Online platform for Swiss who want to register in order to assign their location and contact in order to maintain a communication with their relatives in case of incidents during the trip

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/fdfa/representations-and-travel-advice/travel-advice/travel-admin-app.html>

Military Service

Families and young Swiss who are interested in knowing details about military service in Switzerland

<http://www.vtg.admin.ch/de/mein-militaerdienst/allgemeines-zum-militaerdienst/doppelbuerger.html>

In economic or other difficulty?

Compatriots who are in a difficult situation and who require assistance

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/mexico/de/home/dienstleistungen/schweizer-in-not.html>

Consular questions / consular register / civil status

If any particular questions regarding the registration of civil status events taking place in Belize, and the legalization of such documents by the Embassy of Switzerland in Mexico (for the purpose of transmitting them to the authorities in Switzerland) arise, please do not hesitate to contact the following e-mail address: mexicocity@eda.admin.ch. The following links gives an answer to the specific situations:

Compatriots who change directions or move to another country:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/mexico/de/home/dienstleistungen/immatrikulation-adressaenderung.html>

Swiss citizens who need to apply for a passport or an identity card:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/mexico/de/home/dienstleistungen/pass-id.html>

Swiss citizens who want to register the birth of a child or another person:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/mexico/de/home/dienstleistungen/zivilstand/geburt.html>

Swiss who want to register a marriage or a legal partnership:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/mexico/de/home/dienstleistungen/zivilstand/heirat-eingetragene-partnerschaft.html>

Swiss citizens who need to register a divorce:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/mexico/de/home/dienstleistungen/zivilstand/scheidung.html>

Swiss citizens who need to register the death of a family member:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/mexico/de/home/dienstleistungen/zivilstand/todesfall.html>

Swiss citizens who need to request a Swiss Civil Status document, a certificate of origin or an excerpt of the family register:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/mexico/de/home/dienstleistungen/zivilstand/zivilstandsdocumente.html>

Legalizations, attestations

Swiss citizens who need information about the definition and possibilities of a legalization:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/mexico/de/home/dienstleistungen/beglaubigung.html>

Swiss who need information on the definition and possibilities of an attestation:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/mexico/de/home/dienstleistungen/bestaetigung-bescheinigung.html>

For Swiss who want to be linked to the "Online Schalter" for Swiss abroad:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/de/home/dienstleistungenundpublikationen/dienstleistungenschweizer-ausland/online-schalter.html>

Vehicles

For Swiss who need to obtain a driver's license, obtain number plates or require information about the importation of vehicles:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/mexico/de/home/dienstleistungen/fuehrerausweis-fahrzeug.html>

Social insurance

For compatriots who want to find out about Swiss social insurance matters:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/mexico/de/home/dienstleistungen/sozialversicherung.html>

www.ahv.ch

www.soliswiss.ch

Economy

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/mexico/de/home/bilaterale-beziehungen/wirtschaft-export.html>

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/de/home/vertretungen-und-reisehinweise/belize/bilatereale-beziehungenschweizbelize.html>

Contact

Embajada de Suiza en México
Paseo de las Palmas No. 405, Torre Optima I, piso 11
Col. Lomas de Chapultepec
C.P. 11000, Ciudad de México
México

Tel: + 52 / 55 / 91 78 43 70
E-Mail: mexicocity@eda.admin.ch
Internet: www.eda.admin.ch/mexico
Helpline EDA / DFAE: helpline@eda.admin.ch Tel.: +41 800 24-7-365

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Embajada de Suiza en México



@CH_Mexico



@casadesuiza

Imprint

Number: 6
Edition Date: June 2020
Editorial: Embassy of Switzerland
Contact: mexicocity@eda.admin.ch