

providers of guided fishing tours, trips to the Blue Hole, the Reef... everyone offering services to tourists.”

Officially, “the BTIA is an umbrella organization for the tourism industry’s private sector with a mandate to advocate on behalf of its members for the benefit of the tourism industry by influencing the outcomes of public policy and resource allocation decisions by the government, specifically for tourism.” Today, the Association has representation on almost every government, legislative, advisory, consultative, and licensing committee. As a direct result of BTIA’s advocacy efforts, tourism is front and center on the list of government priorities.

## Member perks

BTIA membership numbers have climbed to 600, covering six categories – three each for Personal and Business members. Burgos notes, “Membership is open to any stakeholder in the tourism industry. Hotel and resort owners, tour operators, tour guides - we even have chocolate companies and artisans that develop souvenirs. Also, any student studying tourism can become a member.”

Benefits well exceed the annual membership fee. They include generous discounts on training, voting at the

AGM, and marketing opportunities such as website listings and reduced advertising rates. In addition, member-to-member discounts from tourism-related companies throughout Belize are especially attractive.

The value of advocacy on behalf of members is priceless. According to Burgos, “We advocate directly for our members on issues that the government sees as important to promoting tourism. Anything that is going to contradict us in any way, we stand up side-by-side with the government to decide the best way forward.” One such issue is the sustainable development of local infrastructure; something the tourism sector touts as crucial to future growth.

The Association is led by a membership-elected Board of Directors that represents all ten BTIA chapters, one from each district, country-wide. Board members elect their own President, who sits for two years. The Secretariat, under Executive Director Burgos, has a permanent staff of three (Event & Marketing Manager, Membership Officer, and Accountant).

## Do you have an app for that?

Tourism is currently the country’s number one sector in terms of revenue generation and employment. Over-

