Best Offshore Trust Jurisdictions

2026 Rankings

The Cook Islands ranks first among offshore trust jurisdictions for asset protection, and Nevis ranks second. Belize is third, the Cayman Islands fourth, and the Bahamas fifth. We put the Cook Islands first because ten licensed trustee companies operate there under compulsory regulation. Its provisions also have the longest record of contested litigation behind them, and its trust statute makes a creditor prove fraud beyond a reasonable doubt.

Five countries account for nearly all offshore asset protection planning by U.S. residents. Each sets its own window for attacking a transfer and its own burden of proof. The five also differ on whether local courts will enforce a U.S. judgment and on what the structure costs to run.

Rank	Jurisdiction	Score	Strongest point	Weakest point
1	**Cook Islands**	**4.75**	Longest litigation record, compulsory trustee licensing	Most expensive of the five to establish and run
2	**Nevis**	**3.85**	Creditor bond required, freezing orders barred	No licensed trustee required, thin litigation record
3	**Belize**	**2.60**	Non-recognition rule, least expensive of the five	Smaller trustee market, shorter litigation record
4	**Cayman Islands**	**2.05**	Deep licensed trustee market, statutory capital floors	Six-year challenge window, money judgments not barred
5	**Bahamas**	**2.00**	Strong trustee regulation, published insurance floor	No defended case record, money judgments not barred

How We Ranked These Jurisdictions

We ranked the five jurisdictions on six weighted criteria, and we gave trustee market and regulation the most weight at 30 percent. The six criteria are what separate asset protection jurisdictions from trust jurisdictions built for administration.

The trust statutes in these jurisdictions look much alike. The Nevis fraud section tracks the Cook Islands provision nearly word for word, down to the two conditions a creditor must prove and the beyond-a-reasonable-doubt standard attached to them. The Cook Islands, Nevis and Belize each shut down the old Statute of Elizabeth route, and each bars its own courts from recognizing a foreign judgment against the trust.

Ranking these jurisdictions on statutory text alone would produce something close to a tie. Trustee safety, defense experience under creditor pressure, and day-to-day handling of the accounts vary widely from one jurisdiction to the next. So do the decisions the local courts have actually handed down and the treatment a foreign judgment gets. That is what our weights measure.

We graded creditor-challenge barriers at 15 percent. They measure the statutory differences that do remain. The Cayman window runs six years from the transfer. The Bahamas allows two years from the transfer, the Cook Islands two years from the date the claim arose, and Nevis one year from that date. Only the Cook Islands and Nevis make a creditor prove fraud to a criminal standard.

Those barriers are rarely tested, because creditors seldom chase assets offshore at all. The structure exists for the case where one does, and there the outcome turns on who holds the assets and whether that trustee defends the trust. What deters the chase in the first place is a statute that refuses to recognize the judgment.

Trustee market and regulation, 30 percent. How many licensed trustees operate there, what the regulator requires of them in capital and professional indemnity cover, how long they have operated, and how deep their staffing runs. It also counts two things a licence register cannot show: whether those trustees have actually defended a protective trust against a creditor, and how far they will go in running the trust's bank and custody accounts alongside the settlor's advisors.

Foreign-judgment non-recognition, 20 percent. Whether the trust legislation bars local courts from recognizing or enforcing a judgment obtained elsewhere.

Litigation track record, 20 percent. How often the statute has been argued in contested proceedings, and what the courts did with it.

Creditor-challenge barriers, 15 percent. How long a creditor has to attack a transfer, and what the creditor must prove.

Procedural obstacles, 10 percent. Bond requirements and statutory limits on freezing orders.

Cost, 5 percent. What the structure costs to establish and to run each year.

We graded each jurisdiction one to five on each criterion from the statutory text and the case law, then multiplied the grades by the weights. This ranking reflects the trust statutes in force in 2026, and we rebuild it each year against the current text.

How we verified this ranking. We pulled each jurisdiction's trust legislation from its official source and archived the text: the Cook Islands legislation database, the 2017 Revised Edition of the Nevis ordinance, and the current revisions for the other three. Every grade traces to a cited statute section or a decided case, and we confirmed how each ended in the court filings.

Jurisdiction Comparison

The five statutes diverge most on three points: how long a creditor has, what the creditor must prove, and whether a judgment from another country counts for anything locally.

Jurisdiction	Window to challenge a transfer	Standard and burden of proof	Judgments from other countries	Creditor bond before filing	Freezing orders during the case
Cook Islands	Barred 2 years after the claim accrued; inside that window only a creditor who sued within 1 year of the transfer may challenge, and only in the Cook Islands within 2 years of it (trust statute ss 13B(3), 13K(1))	Creditor must prove principal intent to defraud beyond reasonable doubt (ss 13B(1), 13B(7))	Not entertained, recognized, or enforced against the trust or its parties, where it rests on law inconsistent with the trust statute or decides a matter Cook Islands law governs (s 13D)	None	Only after the court is satisfied beyond reasonable doubt on the plaintiff's opening affidavit (ss 13K(3), 13K(4))
Nevis	Barred if the transfer preceded the claim or came more than 1 year after it accrued; suit must be filed in Nevis within 2 years of the transfer (trust ordinance ss 26(3), 26(4), 50(1))	Creditor must prove principal intent to defraud beyond reasonable doubt (ss 26(1), 26(7))	Not enforced or recognized against the trust or its parties, on the same two conditions (s 30)	EC$270,000, about US$100,000, held by the Ministry of Finance's Permanent Secretary (s 61)	Barred; no order may detain, garnish, attach, or otherwise interfere with trust property (s 24(4))
Belize	No creditor-challenge provision in the trust statute	No statutory standard, because the statute creates no creditor challenge	Not recognized for marriage, succession, or insolvency-creditor claims (ss 7(6), 7(7))	None	No statutory restriction

Jurisdiction	Window to challenge a transfer	Standard and burden of proof	Judgments from other countries	Creditor bond before filing	Freezing orders during the case
Cayman Islands	6 years from the date of the transfer (fraudulent dispositions statute s 4(3))	Creditor must prove intent to defraud, and the transfer must be at an undervalue (ss 4(1), 4(2))	Refused only where the judgment enforces inheritance rights or a family-relationship claim; creditor money judgments are outside the bar (trust statute ss 91, 93)	None	No statutory restriction
Bahamas	2 years from the date of the transfer (fraudulent dispositions statute s 4(3))	Creditor must prove intent to defraud, and the transfer must be at an undervalue (ss 4(1), 4(2))	Not recognized on the same narrow terms as Cayman law (trust statute ss 8, 10)	None	No statutory restriction

1. Cook Islands

Cook Islands trusts rank first, with a weighted score of 4.75. The trust statute was enacted in 1984 and amended repeatedly through the 1990s, and each amendment tightened what a creditor has to do.

Once two years have passed from the date a creditor's claim arose, a transfer into the trust is beyond attack. Inside that two-year period the transfer is still protected, unless that creditor had already sued on the claim itself, in any court, within twelve months of the transfer. Anything moved into the trust before the claim arose is protected outright.

Neither protection covers a transfer made once the creditor has already filed suit. Such a transfer is still not fraudulent unless the creditor proves principal intent to defraud beyond a reasonable doubt, and the statute says that intent cannot be imputed to the settlor merely because proceedings had begun. Post-claim planning is available in the Cook Islands, at a higher contempt risk and from a weaker bargaining position.

Beyond a reasonable doubt is the standard used in criminal cases, and the burden sits with the creditor. Any challenge belongs in the High Court of the Cook Islands and must be brought no more than two years after the transfer. Before that court hears anything, or grants a freezing order, it must be satisfied beyond a reasonable doubt that the claim is not already barred and that the plaintiff's opening affidavit could establish fraud.

Cook Islands courts cannot entertain, recognize, or enforce a judgment obtained in another country against the trust or any interested party. The bar applies to the extent the judgment rests on law inconsistent with the trust statute, or decides a matter that Cook Islands law governs. A creditor has to start again in Rarotonga with local counsel and local evidence.

Courts in the United States have been testing Cook Islands trusts in contested proceedings since the late 1990s. In *FTC v. Affordable Media*, the Ninth Circuit affirmed contempt against the Andersons because they had kept protector powers, including the power to certify whether an event of duress had occurred. No court, American or Cook Islands, is known to have ordered a Cook Islands trustee to turn trust assets over to a creditor.

The Federal Trade Commission identified almost $1.3 million in the Anderson trust, and the United States sued the trustee in the Cook Islands in September 1999 and litigated there for more than three years. The trustee turned over $1.2 million in a December 2002 settlement that ended the Cook Islands action against it. The judgment against the Andersons themselves was never settled, and the Ninth Circuit opinion describes millions of dollars in commissions sent overseas, so the trust's full value was never established.

Ten trustee companies hold licenses from the Cook Islands Financial Supervisory Commission, and carrying on trustee company business without a license is an offence there. The commission sets capitalization requirements, fit-and-proper-person standards, mandatory professional indemnity insurance, and continuing compliance obligations. Southpac Trust has operated in the jurisdiction since 1982 and Portcullis since 1987.

In the Anderson matter the trustee treated the U.S. restraining order as an event of duress, removed the settlors as co-trustees, and refused to provide an accounting or to repatriate anything. It then litigated in the Cook Islands for more than three years before settling. Cook Islands trustee companies also run the trust's banking and custody relationships day to day and coordinate with the settlor's U.S. accountants on the annual foreign-trust filings.

Cook Islands trusts are also the most expensive of the five. Setup runs about $21,000, and annual trustee fees run about $5,000. Adding an offshore limited liability company brings those figures to roughly $26,000 and $6,000. That cost is difficult to justify below $1 million in total assets or $500,000 in liquidity.

2. Nevis

Nevis trusts rank second, at 3.85 out of 5. A creditor faces the same beyond-a-reasonable-doubt standard as in the Cook Islands. Nevis courts will not enforce or recognize a judgment from another country against the trust, its settlor, its trustee, its protector, or its beneficiaries, where that judgment rests on law inconsistent with the ordinance or decides a matter Nevis law governs.

Nevis trust law protects a transfer made before the creditor's cause of action arose, and protects any transfer made more than one year after it arose. That one-year window is shorter than the two-year window in the Cook Islands. Amendments in 2015 substituted this scheme for the older two-year rule. A challenge still has to be filed in Nevis within two years of the transfer.

Nevis adds two obstacles the Cook Islands does not have. A creditor must first deposit an EC$270,000 bond, about US$100,000, and the Ministry of Finance's Permanent Secretary holds it as security against the costs the creditor will owe if the action fails. Nevis courts also cannot hear a proceeding, or grant any injunction or other remedy, whose purpose is to detain, garnish, attach, or otherwise interfere with trust property.

Litigation history is what separates the two jurisdictions. Cook Islands provisions have been argued in contested proceedings since the late 1990s, while the equivalent Nevis provisions have drawn far fewer decisions.

The Second Circuit recounted one Nevis dispute in *SEC v. Brennan*. The High Court of St. Kitts and Nevis dismissed a bankruptcy trustee's action against the Cardinal Trust in July 1999, because it stated no claim under Nevis law. In 2019 the U.S. Tax Court declined to treat a Nevis trust as a dissipated asset when the IRS measured what the taxpayer could pay.

The trustee requirement is where Nevis gives up the most ground. A Nevis trust qualifies under the ordinance if at least one trustee is a licensed Nevis trust company, a Nevis corporation, a Nevis limited liability company, a licensed Nevis attorney or law firm, or a multiform foundation. Licensed trust companies do operate there under capital, insurance, and compliance requirements comparable to the Cook Islands.

Because the ordinance does not require a licensed trust company at all, what a Nevis trust actually delivers depends heavily on which trustee the settlor engages. The Cook Islands closes that question by statute, since no one may carry on trustee company business there without a license.

A Nevis trust costs about the same as a Cook Islands trust, roughly $21,000 to establish and about $5,000 a year. Price is no longer what divides them, so the choice between the two jurisdictions turns on whether the bond and the freezing-order bar are worth more than a deeper and more tightly regulated trustee market.

3. Belize

Belize trusts rank third, at 2.60 out of 5, and Belize protects trust property by a different route from the other four. The Belize trust statute contains no provision allowing a creditor to set aside a transfer for fraud.

What the statute does contain is a bar on recognition. A Belize court may not vary a Belize trust, set it aside, or recognize a claim against the trust property, where that claim rests on another country's law or another country's court order. The bar covers three subjects: the consequences of marriage, succession rights, and the claims of creditors in an insolvency. It operates notwithstanding section 149 of the Law of Property Act, section 43 of the Bankruptcy Act, and the Reciprocal Enforcement of Judgments Act.

Two limits follow from how the provision is drafted. It reaches claims brought under another jurisdiction's law or judgment, so a creditor proceeding in Belize under Belize law is not plainly covered. And the three listed subjects reach a creditor's claim in an insolvency, which is narrower than the general run of judgment creditors. On paper the Belize rule is broader than any limitation period, and few contested cases have tested it.

The Belize rule and its limit both appear in *In re Rensin*. In August 2017 the Supreme Court of Belize ordered the trustee to obey no turnover order unless that same court had issued it.

Two years later a Florida bankruptcy court applied Florida law to the same trust anyway, holding that enforcing a self-settled spendthrift trust under Belize law is contrary to Florida public policy. That made the trust assets attachable from the trust's inception. The claim that would have brought those assets into the bankruptcy estate was dismissed because the Belize trustee was never joined, and no public record shows any money leaving the trust.

Belize is the least expensive of the five. A Belize trust costs $8,000 to $12,000 to establish and $2,500 to $5,000 a year. A Cook Islands trust costs about $21,000 and about $5,000, so Belize suits liquid assets between $250,000 and $500,000. Belize licenses trust agents through its international financial services commission, and acting as one without a license is an offence, but the trustee market is smaller and the litigation record shorter than in the Cook Islands.

Third place rests on the non-recognition rule. On trustee regulation Belize sits behind the Cayman Islands and the Bahamas, which license far more trust companies under published capital and insurance requirements.

4. Cayman Islands

Cayman Islands trusts rank fourth, at 2.05 out of 5. The Cayman fraudulent dispositions statute gives a creditor six years from the date of the transfer, three times the Bahamian window and the longest on this list.

A disposition is voidable only where it was made with an intent to defraud and at an undervalue, and the creditor carries the burden of establishing that intent. The statute defines an intent to defraud as an intention to wilfully defeat an obligation owed to a creditor. That obligation must have existed on or before the transfer date, and the transferor must have had notice of it. A claim arising afterward falls outside the statute.

Cayman law does refuse some foreign judgments, but not creditor judgments. A Cayman court will not recognize a judgment that enforces inheritance rights or a claim arising from a family relationship to the settlor or a beneficiary. A creditor holding a money judgment gets no such protection from the trust legislation.

Where the Cayman Islands scores well is trustee regulation. The Cayman Islands Monetary Authority licenses trust companies under the islands' banks and trust companies statute, and carrying on trust business without a licence is a criminal offence. As of the second quarter of 2026 the authority lists 138 trust companies: 60 unrestricted, 55 restricted, and 23 nominee companies, alongside 162 registered private trust companies.

An unrestricted trust licence requires net worth of at least KYD 400,000, and its holder must obtain and maintain professional indemnity insurance that the authority reviews. A restricted trust licence carries a floor of KYD 20,000 instead. That is a deeper licensed market than the Cook Islands has, and the statute itself sets the capital floors and the insurance duty.

Size is not the same as protective-trust experience. Most of that book is closed-group work: 55 of the 138 licences are restricted to a listed group of persons, and the authority separately registers 162 private trust companies. No Cayman trustee appears in the decided cases defending a protective trust against a creditor.

In 2011 the Privy Council held that a Cayman court could make a settlor delegate his revocation power to receivers acting for a judgment creditor. The receivers could then exercise the power, and the creditor could reach the trust property. The Board treated the retained power of revocation as giving him rights tantamount to ownership in the circumstances of that case.

Cayman trust law is built for long-term wealth structuring. The perpetuity period runs 150 years from the instrument's effective date. Since 22 August 2024, an instrument may state that the rule against perpetuities does not apply to a disposition at all, unless the trust holds Cayman land. The trustee or settlor of a trust that holds no Cayman land may apply to the Grand Court for the same treatment. Those provisions are what make a Cayman trust useful for multi-generational planning.

5. Bahamas

Bahamian trusts rank fifth, at 2.00 out of 5. The Bahamian fraudulent dispositions statute gives a creditor two years from the date of the transfer, and no action can be brought after that.

A creditor must show both an intent to defraud and a transfer made at an undervalue. Establishing that intent is the creditor's burden, and the statute imposes no heightened standard of proof.

Trustee regulation is where the Bahamas is strongest. The Central Bank of The Bahamas licenses every bank and trust company. Carrying on trust business there without that licence is prohibited. As of August 2026 its register lists 164 licensees holding trust authority, 64 of them once the 100 nominee trust companies are set aside.

A public trust licence carries a $500,000 minimum capital requirement, and the Central Bank expects professional indemnity cover of at least US$3 million, or three times the licensee's fees and commissions where that is greater. Among the five jurisdictions, that is the only insurance requirement published as a figure.

The same limit applies as in the Cayman Islands. Of the 164 licensees with trust authority, 100 are nominee trust companies, and no decided case shows a Bahamian trustee defending a protective trust against a creditor.

Bahamian trust law refuses foreign judgments on the same narrow terms as Cayman law: a judgment enforcing inheritance rights or a claim arising from a family relationship is not recognized, while a creditor's money judgment falls outside the bar. Nothing in the fraudulent dispositions statute requires a creditor to post a bond or restricts a freezing order while the case runs.

The Bahamian two-year window is far shorter than the Cayman Islands' six years, and it is the only measure on which the Bahamas is stronger than the Cayman Islands. It is not enough to overcome the Cayman litigation record. A Bahamian trust and a Cook Islands trust diverge most on what a creditor has to prove.

Does the Ranking Change if the Creditor Is a Federal Agency?

Yes, criminal forfeiture and the federal tax lien reach property that no private creditor can touch, and they run on rules that have nothing to do with which trust statute the settlor picked.

The Federal Trade Commission and the Securities and Exchange Commission sit below those two and above every private party. They bring public budgets, staff counsel, receiverships, asset freezes, and a demonstrated willingness to litigate abroad. The Anderson matter is what that looks like in practice: more than three years of Cook Islands proceedings, and a court-ordered fee award of $96,455.01 covering the Commission's own Cook Islands counsel.

An ordinary judgment creditor faces the same statutes with private money and hourly counsel. Foreign proceedings are rarely filed at all, because the cost of bringing one in the Cook Islands or Nevis usually exceeds what the creditor expects to collect.

Jurisdictions We Left Out

Panama, the Seychelles, Switzerland, Jersey, Guernsey, the Isle of Man, Hong Kong, and Singapore all appear on offshore planning lists. We did not rank any of them.

Switzerland and other civil-law countries can recognize and enforce a U.S. civil judgment through their own recognition proceedings, which gives a creditor a route the Cook Islands and Nevis statutes close off. Banking quality tells a settlor nothing about what happens after a U.S. judgment lands.

Is an Offshore Trust Better Than a Domestic Asset Protection Trust?

For residents of the states with no domestic asset protection trust statute, which is most states, yes. The creditor simply files where the debtor lives, and a court in a state with no such statute of its own will likely apply local law, leaving the trust to do nothing.

Bankruptcy adds a second problem. A bankruptcy trustee can avoid a transfer to a self-settled trust under section 548(e)(1), reaching back ten years, and most state statutes have little case law confirming they work as drafted. Section 548(e)(1) applies to an offshore self-settled trust as well, so the difference is enforcement: a bankruptcy trustee can avoid the transfer on paper, and a foreign trustee still cannot be compelled to send the money.

A domestic trust leaves the assets themselves reachable by a U.S. court, which is why the offshore failure cases turned into contempt fights rather than turnovers. A settlor who uses a domestic trust mostly does not carry that contempt exposure.

Does the Trustee Matter More Than the Jurisdiction?

For most people the trustee matters more than the country, because the trustee holds legal title to the assets, answers the creditor's demands, coordinates with counsel under pressure, and makes the discretionary decisions that determine whether the structure holds.

A trustee who concedes jurisdiction, or complies with a foreign court order without a legal basis for doing so, can undo the strongest statute on this list. In *FTC v. Affordable Media* and *In re Rensin*, no court ordered a trustee to turn trust assets over to a creditor. What cost those settlors was the powers they had kept and the moves they made after the claims arose.

Choosing a trustee comes down to regulatory licensing, institutional history, litigation experience, financial stability, and whether the company will defend the trust when a creditor pushes on it.

Which Jurisdiction Fits Which Situation?

The Cook Islands fits a settlor with real litigation exposure and more than $1 million in total assets or $500,000 in liquidity. Nevis fits the same profile at the same price, trading a deeper litigation record for a creditor bond and a statutory bar on freezing orders.

Belize fits liquid assets between $250,000 and $500,000, where a Cook Islands trust is hard to justify on cost. The Cayman Islands and the Bahamas license far more trust companies than the Cook Islands does, and their creditor provisions are still the weakest of the five. An offshore trust moves legal ownership to a foreign trustee outside U.S. court jurisdiction, and timing and trustee choice decide more outcomes than the choice of country does.

How the Scores Break Down

Jurisdiction	Trustees 30%	Foreign judgments 20%	Track record 20%	Barriers 15%	Procedural 10%	Cost 5%	Weighted score
1. Cook Islands	5	5	5	5	4	2	**4.75**
2. Nevis	3	5	3	5	5	2	**3.85**
3. Belize	2	4	2	3	1	5	**2.60**
4. Cayman Islands	3	1	2	2	1	3	**2.05**
5. Bahamas	3	1	1	3	1	3	**2.00**

Grades run from 1 (weakest) to 5 (strongest). The score is the weighted average of the six grades.

Sources

Cook Islands

International Trusts Act 1984, ss 13B, 13D, 13K (as amended)

Financial Supervisory Commission, register of licensed trustee companies (2026)

Nevis

Nevis International Exempt Trust Ordinance, Cap. 7.03 (N), revised edition showing the law as at 31 December 2017, ss 24, 26, 30, 50, 55, 61

Belize

Trusts Act, Cap. 202, s 7

Trusts (Amendment) Act 2023

Cayman Islands

Fraudulent Dispositions Law (1996 Revision)

Trusts Act (2021 Revision), ss 90 to 93

Banks and Trust Companies Act (2025 Revision)

Perpetuities Act (2025 Revision)

Cayman Islands Monetary Authority, trust licensee statistics (second quarter 2026)

The Bahamas

Fraudulent Dispositions Act 1991

Trusts (Choice of Governing Law) Act, Ch. 179

Central Bank of The Bahamas, register of supervised financial institutions (August 2026) and trust company licence guidelines

Court decisions

FTC v. Affordable Media, LLC, 179 F.3d 1228 (9th Cir. 1999)

SEC v. Brennan, 230 F.3d 65 (2d Cir. 2000)

Tasarruf Mevduati Sigorta Fonu v. Merrill Lynch Bank and Trust Co. (Cayman) Ltd, [2011] UKPC 17

In re Rensin, 600 B.R. 870 (Bankr. S.D. Fla. 2019)

Campbell v. Commissioner, T.C. Memo. 2019-4

Statutes were verified against the official government and regulator texts in force in 2026. Cost figures are Alper Law's published fee ranges for each jurisdiction. Full methodology and the record behind each score: alperlaw.com/offshore/offshore-trust/best-offshore-trust-countries/