

GUATEMALA

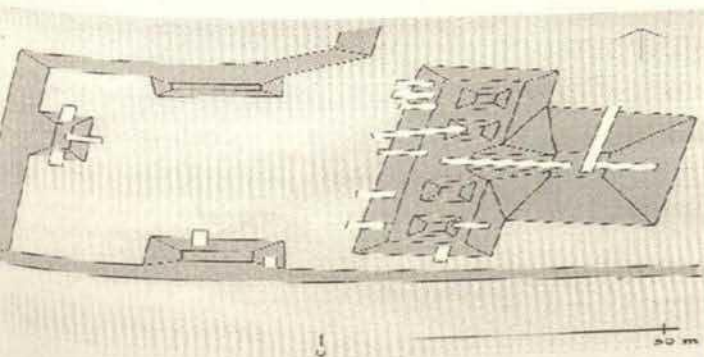
Mayan Ruins in Danger: North-east Region of Petén

For more than 40 years, Tikal has been a source of continuous work for excavation and restoration – and it is now the principal cultural and tourist attraction for the north of the country. Since 1989, the Ministry of Culture and Sports has focused its attention on what is known as the Cultural Triangle: Yaxhá, Nakum, Naranjo, creating a new neighboring park to Tikal. During the years 300 to 900 AD, the north-east Region of Petén saw exceptional construction activity with the erection of hundreds of monumental towns. Recent studies have been undertaken at 64 archaeological sites that contribute to updating the data and to a comparison of the quality and state of conservation of some of the most important towns of the north-east of Petén.

The most important causes of deterioration are neglect and abandonment of the ruins, the destructive actions of the tropical forest climate, and especially the destruction carried out by looters. As many as 2164 recent instances of damage caused by looting in 52 archaeological sites have been documented. There are cities like La Honradez, which registered 203 illegal excavations; another site known as Xultún reported 241, and Naranjo reported 154 illicit excavations. Tunnels more than 30 metres long and trenches around 20 metres high increase the instability of the already precarious situation of the ancient constructions. The investigative report identifies 18 buildings in danger of collapse, these pyramidal temples and palaces require urgent action. For these reasons, the Ministry of Culture and Sports worked on the preparation of five projects to be implemented in order to request technical and economic assistance through international co-operation. The principal actions will be to guide and implement preventive measures to expose architecture in sites in risk such as: Zotz, Kinal, Holmul, Xultún, La Honradez, Chochikitam and Río Azul. As in Tikal, all other archaeological sites of the north-east of Petén are within the Maya Biosphere Reserve, the largest protected area in Guatemala, in which the natural component of an unaltered tropical humid forest presents an example of important natural landscape heritage of worldwide significance.

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Magnitude of damages of looting: Plan of the site of Río Azul



Xultún site (c. 800 AD) showing an enormous trench of the looters

The Pochitoca looting

