

Nombre:

Tikal

Tikal (tee-KAL) is a ruined Maya city located in the northern Petén province of Guatemala. During the heyday of the Maya Empire, Tikal was a very important and influential city, controlling vast stretches of territory and dominating smaller city-states. Like the rest of the great Maya cities, Tikal fell into decline around 900 A.D. or so and was eventually abandoned. It is currently an important archaeological and tourism site.



Archaeological records near Tikal go back to about 1000 B.C. and by 300 B.C. or so it was already a thriving city. By the Maya early Classic era (roughly 300 A.D.) it was an important urban center, thriving as other nearby cities declined. The Tikal royal lineage traced their roots to Yax Ehb' Xook, a powerful early ruler who lived sometime during the Preclassic period.

The Peak of Tikal's Power

At the dawn of the Maya Classic era, Tikal was one of the most important cities in the Maya region. In 378, the ruling Tikal dynasty was replaced by representatives of the mighty northern city of Teotihuacan: it is unclear if the takeover was military or political. Other than a change in the royal family, this does not seem to have altered Tikal's rise to prominence. Soon Tikal was the dominant city in the region, controlling several other smaller city-states. Warfare was common, and sometime in the late sixth century, Tikal was defeated by Calakmul, Caracol, or a combination of the two, causing a gap in the city's prominence and historical records.

Tikal bounced back, however, once again becoming a great power. Population estimates for Tikal at its peak vary: one estimate is that of respected researcher William Haviland, who in 1965 estimated a population of 11,000 in the city center and 40,000 in the surrounding areas.

The Decline of Tikal

The Maya civilization began to crumble around 700 A.D. and by 900 A.D. or so it was a shadow of its former self. Teotihuacán, once such a powerful influence on Maya politics, itself fell into ruin about 700 and was no longer a factor in Maya life, although its cultural influences in art and architecture remained. Historians disagree on why the Maya civilization collapsed: it may have been due to famine, disease, warfare, climate change or any combination of those factors. Tikal, too, declined: the last recorded date on a Tikal monument is 869 A.D. and historians think that by 950 A.D. the city was essentially abandoned.

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Rediscovery and Restoration

In 1958, archeologists discovered the tomb of **Ah Cacau** (Lord Chocolate), one of Tikal's greatest rulers, inside Temple I. Ah Cacau's skeleton was festooned with jade ornaments and surrounded by precious offerings, including pottery, alabaster, sea shells and pearls from the Caribbean coast. You can see a replica of this elaborate tomb in the Tikal Museum near the visitors' centre. Temple I has yielded other treasures, including intricately carved wooden lintels over its doors, which have furnished clues to Maya beliefs and cosmology.

Called Temple of the Masks because of huge stone masks guarding its stairway, Temple II is almost as tall as Temple I, but safer to climb. Its summit offers travel-poster views of the Great Plaza and two labyrinthine ceremonial and residential complexes named the North Acropolis and the Central Acropolis.

From atop Tikal's pyramids, Mayan astronomers tracked the movements of Venus and all the other visible planets. They used these calculations -- extremely accurate even by today's standards -- to fine tune their complex calendar, which can be compared to a system of interlocking gears made up of a 260-day calendar known as the tzolkin that meshed with a 365-day solar calendar to complete 52-year cycles.

The first archaeological teams arrived in the 1880s, but it wasn't until an airstrip was built in the early 1950's that archaeology and study of the site began in earnest. In 1955, the University of Pennsylvania began a long project at Tikal: they remained until 1969 when the Guatemalan government began research there.

Tikal Today

Decades of archaeological work have uncovered most of the major buildings, although a good portion of the original city is still awaiting excavation. There are many pyramids, temples, and palaces for exploring. Highlights include the Plaza of Seven Temples, the Palace at the Central Acropolis and the Lost World complex. If you're visiting the historical site, a guide is highly recommended, as you're certain to miss interesting details if you're not looking for them. Guides can also translate glyphs, explain the history, take you to the most interesting buildings and more.

Tikal is one of Guatemala's most important tourism sites, enjoyed annually by thousands of visitors from all over the world. Tikal National Park, which included the archaeological complex and the surrounding rainforest, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Although the ruins themselves are fascinating, the natural beauty of Tikal National Park merits a mention as well. The rainforests around Tikal are beautiful and home to many birds and animals, including parrots, toucans, and monkeys.

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Contesta las preguntas.

1. Where is Tikal located? _____
2. The Tikal royal lineage can be traced back to what ruler?

3. What city's representatives took over ruling Tikal in 378?

4. What is the last recorded date on a Tikal monument? _____
5. What are some reasons historians think the Maya civilization collapsed? _____
6. What was found by archeologists in 1958?

7. What is Temple II called? _____
8. What did Mayan astronomers do atop Tikal's pyramids?

9. What university began a project to restore TIKAL?

10. When did the first archaeological teams arrive at Tikal? _____

TRUE/FALSE:

10. Tikal National Park includes the archaeological complex and the surrounding rainforests. _____

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11. Temple II is safer to climb than Temple I. _____
12. The first archaeological team arrived in 1950. _____
13. Ah Cacau means Lord Chocolate. _____
14. Ah Cacau's skeleton was festooned with ruby ornaments. _____
15. Tikal National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. _____
16. Historians think that by 950 A.D. the city was essentially abandoned. _____
17. Tikal is located in Mexico. _____