



LATIN AMERICA

FEW PLACES IN THE WORLD COMPARE TO THE POWERFUL MONUMENTS, TEMPLES AND STRUCTURES OF THE ANCIENT MAYA. FROM THE PRE-CLASSIC CITIES AND PYRAMIDS OF GHF-SUPPORTED MIRADOR BASIN IN NORTHERN GUATEMALA, THOUGHT TO BE THE CRADLE OF MAYA CIVILIZATION, TO THE MAGNIFICANT CITIES OF TIKAL AND COPAN, LATIN AMERICA OFFERS A CHALLENGING BUT REWARDING AREA FOR CONSERVATION INVESTMENT BY THE GLOBAL HERITAGE FUND. DESPITE DIFFICULT POLITICS AND EXTENSIVE LOOTING OF ANCIENT SITES THROUGHOUT THE MAYA AREAS, GUATEMALA WILL ONE DAY PROVE TO BE THE EGYPT OF THE AMERICAS, AND BECOME THE MOST IMPORTANT AREA OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSERVATION AND TOURISM FOLLOWING ITS NEIGHBOR MEXICO TO THE NORTH. PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN SITES SUCH AS HOLMUL AND PIEDRAS NEGRAS SHED NEW LIGHT ON HOW THE ANCIENT MAYA LIVED AMIDST A FAR-FLUNG EMPIRE.

IN ADDITION TO POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC INSTABILITY, HERITAGE SITES ARE CONSTANTLY UNDER THREAT FROM RELENTLESS LOOTING, ILLEGAL LOGGING AND ILL-CONCEIVED DEVELOPMENT. IN THE CASE OF PIEDRAS NEGRAS AND YAXCHILAN, A NEW DAM IS THREATENING TO FLOOD THE ENTIRE RIVER BASIN COVERING TWO OF THE MOST IMPORTANT SITES IN MAYA ARCHAEOLOGY. DEFORESTATION AND LOGGING ON ANCIENT SITES ARE CAUSING IRREVERSIBLE DAMAGE, AS WELL AS NEGATIVELY IMPACTING THEIR APPEAL AS TOURIST DESTINATIONS. ILLEGAL LOOTING IS AN AGGRESSIVE BLACK MARKET ECONOMY FUELED BY THE INSATIABLE APPETITE OF COLLECTORS. THOUSANDS OF LOOTERS' TRENCHES ARE DESTROYING THE MOST IMPORTANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND THEIR RESEARCH VALUE IN UNDERSTANDING THE MAGNIFICENT CIVILIZATIONS OF ANCIENT MESOAMERICA.

30° 40' N, 107° 9' W



PAQUIMÉ, CASAS GRANDES Mexico
AD 900 – 1340
Casas Grandes

16° 44' N, 91° 5' W



BONAMPAK Mexico
AD 200 – 900
Maya

17° 45' N, 89° 55' W



MIRADOR BASIN Guatemala
1000 BC – AD 300
Maya

20° 16' N, 89° 42' W



SAYIL Mexico
AD 700 – 1000
Maya

17° 40' N, 89° 50' W



NAKBE Guatemala
1000 BC – AD 1000
Maya

23° 7' N, 82° 21' W



OLD HAVANA AND FORTIFICATIONS Cuba
AD 1519 – Present
Spanish

17° 45' N, 88° 39' W



LAMANAI Belize
1500 BC – AD 1492
Maya

17° 5' N, 89° 8' W



XUNANTUNICH Belize
AD 300 – 900
Maya

14° 52' N, 89° 10' W



COPAN Honduras
AD 465 – 800 (Classic Period)
Maya

17° 2' N, 96° 46' W



MONTE ALBAN Mexico
500 BC – AD 750
Zapotec

Monte Alban

Sayil

Mirador Basin

Nakbe

Xunantunich

Bonampak

Copan

Old Havana and Fortifications

Cuba

Belize

Honduras

Guatemala

Nicaragua

Mexico

Paquimé,
Casas Grandes

LAMANAI Belize

1500 BC – AD 1492
Maya

Unlike other Maya sites, the remarkable city of Lamanai was continuously occupied until well into the 19th century and is one of Belize's largest ceremonial centers. More than 700 Mayan structures have been discovered at Lamanai, including the second largest pyramid in Belize, and several exquisite temples, one of which is guarded by a 13 foot high stone mask of a Maya king. Erosion caused by the region's heavy rainfall has impeded preservation efforts at the site.



XUNANTUNICH BelizeAD 300 – 900
Maya

The spectacular Xunantunich ceremonial center, located on the Mopan River, eight miles west of San Ignacio, is believed to have been the regional capital during the Classic period. Consisting of 6 massive plazas surrounded by more than 25 palaces and temples, the site is renowned for its imposing 130-foot-high pyramid, known as El Castillo. The tallest structure in Belize, it was once used as an observatory by Mayan astronomers. Orate stucco friezes depicting the history of the region decorate the east, west and upper portions of the pyramid. The deleterious effects of tropical climatic conditions present a constant challenge to preservation efforts at the site.





OLD HAVANA AND FORTIFICATIONS Cuba

AD 1519 – Present
Spanish

Old Havana, with its remarkable fortifications, was established in 1519 on a narrow peninsula overlooking the Gulf of Mexico. The city developed rapidly to become the foremost port in the region by the 17th century, transporting gold and silver from Central America to Europe and providing a vital communication link between the Old and New Worlds. The city is home to a rich array of Baroque and Neoclassical cathedrals, plazas and civic monuments, the preservation of which is challenged by overpopulation and natural devastation such as cave-ins and sinkholes.

MIRADOR BASIN Guatemala

1000 BC – AD 300
Maya

The Mirador Basin is a natural geographical basin of lowland mountains that contains a group of the most important archaeological sites in Mesoamerica. The Danta and Tigre Pyramids at the site of El Mirador, for example, are the two largest in the Americas and pre-date the famous Maya city of Tikal by 500 – 1000 years. The Mirador Basin is now believed by many scholars to be the Cradle of Maya Civilization. The site's extensive ancient pyramids and monument complexes provide a still undamaged archaeological record that offers an unparalleled resource for understanding the origins of early civilization in the Americas. Mirador Basin is also one of the most important wildlife habitats and tropical rainforest ecosystems for Central America in the coming centuries. Looting in the region goes unchecked, causing irreparable devastation to ancient monuments.



NAKBE Guatemala

1000 BC – AD 1000
Maya

The ancient Maya city of Nakbe is buried deep in the jungle of Guatemala's Peten region. Long abandoned, this impressive site was rediscovered from aerial photographs during the 1930s, but was not visited by scholars until 1962. Located beside a major historic causeway, an extended period of human settlement at Nakbe is evidenced by archaeological remains that date back 3000 years. The site architecture is split into three major groupings of platforms and mounds, including the 150-foot-high pyramid Structure 1. Sponsored in part by GHF, extensive excavation at the site has explored the rise and fall of the complex Maya civilization. The discovery of artifacts including pottery, tools and decorative elements has made a significant contribution to furthering our understanding of this era. However, looters in the area have raided the site in search of similar marketable objects, leaving behind a haphazard network of hastily dug trenches.



**COPAN** Honduras

AD 465 - 800 (Classic Period)
Maya

The city of Copan, meaning “bridge” in Spanish, was one of four major sites that occupied the Mayan Lowlands during the Classic period. At its peak, Copan was one of the most prominent Maya cities as measured by mathematical and literary achievements. It was established in AD 465 as a fishing, hunting and agricultural center which was superseded over a period of 200 years by religious and political pursuits. Most of the architecture at Copan has been damaged by water erosion and looting of artifacts, which began shortly after the collapse of the city. Several structures were toppled or reduced to rubble by the earthquake that hit western Honduras in April 1934. Restoration and preservation efforts have resulted in the rebuilding of the Hieroglyphic Stairway, and salvaging and storage of more than 25,000 stone blocks from fallen temples around the site.



BONAMPK Mexico

AD 200 – 900
Maya

Bonampak, a relatively small city that peaked in the Mayan Late Classic period, is notable for the remarkable murals discovered at the site in 1949. These extraordinary paintings depict important ceremonial and political events, and illustrate that the Maya actively waged war on their neighbors. The scenes illustrated on the walls and ceilings are bloody and graphic in nature. Painted on wet limestone cement with bright blues, reds and yellows, the murals are believed to tell the story of the raid and capture of a neighbouring town. The painted area covers approximately 180 square yards and includes a total of 108 hieroglyphic texts and 270 human figures, each clad in a different outfit. Very little of the site has been excavated, and much of it remains covered by rainforest. The murals, which constitute the best and most detailed examples of color mural painting from the Maya era, are gradually decaying.



MONTE ALBAN Mexico

500 BC - AD 750
Zapotec

The archaeological site of Monte Alban, located in Oaxaca state in Mexico, is one of the most important in the region. Spectacularly located on an artificially leveled hill-top, Monte Alban was the ancient capital of the Zapotec civilization and one of the first cities in Mesoamerica. The site contains great plazas, enormous pyramids, a ball court, a labyrinth of underground tunnels and over 170 subterranean tombs. Many of these structures, seriously weathered over time, have yet to be restored. In 1999, a powerful earthquake struck southern Mexico damaging many of the ruins at Monte Alban. Eighteen buildings were damaged, causing walls to collapse and loosening stucco from the structures.



PAQUIMÉ, CASAS GRANDES

Mexico

AD 900 – 1340
Casas Grandes

Paquimé, Casas Grandes, located in the Mexican state of Chihuahua, acted as a cultural bridge between the civilizations of the American Southwest and Mesoamerica. The complex adobe structures that extend over nearly 90 acres attest to the achievements of this uniquely located trade center. Unlike similar pre-Hispanic archaeological sites in the U.S.A., Paquimé settlements in Mexico remain largely undocumented and unprotected from damage caused by looters, vandals and agricultural usage. Further study and documentation towards a comprehensive regional preservation plan is urgently needed.



SAYIL Mexico

AD 700 – 1000
Maya

The city of Sayil is one of the best examples of Puuc-style construction in the Terminal Classic period of the Maya. The city contains the ruins of numerous palaces, rows of residential homes, altars, stelae and a ball-court. As with other Mayan sites, Sayil was composed of a ceremonial center surrounded by smaller villages and clusters of residential areas. At its peak the population in the center reached approximately ten thousand, with seven thousand residents living in the outlying areas. The swift decline of the city around AD 1000 has been credited to the warriors of Chichén Itzá. Many of the remaining structures are in danger of being destroyed by the surrounding jungle, which is encroaching upon the site and threatening many of the buildings. Tree growth on the site has broken through walls, displacing bricks and compromising support structures.

