



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Mirador Cultural and Natural System is a unique asset to the department of Petén in Guatemala, Central America, and the world, with some of the largest pyramids ever built and a unique causeway system linking the historic Maya cities in this region. Its unparalleled archaeological treasures and rich, diverse ecosystem makes this region especially unique and valuable for tourism and for the study of the Pre-Classical Period society, which is little known in the history of Maya culture. Wildlife here is rich, with orange-breasted falcons, jaguars, and other exotic animals, that will enhance the visitor experience. The 810,000-acre area encompasses the Parque Nacional Mirador-Río Azul, Biotopo Protegido Naachtun-Dos Lagunas, and Biotopo San Miguel la Palotada, as well as multiple community concessions as part of the Reserva de la Biosfera Maya. The national park and biotopes provide a high level of protection for natural and cultural resources.

This Archaeological Development Plan offers details for an archaeological work program, showing how to invest in needed improvements for archaeological conservation and tourist infrastructure, manage the area in a sensitive, sustainable manner, consistent with prior plans, and minimize threats to the precious resources that are in the Mirador Cultural and Natural System. The Plan also will provide substantial economic development opportunities for local communities and the nation. A detailed set of objectives and strategies and a timeline for near-term (2011–2016), mid-range (2016–2011) and longer term (2021–2026) actions will guide implementation. The vision presented in this plan will be realized with support from the international donor community and the Government of Guatemala.

The *Fundación Patrimonio Cultural y Natural Maya* (PACUNAM), Global Heritage Fund (GHF), the Foundation for Anthropological Research and Environmental Studies (FARES), and *Instituto de Antropología e Historia* (IDAEH), are working together to develop and protect the Mirador Cultural and Natural System. This Development Plan is an effort by PACUNAM, FARES, GHF and their partners to develop a management framework for archaeological priorities in the context of tourism development over the next 10-15 years. The management concepts, maps and strategies in this report can provide the basis for increased tourism in the Mirador area, which today, sees less than 3,000 visitors annually. The Plan is intended to be comprehensive and long-term, but also realistic about funding available and near-term needs. It builds on and refines prior planning, with additional detail provided by maps. The efforts to establish a strong relationship between tourism and stewardship of Mirador's cultural and natural resources will benefit both local communities and the environment, and will be essential for continued conservation into the future.



The Swimmer Frieze in El Mirador is just one of many beautiful pieces of architectural art that excite the imagination of visitors.

Plan Structure and Organization

This Plan is organized into four chapters:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction** provides an overview of the role of the Development Plan, a summary of the location and ecological context of the Mirador region, descriptions of the archaeological sites, and a discussion of the key issues facing the planning area.
- **Chapter 2: Archaeological Development Plan**, discusses the vision and guiding principles of the Plan, the management zones, archaeological work program, visitor circuit and facilities, local economic development and education, and opportunities for learning and research.
- **Chapter 3: Management Objectives, Strategies, and Actions**, is the heart of the document – it includes concrete directives that specifically detail the archaeological work priorities, tourist facilities that will allow for visitors to view the sites, as well as economic development and research opportunities.
- **Chapter 4: Implementation and Phasing**, discusses organizational responsibilities and outlines a timeline for when the actions discussed in the previous chapter will occur. The chapter also addresses funding.



Tourists will be allowed in the Public Use Zone.

Development Plan Summary

The proposed Archaeological Development Plan establishes a forward-looking framework for continued archaeological discovery and preservation within the Mirador Cultural and Natural System. The Plan presents a clear management structure with specific geographic zones for wilderness protection, archaeological research and preservation, and sustainable development activities. The Plan then describes priorities for archaeological activities and visitor development within the context of these management zones. In particular, it proposes a Visitor Circuit that establishes the foundation for both preservation of resources and expanded tourism through the growth of local economies and infrastructure, as well as expanded education and stewardship for the Mirador Cultural and Natural System.

Management Zones

The zones proposed by this Plan provide direction for specific planning and management decisions for issues of visitor access, development, and resource protection. These zones include the Wilderness Zone, Multiple Use Zone, and Public Use Zone. The Public Use Zone is divided into four subzones, including two that define a more precise geographic extent of archaeological resources in the planning area (Primary and Secondary Archaeology subzones), and two that establish specific areas for visitor access and facilities (Trail and Development subzones).

The following table provides a description of each of the zones and subzones, as well as the desired conditions for natural and cultural resources, permitted visitor activities, and development of new facilities.

SUMMARY OF MANAGEMENT ZONES

Zone	Zone Concept	Cultural Resource Prescriptions	Natural Resource Prescriptions	Visitor Activities	Desired Facilities
Wilderness Zone (<i>Zona Intangible</i>)	Natural systems and processes follow their courses with minimum intrusion. The number of visitors is limited to levels that do not significantly affect natural environments.	Cultural resources are managed in a way that does not degrade natural features or the character of the natural environment. Scientific monitoring and research are allowed under appropriate governmental permits. Interventions are allowed, as needed to conserve and protect cultural resources. There is extremely low tolerance for resource degradation.	Emphasis is on restoring and perpetuating natural systems and processes to match wilderness conditions. Unofficial trails and roads may be removed if they pose a threat to sustainability. There is extremely low tolerance for resource degradation.	This zone permits low impact visitor activities, such as hiking, nature studies, birding and photography, which do not adversely affect the natural landscape and resources. Access is limited to designated trails and rest areas; camping is not permitted unless a wilderness camping permit has been issued.	This zone includes unpaved, non-motorized trails and unobtrusive and approved interpretive and directional signs. Structures and visitor facilities are not permitted except as needed for government operations. Pack animals are permitted in this zone only in instances where they cannot be accommodated within the Public Use Zone.
Multiple-Use Zone (<i>Zona de Usos Múltiples</i>)	Natural systems and processes are sustained within this zone, in concert with activities permitted as provided by existing concessions.	Scientific monitoring and research are allowed under appropriate governmental permits. Interventions are allowed, as needed to conserve and protect cultural resources. All concession activities are sited to minimize disturbance to cultural resources. Tolerance for modifications of identified resources, including archaeological sites, is extremely low.	This zone provides access to natural features and resources. Sustainable gathering of forest products such as <i>chicle</i> , <i>xate</i> , <i>pimineta</i> , and <i>ramon</i> is permitted as provided by existing concessions. Tolerance for resource modifications is extremely low and consistent with certified sustainable forestry practices.	This zone permits low impact visitor activities, such as hiking, nature studies, birding and photography, which do not adversely affect the natural landscape and resources.	Sustainable, low-impact support facilities for concessions activities are permitted in this zone. This zone may also include unpaved, non-motorized trails for concessions and visitor access. Structures and visitor facilities are not permitted except as needed for government operations. Pack animals are permitted in this zone only in instances where they cannot be accommodated within the Public Use Zone.
Public Use Zone (<i>Zona de Uso Público</i>)	Comprised of archaeological and development districts. Management emphasis is on preservation of the archaeological and natural resources within the zone. Appropriate visitation will be allowed, provided it will not conflict with scientific research or stabilization and conservation activities.	All significant cultural resources are preserved. Selected sites are excavated, stabilized and conserved. Tourist access is facilitated, and sites are interpreted to enhance visitor understanding. Resource degradation is not tolerated.	Natural resources are maintained to ensure environmental systems are minimally disturbed by archaeological or visitor activities. Vegetation may be modified at major archaeological sites to reveal cultural resources, provide shade, and protect resources. Unofficial trails are removed or allowed to recover naturally.	This zone allows low-impact activities like hiking, nature studies, birding, and photography, as well as picnicking and camping at identified locations. Small, low impact vehicles are permitted for governmental and scientific purposes only in the development and archaeology subzones.	Facilities in this zone support tourism, government operations, and archaeological efforts. This zone may include discreet directional signage, wayside exhibits at entry locations, and additional interpretative media to enhance visitor experience and understanding of the site.
Primary Archaeology Subzone	Identifies the main archaeological site—that which is the physical boundary of the primary area to be preserved, which defines the sites of the major archaeological resources. Tourist access is limited and facilitated by guides.	Major and minor sites are interpreted or facilitated by guides for visitor understanding, with interpretive panels at key locations. Access is limited to prescribed areas and pathways in order to preserve archaeological resources and not disturb excavation, stabilization or scientific research activities. Visitors must be accompanied by a guide.	Natural resources are preserved except for where special archaeological features are exposed or along visitor pathways. Selective clearance of vegetation may be undertaken to open views and clarify relationships between selected archaeological sites. Outside of existing and planned visitor areas, once excavation and stabilization activities are completed, the natural environment will be managed to protect archaeological, cultural, and natural resources.	Signage and wayfinding is provided along designated routes to help guide visitors through archaeology sites. No food preparation or camping is allowed in this subzone. Pack animals are also not allowed.	Facilities are limited to those needed for protection of sites, scientific research and preservation, stabilization, and restoration activities. Limited restroom facilities are permitted for larger sites like El Mirador, Tintal, and Nakbé. Unpaved, non-motorized pedestrian-only trails are permitted on causeways.
Secondary Archaeology Subzone	Encompasses all outlying/ satellite structures related to a specific archaeology site and defines the full extent of the site area. Tourist access is limited and facilitated by guides.	Archaeological resources, excavation, stabilization and research activities have priority over visitor activities. Visitor access is facilitated by guides and limited to trails and pathways through sites.	Once excavation and stabilization activities are completed, the natural environment will be managed to protect archaeological, cultural, and natural resources, but with less intervention than in the primary zone.	Limited, facilitated visitor access along designated trails and pathways is permitted. Visitors can tour archaeological features as well as engage in activities like hiking, picnicking and photography. Pack animal access into and through this zone is permitted on designated trails and staging areas.	Sustainable, low-impact facilities that support archaeological efforts, government operations, and the visitor experience are permitted. These include: rest areas, bathrooms, and research/curatorial space. Facilities may also include designated pack animal staging areas including stables, posts, shelters, and water troughs.
Development and Visitor Subzone	Contains developments required for visitor use, archaeological facilities, and governmental operations. It occupies the least amount of space necessary to achieve the management objectives of this Plan.	This zone is primarily contiguous with the Primary and Secondary Archaeology Subzones. All facilities are sited and designed to minimize disturbance and screened for views and noise. Fences, barriers, and other measures may be needed to protect resources and excavation and stabilization activities. Signs and trailheads are preferred in this zone to avoid intrusion into sensitive cultural areas.	This zone provides access to natural features and resources. Natural resources may be modified in ways that harmonize with facility settings. This zone is located in areas having low impact on sensitive natural resources. Sustainable design, native landscaping, and screening for views and noise are incorporated into facility design. Tolerance for resource modifications is low.	This zone focuses on accessible and convenient visitor services, as well as visitor orientation, education interpretation, and park operations. Interpretive and educational materials and guides enhance the visitor experience. Signs and trailhead orientation facilitate access. Visitors have increased opportunities for interaction with park staff, archaeologists and volunteers. Tourism-related concessions are also allowed in this zone including food preparation, lodging, campsite management, equipment rental, pack animal provision, and artisan craft sales.	This zone includes facilities related to visitor support and services (camp sites, designated picnicking areas, water and wastewater facilities), government operations, archaeology camps and support, supply storage, maintenance office and storage, fire camp, research/curatorial space, seasonal housing, archaeology and staff meeting space. Building design is sustainable and compatible with the environment.

SUMMARY OF MANAGEMENT ZONES

Zone	Zone Concept	Cultural Resource Prescriptions	Natural Resource Prescriptions	Visitor Activities	Desired Facilities
Trail Subzone	Identifies the area around trails and causeways that will be used for tourist and pack animal transport and short-term rest stops.	Cultural and archaeological resources are monitored to ensure resources are not degraded with visitor use. Tolerance for resource modifications or degradation is extremely low.	Natural resources may be modified and manipulated along trails to facilitate visitor and pack animal access. Tolerance for resource modifications or degradation is low.	Signage and trailhead orientation facilitate access. Regulations and appropriate resource use messages are communicated to promote stewardship. Pack animals are allowed along separately-designated pack animal trails that run parallel to the visitor trail circuit.	New trails and non-motorized access are permitted only where proposed by this Development Plan. (Pedestrian-only trails are provided on causeways as part of the Primary Archaeology Subzone.) In areas where trails cross waterways or wetlands (<i>bajos</i>), facilities may include wooden bridges or boardwalks to facilitate access. Rest areas are designated at specific locations throughout the subzone. These areas may include seating, shelter, restrooms, emergency communication equipment and trash accommodation.
Conservation Buffer Overlay	This overlay is meant to provide a buffer around archaeology sites. Visitor support facilities may be located in this overlay area in accordance with the Public Use Zone; however, emphasis is on preservation of cultural and natural resources.	Allows scientific monitoring and archaeological research activities. Concession activities are not permitted in this overlay zone. There is extremely low tolerance for resource degradation.	Emphasis is on restoring and perpetuating natural systems and processes to match wilderness conditions. Sustainable gathering of forest products such as <i>chicle</i> , <i>xate</i> , <i>pamienta</i> , and <i>ramon</i> are permitted as provided by existing concessions. Extraction of non-renewable resources, such as oil, and old-growth forest, is not permitted. There is extremely low tolerance for resource degradation.	Emphasis is placed on facilitating access to the archaeology subzones, while limiting access to designated trails. Hiking, picnicking and visitor services are permitted only where they cannot be provided closer to the sites. Visitor access is managed through issuance of permits and accompaniment by authorized guides. Access is limited to designated trails and rest areas; camping is not permitted.	Sustainable, low-impact support facilities for government operations, scientific investigation and monitoring, and protection of resources.

Archaeology Work Program

The Archaeology Work Program provides an overall strategy for excavation, restoration, and conservation of archaeological resources within the Primary Archaeology Subzone of the planning area. The focus of the work program is on seven key sites that comprise the Visitor Circuit of this Plan: El Mirador, Tintal, Nakbé, Wakná, Xulnal, La Florida, and La Iglesia. These sites contain some of the most culturally-significant and fascinating archaeological resources in the Mayan world. While archaeological research and excavation has been initiated for many of these sites, there is considerable work to be completed in order to restore and prepare these sites for visitors. The Development Plan delineates the excavation, stabilization, and restoration efforts proposed for each of the seven sites.

Visitor Experience and Tourism Development

The Development Plan capitalizes on the visitor appeal and accessibility of key archaeology sites, and uses the Carmelita-Mirador-Nakbé Visitor Circuit and facilities as a framework for tourism development. The proposed Visitor Circuit identifies multiple routes and options for visitors, as well as new destinations and facilities. New camps, trails, and eco-lodge facilities are proposed to accommodate increased tourism, as well as site interpretation and signage throughout the Visitor Circuit.

Controlled access within the Visitor Circuit is essential for long-term sustainability of the planning area and tourism development. Access into the planning area will be limited to Carmelita and Chuntuquí, and will require visitor permits and capacity limitations. Additionally, unofficial trails and roads should be removed where feasible, so site access will be attained either by hiking in with pack animals or taking a helicopter to specific destinations like El Mirador, Chuntuquí, and Carmelita. In the longer term, in order to reduce the impact of pack animals on the Visitor Circuit, some form of low-impact, motorized visitor transportation will need to be explored, but what this might entail is beyond the scope of this Development Plan.



Mural with red, white, and black paint at Garra de Jaguar, El Mirador.



Selective tree removal allows visitors to experience the natural environment while also viewing and learning about key archaeological features.



Eco-lodge facilities at El Mirador and Xulnal will allow visitors to stay in comfort as they experience the cultural and natural wonders of the northernmost forests of Petén.

Local Economic Development and Education

The Development Plan proposes a range of local economic development and education opportunities. These include ensuring that local communities participate in the planning process and that they benefit economically from new tourism and development activity within and around the Mirador Cultural and Natural System. The Plan emphasizes the need to utilize community knowledge as a key resource for tourism planning, and to help build community knowledge and capacity to develop businesses that cater to the tourism market.

Integrated Learning and Research Program

In addition to involvement with the local community, the Development Plan focuses on integration of scientific research and learning opportunities. In particular, the Plan emphasizes the need to share research and findings among agencies, and that these combined resources should inform decision-making about management of the planning area. In addition to guiding management decisions, research activities and findings should also inform the way the Mirador Cultural and Natural System is presented to visitors, and should in turn create opportunities for community members to be directly involved in research, through field work, conservation, and other activities. Finally, the Plan promotes fostering relationships with research institutes, universities, and conservation-related organizations.



The Visitors Center in Carmelita.



A diversity of plants and other species thrive in Mirador, lending themselves to scientific inquiry.

Summary of Development Plan Objectives

The objectives, strategies, and actions are divided into four sections: Archaeological Management, which delineates the creation of management zones and the scope of archaeological work in the planning area; Visitor Experience and Tourism Development, which addresses the issue of provision of facilities, logistics, and sustainable development within the Public Use Zone; Local Economic Development and Education, which provides direction for local community involvement; and Integrated Learning and Research, which addresses the greater opportunities for learning and research for both scientific and cultural benefits.

The 10 objectives that serve as the framework for the associated strategies and actions are:

1. A Viable Framework for Short and Long-term Management
2. Management Zones
3. Conservation and Restoration of Cultural and Natural Resources
4. Protection of Archaeological Sites While Supporting Research and Tourism Development
5. High-Quality Visitor Experience of the Cultural and Natural System
6. Sustainable Tourism Development and Visitor Management
7. Controlled Access and Transportation
8. Inclusion and Participation of Local Communities
9. Local Economic Development Opportunities and Education
10. Integrated Learning and Research

The following criteria are recommended to guide archeological intervention and conservation and the Archaeological Work Program for the Plan¹:

1. Prioritize the study of the Preclassic Period society, which is little-known in the history of Mayan culture.
2. Show visitors only the building edifice so there is more stability for the building.

¹ The authorized guidelines for the conservation of monuments and archaeological sites are published in the document named: “Lineamientos para la Conservación de Monumentos y Sitios en Guatemala” by the Delegación de Patrimonio Mundial de Guatemala and in the “Manual de Criterios de Restauración para La Arquitectura Prehispánica” published by the Programa de Desarrollo de Petén para la Conservación de la Reserva de la Biosfera Maya – PDPCRBM –

3. Respect the vegetation and only alter plants that put architectural features of the building at risk.
4. Prioritize buildings that are found in the pre-established circuit and those that were previously investigated.
5. Privilege the criteria that maintain originality and authenticity in the conservation of monuments with respect to archeological dates.
6. Only use materials compatible with originals for monument conservation.
7. Promote actions that protect the environment, implementing medium and long range use of renewable energies for encampments of rangers, researchers, and visitors.

Summary of Implementation and Phasing

The actions described in the Development Plan will be carried out in phases, with primary involvement and oversight by IDAEH, CONAP, and FARES. The phases proposed by the Plan include: Phase 1 (2011–2016) – short term; Phase 2 (2016–2021) – mid-term; and Phase 3 (2021–2026) – long term. Table 4.1-1 contains a list of anticipated funding needs by archaeological site and timeframe.

Benefits of the Plan

Those who will benefit from this Archaeological Development Plan include not only the local communities but also the people of Guatemala and the world. Proposed studies will increase our knowledge of the Pre-Classical Period society; they also will contribute to greater understanding and appreciation of Mayan culture. Increased tourism will have direct, tangible economic benefits due to local spending, with positive effects on the overall economy as these impacts multiply. The Government also will gain from the visibility this Plan will create and the opportunities it will offer for leadership in Central America on archaeological conservation and sustainable tourism and related development.