

Everything You Need to Know About the Tikal Ruins in Guatemala

There are many ancient ruins all over Central America. But Tikal, Guatemala, nears the top of the list for so many reasons.

Tikal, Guatemala, is one of the most famous Mayan ruins from the Classic Period. It is located in north-central Petén, Guatemala.

Tikal consists of over 3000 buildings including several large and looming temples. There are nine groups of plazas that are connected by bridges and causeways.

The main center of the city is 500 acres in size!

Read on to learn all about Tikal ruins and what you need to know before you visit.

Tikal History

You can't visit these Guatemala attractions without first understanding some of the Tikal history.

The city began around 1000 B.C. Yet it wasn't a major city until about 300 B.C. Around 750 A.D., the Tikal ruins were a thriving metropolitan city home to about 15 million Mayans.

If you could travel back in time to the Tikal of 700 A.D, you would have found an advanced city with a library, a school, and a hospital. There were also sports arenas, palaces, and temples.

Recently, lasers have discovered a network of roads that

connect more than 60,000 homes, temples and even a fortress for times of war.

There isn't much rainfall in the region. So the Maya controlled the flow of water with canal, reservoirs and drainage systems.

The odd thing about Tikal, Guatemala is that although this city was the height of power for Mesoamerica, it didn't last. By 950 A.D., the city was a ghost town.

Archeologists still don't understand why. It may have been drought, deforestation or something else.

Building Tikal

The word Tikal comes from the word *ti ak'al* in the Yucatec Maya language meaning "at the waterhole."

The architecture in Tikal is made from limestone. Many of these buildings include inscribed stone monuments.

When you explore to Tikal, you will be drawn to Temple IV – the tallest pre-Columbian structure in the Americas. At 70 meters (230 feet) tall, this temple is a great climb with a rewarding view.

You may recall seeing the breathtaking view in *Star Wars: Episode IV*.

The second highest temple, Temple I is 47 meters (154 feet) tall. This is called the Temple of the Great Jaguar. It was built for a king named Lord Jasaw Chan K'awil who died near the end of the civilization.

Next to Temple I sits Temple II. This temple, known as the Temple of the Mask. This temple was likely built by Lord K'awil for his wife. The structure is perfectly oriented towards the rising sun.

Make sure to climb up so you can see the magnificent views of the city and the jungle.

Tikal Park

The main gates of Tikal park open at 6 am and close at 6 pm each day. Tickets to get into the park cost less than \$20USD for adults.

You can buy a map outside of the visitor's center. But unless you want to keep the map as a souvenir, opt to take a picture of the map on your phone instead.

There are many great walking trails in the park that wind through and around the temple complexes.

In the main area, you'll find a visitor's center, tour guide service, a museum, three hotels, a campground, a souvenir shop and a couple of restaurants.

There is no ATM on-site, so make sure to bring the cash you'll need.

Sunrise or Sunset at the Tikal Ruins

Many tourists opt for either a sunrise or sunset tour of Tikal. With such impressive heights and a lush canopy of the jungle, it's no wonder why.

Both sunrise and sunset are great options. There are pros and cons to both.

Keep in mind that you must pay for a guide to do a sunrise tour of Tikal. You can expect to pay around \$14 USD per person. Make sure to buy your ticket the day before because the ticket booth at Tikal won't be open when you arrive for the sunrise tour.

Sunrise at Tikal

Sunrise at Tikal means that you have a very early morning. If you are staying at Flores, your bus may leave at 3 am.

The good thing about sunrise at Tikal is that you will enjoy cooler temperatures and have access to the park when there are many fewer visitors. This makes for a private and special experience.

Sunset at Tikal

If you aren't really an early riser, sunset at Tikal may be your best option. Yet, be warned that you will arrive during the hottest part of the day.

If you plan to do this experience, you should think about staying at the on-site hotels or campground. The last bus returning to Flores leaves at 5:30 pm which doesn't give you time to enjoy the sunset.

If you come to Tikal as part of a Guatemala Adventure Tour, you will already have a Guatemala guide to help you get the most of the experience.

Wear Comfortable Shoes and Clothes

It's important to remember that Tikal, Guatemala is a jungle. It will be hot and muggy even in the evening.

If you plan to climb up a few temples or explore the paths, you can expect some uphill and uneven paths.

Make sure to wear good walking shoes and clothes that breathe well. Bring a refillable water bottle that keeps your water cold. It will be a relief in the heat of mid-day.

Looking for the Perfect Tour?

Thanks for reading all about the history and tips for visiting the Tikal ruins. We hope this article helps you get prepared for your Guatemala adventure.

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