

Tikal

After spending the first night of our journey in Belize City at the Fort Street Hotel, dining on Red Snapper in Banana leaf, and drinking 32 oz. Margaritas, it was time for the five of us, along with our Maya driver and guide to make the long drive to Tikal in Guatemala.

As we neared the border to Guatemala I couldn't help but notice that it resembled something out of a James Bond movie, khaki uniformed soldiers with semi-automatic weapons standing guard over a lonely deserted guard shack out in the middle of nowhere.

After checking our passports, we were detained for quite a while, no reason, they did not check anything, and it just seemed that when they became tired of looking at us, they let us into the country.

After we entered the country, we drove past an army base, complete with barbed wire fence and angry looking guards; I began wondering if I had done something REALLY stupid. There were no freeways here, just a mud road with a gazillion potholes, and this was the main road. I can only imagine what the back roads were like!

Upon arriving at Tikal, I was amazed as to how crowded it was, most people come to Tikal from Guatemala City, and we had entered through the back door. There seemed to be people coming out of the wood work!

It was then that we were informed that we had no room at the Jaguar Inn, the local hotel. As we were planning to observe Tikal under a full moon that evening, this meant that we would be traveling in Guatemala after dark, not a good thing.

Tikal is very old, being occupied between 200-800 AD.

The temple complex has been restored and is actually in very good condition, only royalty and the wealthy lived in the temple area, everyone else lived in villages surrounding the temple.

It was fascinating to be standing in the courtyard where games resembling basketball and racquetball were played. There were even holes in the wall where the ball had to be thrown or kicked through! They were not very large

and looked to be higher than our present day basketball rims, which are ten feet from the floor.

It probably wasn't hard to make the pros in those days, as the losers, and sometimes even the winners were beheaded!

Having lived my life in basketball crazy Indiana, I realized that maybe the reason basketball is so popular in Indiana is that there must be a large number of reincarnated Mayas living in there!

At least we don't behead the losers any more, we come close, but that isn't actually done, well maybe in our minds!

While climbing the Pyramid of Death at Tikal, I fell on my left side twice and also stubbed my left toe, which was a reminder to me to watch my step on the spiritual side of life, I felt constantly bombarded with negative spiritual energy while in Central America and I felt a constant need to protect myself from whatever forces were out there.

I couldn't help but notice the view from the top of the pyramid and couldn't wait for the full moon to rise above the temple.

I wasn't disappointed, the sky cleared and the moon rose right above the temple as planned! It was a spectacular sight, one that can't really be captured on film!

After viewing the full moon rise above Tikal, it was off to our Hotel in Flores, a 45 minute drive through the jungle. We had been warned (repeatedly) not to travel at night, as the banditos made a habit of robbing tourists and leaving them tied up in the jungle. The tour company we were traveling was extremely cautious as one of their groups had been kidnapped just two week earlier.

Everyone was nervous as we boarded the van for our journey, no one said a word. I was seated near the back door, with the idea of bailing out if we got attacked and helping the others escape, good idea, but the back door would probably have been guarded to prevent that from happening.

After traveling for some time on these disastrous roads it became apparent that our biggest fear would not be banditos, but getting stuck in the mud out in the middle of nowhere.

The road leading to the hotel was extremely hazardous, traveling in a Ford van, with brush rubbing both sides of the vehicle; we just barely made it through some of the mud puddles and holes in the road. However, we finally reached our final destination, the Villa Maya Hotel in Flores.

It was well worth the journey!

The hotel was new, and very nice. It was due to open the next week with a dedication ceremony featuring the Governor. We had the place to ourselves! The courteous staff had dinner waiting for us, fried chicken with all the fixins, Gallo beer and desert.

After dinner we enjoyed a well deserved swim in the large pyramid shaped pool, sitting under the waterfall watching the large moon lite lake in the background, it was hard to imagine that there could be any place any nicer than this paradise resort!

Fully refreshed, it was off to a relaxing nights rest in our individual open air room.

Waking up to the sounds of parakeets and Toucans in the trees next to the hotel, we enjoyed a delicious breakfast on the patio, then it was time to board the van for our trip back to Belize.

For photos see Gary's website at www.garywoningphoto.com