



Travel Stories by Amaru & Suzanne



Among the Mayan ruins of Tikal

by Amaru & Suzanne, January 5th 2009

When we left off last, we had just left Caye Caulker on our way to Belize City to catch a bus into Guatemala...

When we booked the bus we were promised that it would be a big express bus (with toilet) that would take us on the five hour journey all the way to Flores in Guatemala, they even showed us a photo of a nice big bus.

So imagine our surprise when we first discover that the bus is really nothing more than a larger minibus. Secondly, the bus seemed to be packed to the rafters and we wouldn't be able to fit on it. Some guy was even telling us that we would have to wait for the 14.30 bus. What?!? What are we going to do in Belize City for 5 hours??

No way! We complained and said that we had been given the tickets on the 9:30am bus, that seats had been confirmed and after much discussion we managed to get squeezed onto one of these buses, sitting in the aisle on temporary seats which didn't have a lot of support for our backs....



Our bus to Guatemala didn't look like the one that was advertised



Do we really want to cross?
Bridge under construction...

Needless to say, it wasn't the most comfortable bus ride. At least it didn't go on for that long. After around 3½ hours we reached the Guatemalan border where everyone had to disembark, pass Belizean immigration and then the Guatemalan immigration. All of this took another hour before all the passengers passed through.

Before we got back on the bus I asked Suz if she wanted to grab some more comfortable seats, but she didn't feel like "stealing" seats from other passengers.... sometimes my wife is just a bit too nice, I would have taken the seats in a heartbeat =))

Once we passed the border we instantly felt like we were finally in Central America (in Belize you get a much stronger feeling of the Caribbean).

All the signs on the side of the road were in Spanish and the country side with its houses and animals looked very typically Central American (or at least as they do in movies).

After another hour on the bus we reached our destination, a little village called El Remate. From here we made our way to our accommodation which was **La Casa de Don David**. We had chosen to stay in El Remate instead of Flores since it's closer to Tikal and that was the main reason for our visit to Guatemala.

As soon as we had checked in we knew that we had chosen a great place to stay at.... its location is perfect, right next to the lake and it's also very quiet and peaceful. We loved it straight away!



We have arrived at our destination
La Casa de Don David



Our accomodation
A very nice room in a beautiful setting

We decided to do a Tikal tour the very next day and signed up to their package with transport, lunch and a local guide.

The next morning we were up early again, at 5.30am, having a cup of coffee and waiting for our transport when our guide, Juan, showed up. We had a chat with him before the bus arrived and he told us that we were the only ones he had booked so far but some more might join from the bus. We instantly got a great impression of him, he was very open and had a great personality....

Once we got to the park two other girls joined our tour and we set off. Our first stop was a scale model of what Tikal used to look like where Juan was giving us some background information and also telling us what we would be seeing today.

He then took us into Twin Pyramid Complex Q (there are a few of these around the area). There were commemorative complexes that were build to celebrate a 20 year period (also known as a Katun). We were told about the rites that the king performed and also what he meant for his people. Juan here also showed us that by clapping our hands together we could replicate the sound of the Quetzal bird.... very clever!

We were here also joined by 2 more people on our tour so we were 6 of us in total... still very good, we saw some groups that were 20 to 1 guide.

From here we were taken to see the Grand Plaza, the core of the city and its most visited area. Here we were able to see Temple I, also known as the Great Jaguar Temple. When you see an image from Tikal, this temple is usually what you see...



The garden at
La Casa de Don David



Sunset over Lake Peten Itza
With the locals bathing and washing

At each location Juan would let us explore a bit first and then we all sat down (almost as if we were at school.... we were loving it) and he would tell us about the area, its history, uses and archeology.

This way we covered The Grand Plaza, Temple I-III, Mundo Perdido (oldest area of the city), Seven Temples Plaza and eventually we were able to climb the tallest temple in the area, Temple IV. From up here you get a great view of the forest surrounding the area and you can see the top of temples I and II (Juan told us that this was the Star Wars view as it was here that the first movie was filmed back in 1977).

On our way back to the parking lot we heard some loud roarings coming through the jungle and soon enough we had found some Howler Monkeys. These guys are really noisy and almost sound like jaguars...

The feeling we had after the tour was that this was one of the best tours we've ever done, not only was the visit to Tikal amazing, it was also made so much better just because of the guide that we had. We asked him if he had a University degree since he was so knowledgeable about it but he just insisted that it was a personal interest that had led him to read everything he could find about the Mayan Culture (I think my Dad would find it interesting to have a chat with him regarding Mayans and Inkas).

The rest of that afternoon we stayed in our room, doing some reading, having siestas and just relaxing...

We still had one more day in Guatemala though... so the next morning after breakfast (more lunch really if you go by the clock) we decided to make a day trip into Flores.



A beautiful lake
Specially during sunset



We've made a new friend
He was a bit shy at first though...

Our original plan was to take the local bus into the city but when a man (Bruno) approached us and asked if we needed a taxi we just decided to go with it. In the end we managed to use him as a personal taxi driver for that day and he was also able to take us to the airport the next morning.

Anyway, we arrived in Flores which is located on a island on the lake of Peten Itza. It's quite a small place but it was nice to be able to walk around and just look around. We even managed to find an internet cafe here where we called and booked our accomodation in Cuba for the next night...

Our visit in Guatemala was short, but we both really enjoyed it a lot, people are very friendly, the food is good and besides Tikal, there is so much more to see and experience here. Who knows.... we might come back here some time soon again!



A horse at sunset
...just an arty kind of shot



La Casa de Don David
During sunset



Suz with our big drinks
(non-alcoholic mind you)



This guy stayed outside our room
for the duration of our stay



We have arrived at
Tikal



Our morning started out
quite foggy



A miniature model
of what Tikal looked like



Apparently there are Crocodiles here
But we didn't see any...



Pillars in front of
the Twin Pyramid Complexes



Looking down at Suz
from the top of the Pyramid



Spider Monkey
Quite a few of these around...



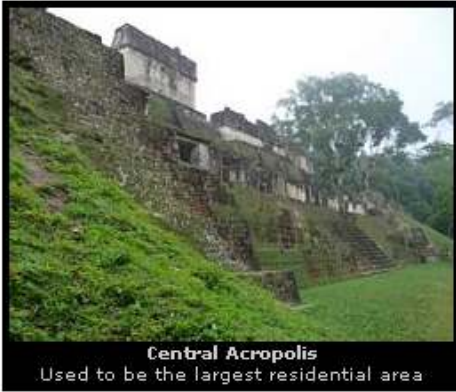
Mayan symbols
Carved onto the sandstone



Our guide Juan
explaining what the writing means



Suz and I
in front of Temple I



Central Acropolis
Used to be the largest residential area



At the Grand Plaza
The main area in Tikal



We found a Mayan Turkey
Apparently it's a Ocellated Turkey



A wall Mask
Massive...



Another wall Mask
Both of them quite hidden...



Temple I is also known
as the Great Jaguar Temple



Suz sitting down and enjoying the view
It's beautiful in the fog



All of this is part of the
Grand Plaza



Suz climbing down
some slippery stairs



Mundo Perdido
"The Lost World"



We're sitting down and are getting
a history lesson from our guide



Recognize the view?
Yup, it's the view from Star Wars



It's a Toucan
Also known as a Collared Aracari



The Great Jaguar Temple
...again



We're back at the
Grand Plaza



Temple II was built in honor
of the ruler Ah Cacao's wife



The Great Jaguar Temple
The most known temple in Tikal



Howling Monkeys
They do get quite loud!



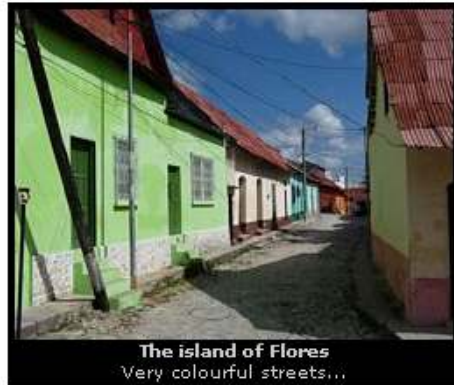
Howling Monkeys
They sound more like a panther...



A local kid
selling fresh orange juice



Arriving at the island
of Flores



The island of Flores
Very colourful streets...



Wandering the
streets of Flores



Municipal building
in Flores



Suz
at a restaurant in Flores



Gallo
Trying out the local beer

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