

## El Tajín

The beautiful city of El Tajín was developed between 800 and 1200 A.D. in the humid, hot and rich lands of the north of the current state of Veracruz, not far from the sea. Due to its extraordinary location, it had interactions with both the Maya area and the cities of central and western Mexico.

It shares characteristics with other cities in Mesoamerica, such as the use of the ball game and the representation of the god Quetzalcóatl, the feathered serpent, linked to the cycle of Venus.

All cities have a particular spatial arrangement and this is the main characteristic that distinguishes a rural settlement from an urban one. The city in its spatial arrangement responds to the political, social and cultural needs of the society that designed it. In the case of El Tajín, it may seem that the location was made at random or lacked planning; however, it is quite the opposite.



### Panoramic view of El Tajín

There are aspects that are not usual in our conception of the use of architecture, such as the construction of solid structures to scale them. However, everything had a purpose, a reason and a meaning. Only it is not so evident to us.

When touring the pre-Hispanic city of El Tajín, what can be appreciated is the existence and division of social classes which politically coincide with the existence of a consolidated state. It is a base whose political support is social consensus and whose legitimacy is the preferably divine forces that evidently escape the reach of humans.

Rulers manage to have this privileged position because they have close ties with the gods, and their lineage comes from the latter. In the area known as El Tajín Chico, there is evidence of mural painting. It is 98 linear feet in a residential area. Fantastic zoomorphic human characters were captured, reflecting the high status of those who inhabited these spaces.

Some of the elements that are associated with wind, water, and animals like jaguars or snakes with feline bodies, feathers, and clouds in the form of fretwork. The colors used were red, black, white, blue, green, pink, brown and yellow. The skill that the artists showed in the realization of these murals highlights their extraordinary ability to express their ideas through mural paintings.

On the walls of the ball game courts are embodied images of male rulers with their exploits in war, sacrifices and in the ball games. Curiously, a woman is represented only once in a bas-relief in El Tajín. It is a mother who gives her baby to a priest.

The architecture of El Tajín is amazing. We are surprised by each space and its original urban design. El Tajín was built with open spaces delimited by slopes and temples. The main area of this pre-Hispanic city has an extension of 1.5 square kilometers and includes 168 structures such as altars, ball courts and temples.

In the city of El Tajín, records of 17 ball games have been found. The iconography that is represented on their walls is related to the rites and functions that accompany the investiture of the leaders. The themes are mythical, ritual, and historical, with a religious character. There are human characters, animals or beings with attributes of both, figures of plants, ritual objects,

architectural structures, geometric motifs and some glyphs. Realistic and abstract designs are mixed in each of the relics.

In the mythical scenes, there are walls that present divinities or other beings. In others there are priests wearing masks, accompanied by serpentine characters with bat forms, framed by snake bodies or intertwined with them, and finally, friezes in which beings or their masks are observed in interlaces and scrolls.



Ball Game, Tajín, Veracruz

The ritual scenes include references to the ball game, with the court buildings and the ball itself. You can distinguish the players, other human characters, beings with zoomorphic heads and divinities such as the death. They even represented the sacrifice of a ball player. (see image).

In the historical scenes, it is possible to identify the names of the characters who took part in some events. Birds, other animals, anthropomorphic beings with some non-human attributes, divinities and symbolic-religious elements also appear in the scenes. The gods seem to take part



in the events that occur in daily life. Men and gods share the same framework, as in the epic stories.



Niche Pyramid, Tajín

This city is imposing; it doesn't leave anyone indifferent. The most important structure was the pyramid of the niches. It is believed that it was an astronomical marker linked to the agricultural calendar as well as the descent of the God Quetzalcóatl at the beginning of the sowing season. It is a pyramidal base composed of seven floors and an estimated number of 365 niches. It was a sacred and ritual space of public and private character, it was also a solar marker, an astronomical observatory and, as we already indicated, an agricultural calendar.

The surprising thing about this monument is its aesthetic quality. The perfection in its constructive realization, both the north and south are surrounded by several ball game courts. They symbolize the movement of the sun, which allows it to pass through the sky and the underworld, giving rise to the succession of day and night, the transition from light to darkness.

The wind is symbolized by the feathered snakes. In the northern part of the site there is a wall in the shape of a huge stepped greca representing Quetzalcóatl, a deity linked to the wind.

In the landscape of El Tajín, the exquisite silhouette of the pyramid of the niches stands out, but there is much more to discover in this pre-Hispanic city: the ball games, the walls and their reliefs that dazzle us with their mythical creatures, rituals and historical scenes. As we walk through El Tajín the roads seem too narrow, sometimes disappearing for a moment. The purpose is to invite us to continue exploring and imagining how this great city was in its time of splendor.

I invite you to get to know El Tajín and let yourself be amazed by its extraordinary architecture, its delicate murals, its interesting panels and reliefs and the stories it holds in each niche.



Panoramic view of El Tajín



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