

## **Palenque: Consolidation of Pakal's Tomb**

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Part 1

PALENQUE, Chiapas - Archaeologists responsible for the partially-excavated Maya ruins of Palenque have decided to close the tomb of the Priest-King Pakal.

It is understood Pakal's tomb, especially popular with sightseers, will be off-limits until this coming December.

Located in the gateway to the Lacandon Rainforest in the northernmost part of the State of Chiapas, this ancient Maya city receives more than 350,000 tourists a year.

This is despite the ongoing tug-of-war between Zapatista Maya guerrillas and the federal government.

Years ago the ruins became a popular destination on the "Maya Trail" and millions of visitors have explored the crypt.

Unfortunately, the temple which houses the seventh century A.D. tomb, the "Temple of the Inscriptions," has been severely affected by extreme humidity and water infiltration.

The humidity and sweat of so many visitors inside the temple was severely affecting the interior of the temple and crypt and moss and mold began to grow. Tests and restorative work are now underway.

Arnoldo Gonzalez Cruz, archaeologist of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), told the [www.TheNewsMexico.com](http://www.TheNewsMexico.com) that tourists "will just have to wait until the work is completed."

It was imperative, according to Gonzalez Cruz, that the tomb be closed. "We are now able to study and calculate the interior climate," he said. "That is helping us do the urgently needed restoration work."

But even after December, the archaeologist adds, it will be necessary to control the influx of tourists, not only in the tomb, but also in the palace complex.

The caretakers intend to allow only 20 visitors access to the inside of the tomb and only during the coolest part of the day, between 4 and 5 pm.

It is of little wonder why the Palenque ruins are so popular. To justify Pakal's own divine right to rule, he conscripted thousands of Indian subjects to edify his own tomb.

He also had scribes elegantly carve in stone a fantastic amount of hieroglyphs on a temple wall.

But the tomb was well hidden from outsiders. It took until 1952 before the discovery was made (quite by accident when Mexican archaeologist Alberto Ruz Lhuillier removed a stone slab in the pyramid's top floor).

Then it took several years for the workers to haul out all of the rubble from the inside hidden staircase of the temple-pyramid.

At the bottom of the staircase, after opening an immense triangular-shaped door, a delicately stone-carved giant sarcophagus lid was first revealed.

And when that 10-ton stone slab was removed, Ruz Lhuillier saw Pakal's face for the first time, covered in a mosaic emerald green jade mask (now housed in the Maya Room of the Museum of Anthropology and History in Mexico City).

Little by little, more of the entire complex was revealed. The palace, for example, is a complex of temples and buildings that rise on an artificial man-made platform 30 feet high, 300 feet long and 240 feet wide.

Amazingly, only 15 percent excavated of the ancient city has been uncovered.

But mass tourism and the encroaching city of Palenque are hindering both the discovery and restoration processes.

However, there is some good news for visitors.

While Pakal's tomb has been temporarily re-sealed to visitors, another crypt is open for viewing on the west side of the Temple of the Inscriptions.

In 1994 Arnaldo González discovered a funerary crypt of the "Red Queen." And though investigators have only begun to speculate on who the royal queen was, this temporary name was coined from the vermilion cinnabar she was covered in.

But the Red Queen's crypt is also being damaged by water filtrations.

"As much as we try to control the water, it seeps in here too from the mountain behind it," the archeologist said.