Living Lakes
Mayan Culture and Conservation of Nature in Guatemala and Lake Atitlán:

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Linking Cultural Landscape Values to Lake Protection
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Mesoamerica

Mesoamerica witnessed the birth of one of the greatest civilizations and cultures of the world: the Mayan culture.
It extended from the south of Mexico to Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador.

The Mayan culture has endured for more than 3,000 years and the culture still remain.
Their accomplishments in the development of architecture, astronomy, mathematics, art and the counting of time, through Mayan calendar, have astonished the world.

Tikal - UNESCO World Heritage Site

Mayan Pyramid: Tikal Guatemala
Time:

Mayan Calendar
The Guatemalan population is approximately 60% indigenous.

Today, the Maya are made up of twenty-one linguistic communities with common elements such as their worldview, spiritual practices, community authorities, forms of organization, vernacular architecture, agricultural practices, and the management of natural resources, that together, grant unity among their diversity.
In the watershed of Lake Atitlán, the indigenous groups, Kiche, Kaqchikel, and Tzutujil make up 95% of the population. The Maya sanctify nature to show their respect for the Cosmos. The Mayan worldview is intimately related to nature.
Key belief of their worldview: human being is absolutely part of nature.

Water, air, fire, and earth are essential natural elements in the creation of their culture.

They practice ceremonies in Sacred sites and places of natural beauties and ecological importance.
The overall forest coverage in Guatemala is 38%, of which 60% is found in areas predominated occupied by the Mayan population.

Half of the protected areas in Guatemala are located in territories occupied by the Mayas, including Atitlán lake.
Families collect firewood for cooking and heating.

Plants provide a sustainable source of material for woven mats, they are also used to make dyes for traditional clothing and other handicrafts.
The use of medicinal plants is a fundamental part of traditional medicine in Guatemala.

The practice of soil conservation through the use of terraces is widely practiced in Guatemalan indigenous communities.
The Management Plan for the Multiple Use of the Atitlan Watershed Protected Area takes into consideration both natural and cultural elements.

Mayan archeological sites

Sacred sites and historic routes
Mayan cultural heritage such as paintings, images, and archeological remnants

- Historic memory, knowledge, and traditional practices
- Community organization and values
- Spiritual, therapeutic and recreational landscape values
Main Threats to Cultural Conservation:

- Lack of urban and rural planning, uncontrolled growth
- Globalization process - no time for adaptation.
- Lack of valuation of the culture and the landscape.

Wars destroy the autoctonus organization in the past decades.

Social division among different religious groups

Negative impact of modern civilization.
National Policy for the Conservation of Mayan Culture and Spirituality.

Creation of the National Council of Sacred Sites

This is a decentralized state entity, with jurisdiction in the entire territory. The objectives is the guaranteed right of spiritual practice in Mayan communities. It will exercise the administration of the sacred sites and define the places, objects and sacred elements of Mayan spirituality.

• The congnition, respect and promotion of cultural pluralism in Guatemala society.
• The validity of Mayan spirituality

• The validity of the Mayan way of life and social organization.
• The validity of the indigenous rights of the Mayan community.
Conservation Strategies of the Master Plan

Promote the establishment of the Commission of Culture and Indigenous Communities in the Departmental Advisory Council with the participation of the State and the civil society.

Develop alliances between indigenous authorities and local organized groups, private businesses, non-profit organizations and municipalities to promote and strengthen the protection, control and supervision of cultural places and values.

Establish a monitoring system for the tangible cultural patrimony, including sacred sites.

Investigate, systematize, diffuse and strengthen the principles, values and manifestations of the living culture and the cultural patrimony, based on the full participation of the community.
Conclusion

Maya spirituality is a relationship with Nature that emphasizes balance and reciprocity.

Many local indigenous leaders believe that the environmental degradation is due to the decrease of these Spiritual practices

The conservation of Mayan culture and spirituality is totally related to the conservation of Nature.