



La Ruta Zoque

Churches in Zoque Province, Chiapas, Mexico – 4-18 July 2009

◆ Cultural site – submitted to the Tentative List in 2001

The site: This valuable historic complex includes eight XVI-century churches built under the guidance of Dominican friars, whose goal was to evangelise the Zoque people, a culture which was still very much alive, and was heir to one of the most ancient cultures in Mesoamerica. The building project was originally of European design, but it soon acquired local features, and it is therefore one of a kind in Mexican Colonial art. The presence of these churches triggered the development of a school of gilded and painted sculpture. The Convent of Santo Domingo Tecpatan became the most important centre in the region, and is now the focal point of efforts to recover the use of the Zoque language. All eight churches still preserve their roles as spiritual guides for the local population.



The project and its objectives: The church and former monastery of Santo Domingo, begun in the mid-16th century, will be the main site where the project will take place. The complex is mudéjar-style with marked medieval influence, and dates from the earliest building period. Vestiges of the presbytery, which was once covered with a conch vault, are all that remain of the nave. The project will see the participation of 15 international volunteers including local and national young people working on the preservation of the compound – which is currently only inhabited by two Franciscans friars – and running an awareness raising campaign for the local population to rediscover this important site and its historic and cultural role. The objectives of the project are to encourage the local population to work on the protection of their cultural heritage; to make conservation works in the church of Santo Domingo; to promote awareness for World Heritage conservation among the Zoque population; to encourage the participation of the local population in the preservation of church and ex-convent of Santo Domingo in Tecpatan; and to encourage international voluntary service participation in the conservation of the world's cultural heritage.

The activities: Volunteers will clear the surroundings of the ex-convent and the church, cleaning of mosses and the growing parasite vegetation in the walls of different facades which are currently in ruinous state. Leisure and cultural activities will also be organised together with the local population to discover the rest of the churches of the Zoque Route, learn about the local traditions and visit other cultural and natural heritage sites in the region.

Expected results: The main result of the project will be a sensitised local population interested in and capable of setting up concrete projects aimed at preserving the cultural heritage of the Zoque Route. The activities will also have improved the image of the site thanks to the renovation works carried by the volunteers, encouraging partner organisations at local level to continue the preservation and renovation actions with a wider participation and ownership of the local population and authorities.

Partners: The project will have the support of the INAH – the institution in charge of the preservation of the architectural heritage in Mexico – and of UNESCO National Commission in what concerns the advising and follow up of the project. The municipality of Tecpatan will participate in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the project.

Organisation responsible for the project:

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[World Heritage Volunteers - "Patrimonito Voluntary Action 2009"](#)

Sources: for the description of the World Heritage site: UNESCO World Heritage List, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list>
For the description of the activities: Nataté A.C. Mexico and CCIVS, www.unesco.org/ccivs