

Campeche (Mexico)

No 895

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Zone of historic monuments in the town of Campeche and its system of fortifications
<i>Location</i>	State of Campeche
<i>State Party</i>	Mexico
<i>Date</i>	23 June 1998

Justification by State Party

The town of Campeche is an urbanization model of a Baroque city (1686-1704), with a grid layout, surrounded by an irregular hexagon corresponding to the defensive belt which encircled the town and protected it from pirate attacks. For this reason, its system of fortifications is part of an overall defence plan, an architectural expression of its history, which still exists in certain town planning features.

Criterion ii

The area of historic monuments in the town of Campeche, with its walled section, is an example of a colonial harbour town which has played an important economic and strategic role over time. It still has traces of its urban plan and its historic buildings, which are silent witnesses to the high degree of conservation and integrity of the town.

The fortifications of Campeche provide an outstanding illustration of the military architecture of the 17th and 18th centuries, forming part of a integrated defence system for the ports established by Spain in the Caribbean to defend itself against pirate invasions. Campeche is one of two fortified towns on the Caribbean coast of Mexico, and the only one to have largely conserved this important cultural heritage.

Criterion iv

Category of Property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the area of historic monuments of the town of Campeche and its system of fortifications are a *group of buildings*.

History and Description

History

Campeche was founded in 1540 by Francisco Montejo El Mozo in the south-west of the Maya

region of Ah Kin Pech, which had been explored and occupied by Spanish conquerors from 1517 onwards. From the start, the port played a major role as a starting point for expeditions to the Yucatan peninsula and the Petén region in Guatemala. Its commercial and military importance made it the second biggest town in the Gulf of Mexico, after Mérida.

During the second half of the 16th century, Campeche, like other Caribbean towns, was systematically attacked by pirates and corsairs in the pay of enemies of Spain; this is why a large-scale defensive system was installed. At the beginning of the 18th century, the town was surrounded by an impressive hexagonal wall with a perimeter of 2536m, 6-8m high, and 2.50m thick. An urban checkerboard plan was chosen, with a *Plaza Mayor* facing the sea and surrounded by government and religious edifices.

In the 19th century, the town endowed itself with a fine theatre, harmonized with the urban fabric. A section of the wall was pulled down in 1893 to open up a space with a view of the sea, and the main square was turned into a public garden.

In the 20th century, the traditional areas of the town centre were little affected by the modernization movement owing to a relative slackening of the economy.

Description

The area of historic monuments is in the shape of an uneven polygon spread over 181ha, including 45ha surrounded by walls, with the town stretching out on each side, following the configuration of the coast and the relief. The protected group consists of two sub-groups: area A with a high density of buildings of great heritage value, and area B, which is not so dense or valuable but which forms a transitional and protective zone. Among the c 1000 buildings of historic value are the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, several churches, the Toro theatre, and the municipal archives.

The system of fortifications, with the redoubts of San José and San Miguel, and the batteries of San Lucas, San Matías, and San Luís, is mainly in the area of historic monuments, at both ends and facing the sea.

Management and Protection

Legal status

Most of the buildings in the area of historic monuments are privately owned, with a few being publicly owned.

Legal protection is ensured by the 1972 federal legislation on Monuments and Archaeological Areas and by its application regulations of 1975 under which all modifications to buildings must receive prior authorization. A Federal Decree of 1986 lists the area of historic monuments of Campeche and places it under the authority of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH).

At municipal level, a number of prescriptions regulate the conditions for carrying out work on

monuments, and ensure respect for the urban image and various protective measures. An important legal instrument is the *Partial Programme for the Conservation and Improvement of the Area of Historic Monuments* which has recently been adopted. This management plan is intended to be a dynamic instrument for the protection and re-allocation of buildings for new economic and cultural purposes.

Management

The main responsibility for management is held by the State Office for the Coordination of Monuments and Sites and the Municipal Department of Town Planning. These two offices are run by competent and motivated professionals, under the direct authority of the Governor or the President of the Town Council.

The Partial Conservation Programme mentioned above was drawn up by the Department of Urban Planning. It covers 42ha surrounded by walls, and lays down guidelines for conservation, for the allocation of land, and for the promotion of tourist, commercial, and social activities. It also aims at improving housing and living conditions in the historic centre.

At federal level, overall supervision of the conservation conditions of the cultural heritage is exercised by the National Institute of Anthropology and History.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

The conservation conditions are excellent. Even before the adoption of legal protective measures, the residents of the town carefully watched over the conservation of the historic centre and this public conscience is still very much alive.

A large-scale programme to restore facades has been implemented. It is not just a question of a facelift, since most of the buildings are still in a good state of preservation. Whenever necessary, work is also carried out inside the buildings. Several buildings of quality are in the process of being rehabilitated: No 6 on the main square will house a social and cultural institution and the *Renacimiento Circus* of 1910, which still has its original metal structure, will become a multi-purpose hall.

The works undertaken on several sections of the fortifications are exemplary. The green areas are well kept and the town is clean and peaceful.

Authenticity

The area of historic monuments and the system of fortifications have a high degree of authenticity because of the small number of transformations and interventions. Restoration works make use of traditional techniques and materials.

The authenticity of the historical centre is, to a large extent, due to the continuity of a traditional family lifestyle, with manifestations of a rich intangible

heritage, illustrated by local music, dances, cooking, crafts, and clothes.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the historic centre of Campeche and the system of fortifications in February 1999. In addition, ICOMOS also consulted its International Scientific Committee on Historic Towns and Villages.

Qualities

The area of historic monuments is a coherent reflection of colonial architecture. The very well conserved system of fortifications is an illustration of military engineering during the period of Spanish colonialism in the Caribbean.

Comparative analysis

The historic centre of Campeche, surrounded by a defensive wall, and its fortifications are of an exceptionally high standard, comparable with Cartagena de Indias and San Juan in Puerto Rico. The harbour town is part of a defensive system and transport routes covering all the Caribbean, as demonstrated by experts who met in Cartagena de Indias in 1996 under the auspices of UNESCO.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

The buffer zone is coherently defined but should be extended to cover a larger area, so as to preserve the heritage values of the perimeter of the historic centre, and it should also include the fortresses.

There is good reason to pursue with determination the present policy to improve the living conditions of the inhabitants of the historic centre and to make investments for an endogenous tourist development - accommodation in the home of an inhabitant, local crafts, and cultural events.

In addition to the historic centre and the buffer zone, it would be appropriate to take into consideration all the land of the municipality of Campeche, considered as a vast complex of architectural, archaeological, natural and cultural values.

Brief Description

The historic centre of Campeche is a harbour town typical of the Spanish colonial period in the New World which has kept its outer walls and its global system of fortifications.

Recommendations

That this cultural property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria ii and iv*:

Criterion ii: The harbour town of Campeche is an urbanization model of a Baroque colonial town, with its checkerboard street plan; the defensive walls surrounding its historic centre reflect the influence of the military architecture in the Caribbean.

Criterion iv: The fortifications system of Campeche, an eminent example of the military architecture of the 17th and 18th centuries, is part of an overall defensive system set up by the Spanish to protect the ports on the Caribbean Sea from pirate attacks.

ICOMOS, September 1999