



### The History and Education Center "Rijj Ib'ooj" in Río Negro

The community of Río Negro was able to recover after the tragic events of the civil war. This transformation of pain into a motor for social change has made Río Negro an ideal place to learn about the past and its relation to the present and future. It is one of the most fitting places to give testimony about the atrocities of the civil war and also to reflect on ways in which to work for justice, dignity and peace.

In 2007 the community of Río Negro built the History and Education Center Rijj Ib'ooj (shell of the armadillo) to commemorate its history and present the culture of the region. The Center combines two approaches: an educational one with a tourist one.

The educational focus concentrates on two themes which are interrelated: the history and culture of the region. The tourist focus of the Center in Río Negro is very much related to the historic one, since the tourist activities such as visiting caves or archeological sites convey a lot about the history of the area.

The Center is administrated and run by the families of Río Negro. The entire income generated by the Center is for the community. Its doors are open for groups of people who want to visit the community and for workshops and retreats.

### The Río Negro has a lot to tell

For more than 2,700 years, Mayas have been living in the central river basin of the Río Chixoy/Río Negro. There were many religious ceremonial centers, some of them mentioned in the Popol Wuuj and other historical sources. However, the area not only conveys a sense of ancient culture, it also bears testimony to the atrocities that were committed in the more recent history of Guatemala. In 1978, before the construction of the Chixoy Hydroelectric Power Station, the community of Río Negro was the second largest in the central river basin of the Río Chixoy. The 113 families belonged to the Maya Achi, who have been living in the region for centuries.

During the civil war, the community was the scene of five massacres, in which approximately 440 people were murdered. The survivors fled and hid in the hills. At the same time their sacred sites were disappearing under the waters of the reservoir and the Pueblo Viejo Dam nearing completion. At the beginning of the 90s, some of those who had fled decided to return and to recover the land of their ancestors and fill it with life again.

"In Río Negro, where the brightest and darkest aspects of life come together, you can appreciate how the community of Río Negro has transformed suffering into new life."

### Installations

The Center consists of the House of Memory and the Traditional Community.

- In the House of Memory, information is presented about the history of Río Negro, from the time prior to the Spanish invasion, including the period of the armed conflict in the late 20th century and up until now. It also has a Room for Reflection in honor and in memory of the victims of the genocide.
- The Traditional Community is a replica of typical dwellings of the Maya Achi inhabitants of Río Negro and shows various aspects of their daily life and that of their ancestors.

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### We offer



- Accommodation and food for approx. 30 people
- Small kitchen for our visitors' use
- Large balcony from which one can enjoy a beautiful panoramic view of the valley and the river basin
- Pavilion where one can eat and work outside
- Library with books and films about the history of the area
- Multimedia equipment to see films
- Infrastructure for workshops
- Sale of handicrafts made in Río Negro

### Activities

• The path of memory "The sun rises again in Pak'oxom", devoted to the massacre of March 13, 1982 in Río Negro

• The exhibition "Voices from Río Negro. Rising from memory, illuminating the new dawn" about the history of Río Negro

• Displays of the Maya Achi culture

• Displays of archeological findings

• Excursions by boat to archeological sites

• Excursions to caves and places of refuge during the armed conflict

• Walks to get to know the community and its surroundings

• Instruction in making fishing nets, hammocks, servilletas (small woven cloths), bags, petates (palm mats), etc.

• Marimba concerts

• Swimming and fishing in the river

### Exhibition "Voices from Río Negro. Rising from memory, illuminating the new dawn"



The exhibition presents the important historic events in the community from the point of view of those living there. It focuses on different chapters in history, happy ones and sad ones: the life of their ancestors, the construction of the Chixoy Hydroelectric Power Station, the civil war, survival, the return to Río Negro and present-day life with its challenges, hopes and demands.

The exhibition shows the abuses and cruelty the people endured and how – despite the immense pain – they managed to overcome obstacles and rise up again with dignity. Moreover, the exhibition contributes to an awareness of the importance of history for the present and of the challenges for building peace and the role of the community members in this endeavor.



### The path of memory "The sun rises again in Pak'oxom"

The path of memory focuses on one of the cruelest chapters in the history of Río Negro: the massacre of March 13, 1982. Visitors take the same path as the 177 women and children who were assassinated were forced to take that fateful day. One can walk up the hillside, passing the conacaste, the tree around which the women were obliged to dance in an act of humiliation, and finally arrive at Pak'oxom, the site of the massacre.

Two Guatemalan artists have produced paintings of the events that marked that day and, in doing so, have singled out eight significant places along the way. The conacaste-tree and also Pak'oxom are historic sites of particular great importance for the people of Río Negro and remind them of the suffering of family members. The path of memory communicates the horror and martyrdom of that day, but it also documents the stories of survival and the transformation of the victims into individuals who today fight for justice. Thus the path of memory serves as a bridge between the past and the present as well as a link between the different generations.

### The Maya Achi Culture Path



The Maya Achi Culture Path presents images of life as it is in Río Negro today: dynamic and creative. The exhibition shows how the inhabitants of Río Negro have adopted new instruments and technologies and developed forms of social organization, without having to break with traditions they value.

This exhibition is an excellent way of getting to know what the community is like today and how the inhabitants live off their land. It is amazing to see how the Maya Achi culture continues to develop despite the difficult conditions that were imposed on the people after the construction of the Chixoy Hydroelectric Power Station.

### Excursions to ceremonial sites and caves

For up to 2,700 years Mayas have been living in the central river basin of the Río Chixoy/Río Negro. 45 archeological sites representing up to 2,500 years of antiquity have been identified along the river basin. The most important objects found date back to the Preclásico Medio of Mayan history. Some of the places were civic-religious centers with extensive ceremonial complexes.

In 1978 a French-Guatemalan team of scientists started to explore the central river basin of the Río Negro. Their goal was to rescue the archeological sites that were condemned to disappear under the waters of the reservoir. The most important sites near Río Negro are Pueblo Viejo, Los Encuentros, Kawinal, Chicruz and El Jocote. Visitors can go by boat to the sites that are now covered by water as well as to Kawinal, which remains partly visible throughout many months of the year. In the History and Education Center Rijj Ib'ooj replicas of excavated vessels as well as fragments of ceramics are on display.

The boat ride to Río Negro itself is enchanting, and the environs of the community are very attractive for those who enjoy more adventurous activities such as hiking and exploring caves. There are many impressive caves near Río Negro, many of which played an extremely important role during the civil war. The survivors of the massacres hid in the caves, where they were protected from rain and could make fires. Today local guides help visitors to explore the caves and at the same time learn more about the history of Río Negro.



### Workshops: handicrafts of Río Negro



Palm trees grow abundantly in the region of Baja Verapaz and the inhabitants of Río Negro looked for ways to use this plant. When it is supple, it is used to make bags, brooms (mezabal), fire-blowers, hats and mats. The palm mats are important for the people of Río Negro because they sleep on them, and when somebody dies, a big mat without colors is made in which the person is wrapped up. The mats can be simple or double in thickness. The difference is that for the double ones, the leaves are not separated; for the simple ones they are. In order to decorate the simple ones, some leaves are painted with añalina, which makes them look more cheerful. In Río Negro there is white palm and yellow palm (suyate); the latter weighs more and is more durable. Visitors can learn how to make a typical mat or petate.

Before the civil war, the custom of weaving did not exist in Río Negro. Some years ago, however, men and women using waist looms learned to make bags, güipiles (traditional blouses) and servilletas (small woven cloths to keep tortillas warm). The wisdom of the ancestors is woven into the Mayan textiles. The secrets of nature are expressed in the güipiles women wear every day in Río Negro; there are many designs with flowers and birds. Visitors have the opportunity to learn how servilletas and bags are made.



The Virtual Museum of Historic Memory of the Center of Mesoamerican Research (CIRMA) is a series of interpretative exhibitions of the political history of the country, from 1808 until today. Its aim is to contribute to the preservation of historic memory in Guatemala and to the development of a sense of citizenship and includes elements such as social transformation, dialogue, reconciliation and critical thought.

The museum gives pre-eminence to the events that have shaped the more recent past, taking into account the testimony of those who have previously been invisible and consigned to oblivion, especially women and the indigenous population. It emphasizes their role as subjects and not as objects of history. It is a project that is constantly evolving, facilitated by virtual mediums. The History and Education Center Rijj Ib'ooj and the history of Río Negro are part of the Virtual Museum of Historic Memory of CIRMA.

"We, who are living in Río Negro and who have suffered through great distress, are fighting and learning to overcome our fear. We are content now; fear has more or less been left behind. But what we want is not to forget the stories of our parents and grandparents who died in the massacres, of our brothers and friends. That is our idea."

Wa'ora lik kojki'kotik, e rumal, ma ri xib' k'a e ko la' katajin rik'owik chaje.

### Virtual Museum of Historic Memory

### Getting to Río Negro

At km 192 of the road between Guatemala City and Cobán (near Tactic), at the crossroads known as "Cruce del CID", you turn off onto the unpaved road that leads to the Pueblo Viejo Dam. From there it is a 30-minute boat ride (6 km) to Río Negro. It takes four and a half hours from Guatemala City and one and a half hours from Cobán to get there.

A permit from the National Electrification Institute (INDE) is required to gain access to the boat landing of the Pueblo Viejo Dam. The Pokomchi Community Education Center (CECEP) in San Cristóbal helps you with this administrative step.

### More information and reservations

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