TOURIST AREAS AND POTENTIAL ON THE PACIFIC COAST OF GUATEMALA

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

DAVID ROBERT HICKS

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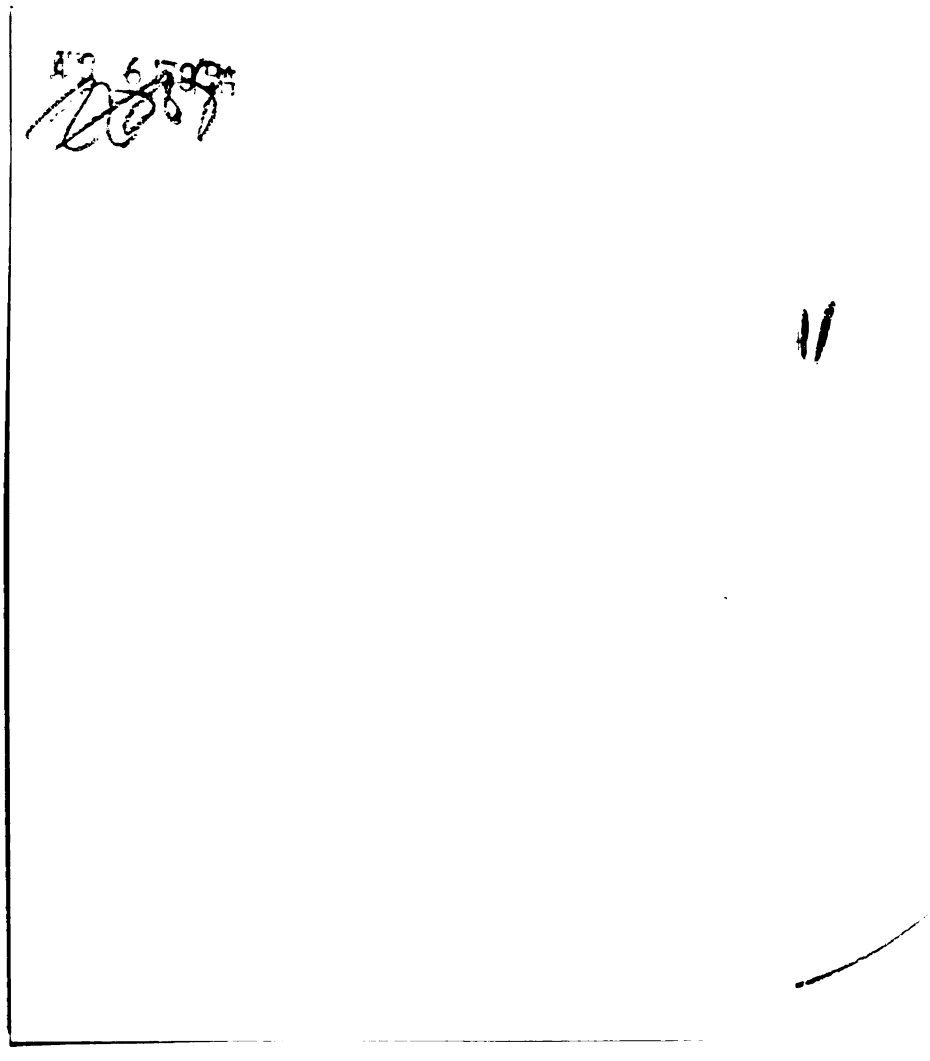

ABSTRACT

TOURIST AREAS AND POTENTIAL ON THE
PACIFIC COAST OF GUATEMALA

by David Robert Hicks

Revenue from tourism in Guatemala is disproportionately small compared with that of the Caribbean area, and especially Mexico. The primary factors responsible are unfavorable beach conditions and inadequate tourist facilities on the Pacific coast. Despite present conditions of underdevelopment, the area appears to have definite tourism potential. The recently-opened Pacific Coast Highway now provides an all-paved route through the region, and some roads connecting with the coast have been completed. The National Tourist Institute has shown increased interest in stimulating tourism in the area, as have a number of other government agencies.

Although Guatemala is no less picturesque than Mexico, its tourist facilities on the Pacific coast consist mostly of poorly constructed thatched-roof beach houses. Safe drinking water, electricity, and proper sewage disposal are, in general, yet to be installed in most areas. Black volcanic sand occurs extensively along the shore, and many tourists, especially North Americans, are not initially attracted to it. Elsewhere, poor access, mangrove thicket, heavy surf, strong undertow, and the lack of natural harbors have retarded tourism development.

David Robert Hicks

An analysis of field data indicates that much of the Guatemalan Pacific coast is unsuited to large-scale tourism development or promotion, but important exceptions exist. With paved access roads from the Pacific Coast Highway, tourists might begin to visit those beach areas having development potential, thus warranting the construction of facilities.

To evaluate the tourism potential of the Pacific coast all transportation routes were analyzed, including roads, rivers, and the Chiquimulilla Canal. Interpretive study of aerial photos, topographic maps, and nautical charts made possible the analysis of beach characteristics. Extensive interviews with people knowledgeable concerning both the area and topic provided a useful supplement to personal observation.

On the basis of this study it is recommended that: (1) roads constructed primarily to serve agriculture should be planned to stimulate fishing and tourism as well, (2) a coastal road should be constructed to connect attractive beach areas that are presently inaccessible to tourists, (3) a national park and game preserve should be established near the Chiquimulilla Canal, and (4) a tourist complex should be built in conjunction with a proposed Pacific port facility. At present, San José is the favored site for the proposed port, and the nearby Chiquimulilla Canal possesses significant tourism potential. A tourist complex located in this area, and benefiting from the advantages offered by the proposed port, would attract additional investment and tourists.

TOURIST AREAS AND POTENTIAL ON THE PACIFIC COAST OF GUATEMALA

By

David Robert Hicks

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The potential for tourism as a major source of foreign exchange in Central America is increasingly being recognized. Yet, tourism development throughout the isthmus has traditionally lagged far behind that of the Caribbean area and Mexico. That the lack of tourism revenue is seen as a regional problem is evidenced by the formation, in 1965, of the Secretaría de Integración Turística Centroamericana (SITCA) by the five Central American nations. The initial program of the organization is designed to attract selected elements of the potential tourist population, rather than tourists in general. This is due largely to the fact that the Central American countries have limited funds to expend in promotional efforts, and existing facilities are inadequate to accommodate a large and sudden influx of tourists at this time.[1]

The paucity of tourism in Guatemala is particularly striking when compared with that of its neighbor to the north. In Mexico, revenue from tourism has increased to such an extent that it is by far the leading source of dollar income.[2] Meanwhile, in Guatemala the income from tourism is less than one-tenth the amount earned from the

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[1]"Tourism in Central America," Latin American Report, Vol. V, No. 12, December-January, 1966, p. 34.

[2]"Turismo, factor básico de la actividad económica mundial", El Universal, Mexico, D. F., July 27, 1966.

country's leading export, coffee. Although Guatemala is no less picturesque than Mexico, it lacks suitable tourist facilities, is deficient in the promotion of tourism, and gains less income from tourists than its own citizens spend in travel abroad.

Some tourism has developed on the Pacific coast of Guatemala, but it is limited primarily to native Guatemalans and to such occasions as weekends and religious holidays. North Americans, constituting the greatest potential number of tourists, and other foreign tourists are conspicuously absent. Three factors largely responsible for the dearth of tourists on the Pacific coast are: (1) poor accommodations, (2) poor access, and (3) inadequate development of areas that have significant tourism potential. Existing tourist facilities consist mainly of poorly constructed thatched-roof beach houses. In general, electricity, potable water, and proper sewage disposal systems have yet to be installed.

Natural conditions have also contributed to the retarded status of tourism along the coast. Black volcanic sand occurs extensively along the shore, and many tourists, especially North Americans, are not initially attracted to the area. Mangrove thickets, heavy surf, undertow, and unfavorable beach conditions have also been detrimental. Thus, until recently, the Pacific coastal plain has been a frontier of settlement, remote from the principal centers of economic activity in Guatemala.

Objectives

This study has a two-fold purpose: (1) to provide comprehensive data useful to both private and governmental agencies in planning the development of tourism in Guatemala, and (2) to fulfill, in part, the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in Geography at Michigan State Univeristy.

The Guatemalan government, through the Instituto Guatemalteco de Turismo, is seeking ways to develop new tourist areas and to enlarge existing ones. This organization, in its National Plan for Tourism Development, has recommended that a government-operated tourist center be built on the Pacific coast of Guatemala. Data from this study will supplement that of the National Plan, as well as that being compiled for an atlas-guidebook of Guatemala by the Committee on Applied Geography of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History (O.A.S.).

An evaluation of the Pacific coast of Guatemala in relation to tourist facilities and potential is both warranted and necessary. The recently-opened Pacific Coast Highway offers an all-paved access to the area, and some resort facilities have already been built. There is, however, an urgent need to identify, analyze, and evaluate potential development sites, if tourism planning is to be adequate to meet future demands. In addition, areas suitable as national preserves should be considered with respect to both tourism planning and conservation.

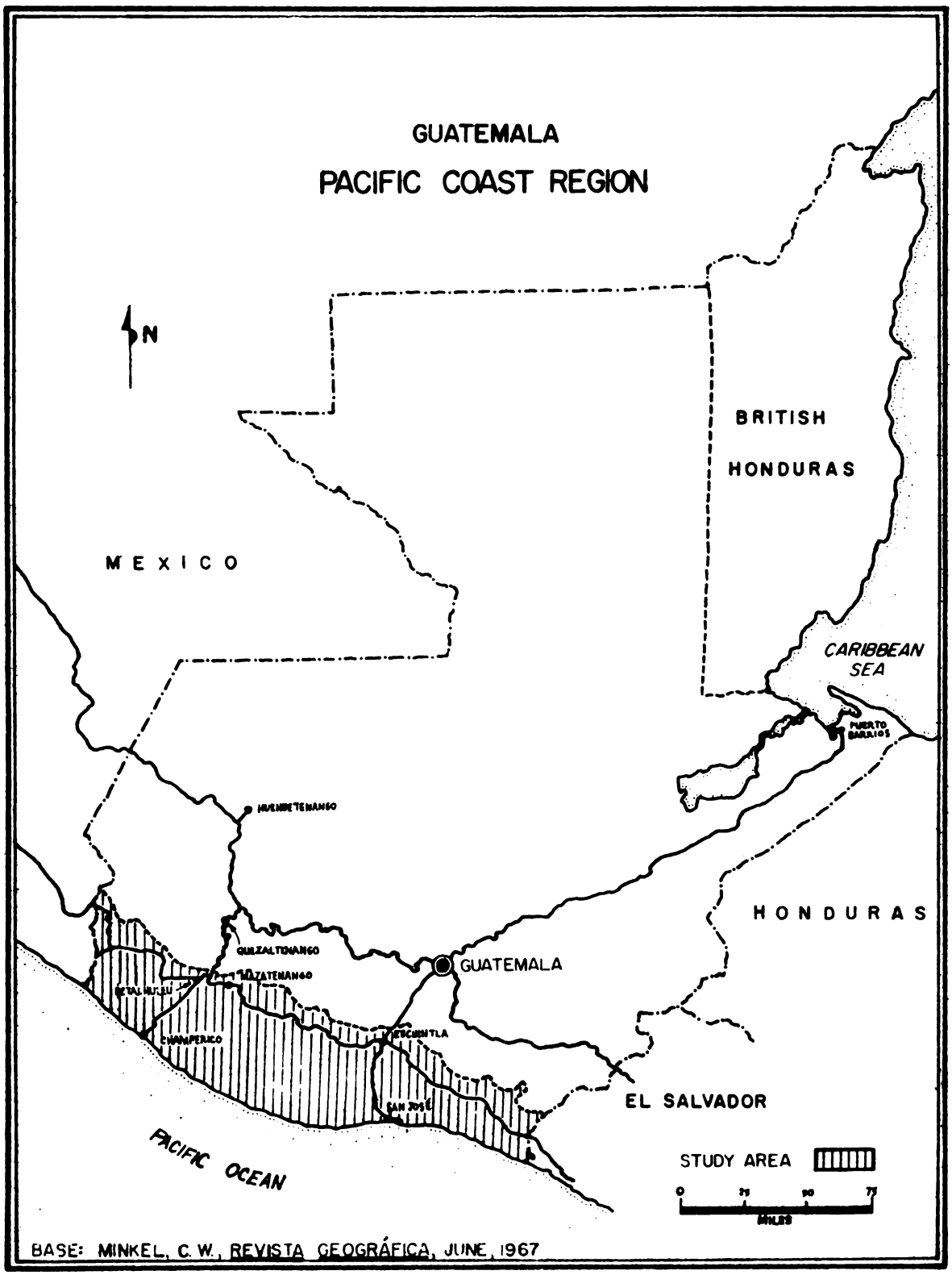
Study Area

The study area includes all land on the Pacific coast of Guatemala from sea level northward to the lower slopes of the Guatemalan highlands, where it is delimited by the 500-meter contour. This area includes all or parts of the departments of San Marcos, Quezaltenango, Retalhuleu, Suchitepéquez, Escuintla, and Jutiapa (Map 1).

Procedure

A review of literature related to tourism in Middle America, and specifically in Guatemala, was begun in October, 1966, and continued until the writer's departure for Guatemala in November, 1966. During this time also, correspondence was initiated with national tourism agencies in Middle America, and the thesis proposal was prepared at Michigan State University. After the writer's arrival in Guatemala, working relationships were established with persons competent in both the area and the topic under study. A useful orientation was thus acquired prior to the inauguration of field research.

Detailed field surveys were made of the entire Pacific coast of Guatemala during the period from November, 1966, to February, 1967, and all transportation routes were analyzed. Four steps were taken in the field investigation: (1) a comprehensive survey was made to assess beach and offshore conditions with regard to tourism potential, using large-scale maps, nautical charts, government publications and aerial photographs; (2) existing tourist facilities were inventoried in terms of number, rates, quality, services, and nearby recreational


GUATEMALA
PACIFIC COAST REGION
N
BRITISH
HONDURAS
MEXICO
CARIBBEAN
SEA
PUERTO
BARRIOS
HUEHUETENANGO
HONDURAS
QUEZALTENANGO
GUATEMALA
RETALHULEU
SUCHITEPEQUEZ
ESCUINTLA
SAN JOSE
EL SALVADOR
PACIFIC OCEAN
STUDY AREA
0
25
50
75
MILES
BASE: MINKEL, C. W., REVISTA GEOGRÁFICA, JUNE, 1967

MAP 1

opportunities; (3) the potential for the establishment of new tourist facilities was evaluated; and (4) interviews were conducted with appropriate persons, particularly local fishermen, private investors, and government personnel.

Findings of the Study

An analysis of field data indicates that much of the Guatemalan Pacific coast is unsuited to large-scale tourism development, but important exceptions exist. Tourists may in the future be attracted to a few specific beach areas that are physically suitable and adequately developed. With paved access from the Pacific Coast Highway to such locations, tourists would begin visiting certain areas of the coast, and the construction of facilities at these sites would become economically feasible. Some resorts have, in fact, already been developed despite poor access.

It is recommended that wherever roads are constructed for agricultural marketing purposes, efforts should be made to stimulate tourism and other economic activities as well. It is considered especially important that a road be constructed along the entire length of the Guatemalan Pacific coastline to provide access to beach areas presently inaccessible. Since construction might have to be carried out on a long-term basis, areas having greatest development potential should initially be connected with one of the existing all-weather highways of the region.

At least one large national seashore and wildlife preserve should be established on the Pacific coast, preferably near the Chiquimulilla Canal. Numerous sites along the canal would be suitable for a reserved area. In addition, certain segments of the canal would have significant tourism potential if adequate facilities were provided. However, any resort development in the area should be planned in harmony with such a preserve, rather than at the expense of conservation.

A new port facility is proposed for the Pacific coast of Guatemala and should include the establishment of a national tourist center. This center need not be physically part of the port facility, but it should be located so as to take advantage of access to the port and protected swimming areas. Tourist accommodations, such as dock space for deepsea pleasure craft, should be provided.

The future of any large-scale tourism development will be influenced greatly by construction of the proposed Pacific port and its location relative to populated areas. Since an adequate harbor does not now exist along the Pacific coast of Guatemala, areas near the proposed facility will have harbor access and wharfage for the first time. Though several port sites have been suggested, San José seems to be the preferred location. This area possesses considerable potential for tourism development, especially in terms of access and infrastructure. If the Pacific port is built at or near San José, the growth of the existing resort industry would be greatly enhanced. In recent years, a substantial investment has been made in several private resort facilities in the San José area, and a national tourist center

associated with the proposed port would attract additional investment and tourists.

Acknowledgments

Numerous organizations and individuals in Guatemala deserve acknowledgment for their cooperation and assistance in support of the study. The firm El Salto, S. A., through its director, Mr. Robert C. Dorion, provided the writer with lodging and subsistence at its finca near Escuintla, Guatemala, during the period of field work. Mr. Dorion provided, in addition, boat transportation to facilitate field study in the San José area. I am deeply indebted both to Mr. Dorion and to the many other helpful persons associated with the firm for their assistance. Through the Instituto Geográfico Nacional (I.G.N.), of Guatemala, and its former director, Ing. Alfredo Obiols Gómez, land transportation was obtained for much of the field investigation. Maps, aerial photographs, and the use of facilities and services were generously provided. Ing. Gonzalo Barillas Flores, director of the Dirección General de Obras Públicas (D.G.O.P.), furnished a boat on several occasions for field work in the Chiquimulilla Canal area and also provided useful information regarding present and future public works in Guatemala. Ing. José López Toledo, Chief of the Sección de Estudios Geográficos, offered the use of facilities and valuable counsel. The Instituto Guatemalteco de Turismo, through its director, Colonel Ricardo A. Porras, showed continued interest in the study and supplied publications pertinent to the topic as well as useful

suggestions. Dr. James R. Snitzler, representing the firm Consultora Latinoamericana Ltda., provided information related to the construction of new roads within the study area. Other organizations in Guatemala deserving acknowledgment include the Instituto Nacional de Electrificación (INDE), the Dirección General de Telecomunicaciones (D.G.T.), the United States AID Mission to Guatemala, and the AID Regional Organization for Central America and Panama (ROCAP).

Valuable assistance in the thesis program was provided by several persons having continuing research interests in Middle America. Dr. Arthur L. Burt, Coordinator for Maps and Publications, U. S. Department of State, provided helpful suggestions pertaining to sources of information in Guatemala and supplied maps and other materials related to the study topic. Dr. Paul C. Morrison, former Professor of Geography at Michigan State University, read portions of the manuscript and offered valuable criticism. Finally, acknowledgment is due to Dr. Clarence W. Minkel, Professor of Geography and the writer's thesis advisor at Michigan State University, who gave helpful advice and counsel.

CHAPTER II

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The Pacific coast of Guatemala extends from Mexico on the west to El Salvador on the east, a distance of 156 miles. An alluvial plain stretches from the coast northward toward the volcanic range of the Guatemalan highlands. The plain is approximately thirty miles wide near the Mexico-Guatemala boundary and narrows to only ten miles near the border with El Salvador. Coastal alignment is generally northwest to southeast, but a middle segment about forty-five miles in length has an east-west orientation.[1] The latitude of the Pacific coast is approximately fourteen degrees north.

Physical Setting

The Pacific coastal plain is low, flat, and relatively uniform, the entire area being composed of coalescing alluvial fans of volcanic ash eroded from the mountain axis. However, numerous streams rising in the higher elevations have incised the alluvial deposits along their lower courses, resulting in the formation of low riverine terraces. Along the coast, beaches of black volcanic sand are backed in many places by extensive areas of marsh, lagoon, and mangrove. The

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[1] Port Feasibility Study, Pacific Coast of Guatemala, C. A., U. S. Army, Corps of Engineers, Washington, D. C., 1963, p. 41.

numerous lagoons result from the ponding effect of barrier spits and sand bars that have been formed along the coast by longshore currents and the deposition of sediments. Because of the accumulation of volcanic alluvium and sandy marine deposits, no significant rock outcroppings occur along the coast, nor is any coral or other reef-building material present offshore.[2]

Climate

The climate of the Guatemalan Pacific coast is tropical, with contrasting wet and dry seasons. A distinct rainy season, accompanied by high temperatures and humidity, extends from May through October and is followed by a hot, dry season from November through April. During the latter period pronounced droughts may occur. Champerico, representative of this climatic regime, has an average annual temperature of seventy-nine degrees Fahrenheit and receives approximately thirty-seven inches of rainfall annually, over 95 percent of it during the wettest six months of the year.[3]

Genetically, the climatic pattern results from the poleward advance and retreat of the Pacific high pressure system. From November through April, when high pressure is dominant, stable conditions are present, and hot, dry weather prevails. With the retreat of high pressure in May, wind shifts from east to west, the area then being

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[2] *op. cit.*, p. 1.

[3] *Estudio geográfico*: Champerico, Dirección General de Obras Públicas, Guatemala, C. A., October, 1966, pp. 7, 75.

dominated by equatorial low pressure and subject to heavy rains. Important local climatic influences prevail as well. Because of adiabatic cooling, the inland windward Pacific slopes receive three to four times as much precipitation annually as the low-lying coastal areas (Figure 1). In addition, the coastal wet season is about one month shorter than that farther inland, due to the lack of significant relief.

Vegetation

The natural vegetation of the coastal plain is a tropical broad-leaf deciduous forest, but extensive savanna grasslands developed with the clearing of land for agriculture and now predominate. The savanna areas are characterized by partially cultivated or vacant land, interspersed with ceiba, guanacaste, and in some areas, scrub palm. Bunch grass, providing pasture for beef cattle, is found throughout the savannas. Deforestation has been widespread, especially in the west, where much of the land was cleared with the advent of commercial cotton production.

Along the western and central coastal sections are wide, grass-covered beaches backed by scrub growth and savanna, while bare sand is more typical of the eastern coast. In the latter area, extensive mangrove thickets line the margins of lagoons, marshes, and especially the Chiquimulilla Canal. Several varieties of palm occur throughout the coast, but these are concentrated mainly along the leeward sides of barrier spits and on the margins of some lagoons.

Figure 1

Guatemalan Pacific piedmont east of Chiquimulilla. Laguna Nisguaya in foreground.

Figure 2

Sugar cane east of Escuintla. Volcán Agua in background.

Settlement and Economy

Until recently, most of the Guatemalan Pacific coast was a frontier in terms of settlement, communication, and economy. With the exception of Iztapa, which served as a shipbuilding center during colonial times, the region's ports owe their existence to the establishment of commercial coffee and sugar production around 1860. San José, Champerico, and Ocós subsequently became centers for the export of coffee, sugar, hides, rubber, and lumber. Elsewhere, settlement was retarded well into the twentieth century because of poor communications, malaria, and dense vegetation. In recent years, improved access and communication facilities, as well as malaria control, have made possible the opening of much of the area to agriculture and settlement. Improved utilization of the region's rich volcanic soils, coupled with the processing of agricultural commodities, has made the Pacific coastal plain Guatemala's most productive agricultural region.

The most significant period of development on the coastal plain began in 1936, with the establishment of banana production in the Tiquisate area by the United Fruit Company. With the beginning of plantation agriculture, new settlements were organized and access improved. About 1950, further development was stimulated by the rise of cotton cultivation near Champerico, El Semillero and Escuintla. In addition, the livestock industry developed considerably with the introduction of new beef cattle breeds. Agricultural colonization has provided a more recent impetus, especially by stimulating migration into remote areas of the coastal plain. In 1952, vigorous government

attempts at land reform were begun under the regime of President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán. Many of the land reform measures were replaced or modified in 1954, however, by a more moderate program under the government of Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas. During the latter administration, agricultural cooperatives were established in a national effort to develop the region generally and agriculture in particular. The establishment of commercial shrimp operations at San José and Champerico by private initiative, in 1960, also proved significant.

The economy of the immediate coastal area is now based primarily upon commercial shrimp fishing, salt production, port commerce, and some localized tourism. Both San José and Champerico have small but modern freezing and packing plants for seafood, and each maintains shrimp fleets that operate along much of the coast.[4] Also, fishing in brackish waters is locally important in many parts of the coast. The production of salt by evaporation from saltpans is of considerable importance at some coastal locations. San José, Champerico, and the eastern section of the Chiquimulilla Canal are primary centers for this activity, the product being recovered in the dry season and marketed domestically. At Champerico, the three saltpan areas have a total production of about 6,250 tons annually.[5] Port commerce, including the export of coffee and cotton in return for crude petroleum, fertilizer and machinery, is important at San José and

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[4] Port Feasibility Study, Pacific Coast of Guatemala, C. A., p. 2.

[5] Estudio geográfico: Champerico, p. 14.

Champerico. Port facilities are at present inadequate, the result being high freight rates and costly delays. However, a proposed new port facility, when completed, should stimulate foreign trade and area development. Tourism is a small but growing factor in the coastal economy, having attained some importance in the area between San José and Iztapa, and particularly at Likín. West of San José, resort facilities have been built at Quitasombrero and Chulamar. Some development has also occurred at Tilapa, near the Guatemala-Mexico border.

Tropical plantation agriculture is the economic base of the coastal plain and adjacent piedmont areas. Cotton is the major crop, and its cultivation has expanded to the extent that it is now Guatemala's second-ranking export. Beef production is also well-developed, and some banana cultivation is still carried on by private producers despite the closing of the United Fruit Company operation at Tiquisate in 1964. In the Escuintla area sugar production on the alluvial piedmont is significant, while Guatemala's principal export, coffee, is grown primarily on the adjacent slopes of the Guatemalan highlands (Figure 2, page 13).

Since colonial times, a series of market towns have served the needs of the piedmont and coastal region. After the mid-nineteenth century, with the establishment of extensive plantation agriculture and the construction of railroads in the area, some of these communities became substantial commercial centers. Coatepeque and Retalhuleu are major coffee marketing centers, and Mazatenango is important for both coffee and sugar. Escuintla, due to its strategic location and

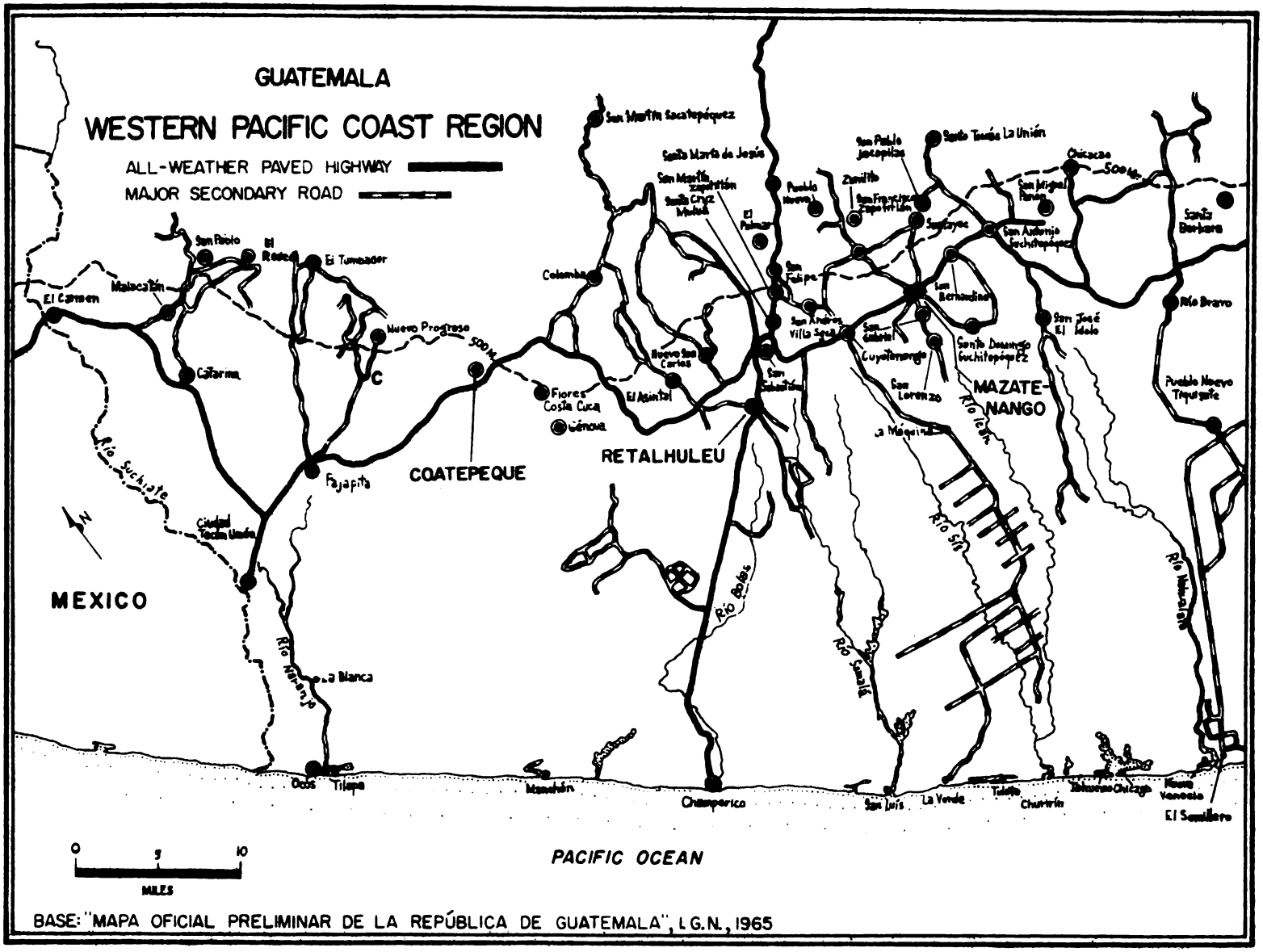
well-developed transport facilities, has become a center for light manufacturing, such as cotton processing and the production of crude sugar. Meat packing in conjunction with the area's cattle industry has also been established at Escuintla, and a petroleum refinery has recently been built. It appears that Escuintla will function increasingly as an agricultural and manufacturing center for the rapidly developing Pacific coastal region.

CHAPTER III

THE WESTERN PACIFIC COAST

The western Pacific coastal region is one of Guatemala's richest agricultural areas, although the immediate coast remains largely forested and is sparsely settled. The coastal section is sixty miles in length, and extends from the Río Suchiate on the west, which forms the Guatemala-Mexico border, to the Río Nahualate on the east (Map 2). Landward, the coastal plain extends northward to the alluvial piedmont. Cotton and cattle production, as well as the extraction of tropical woods from the remaining forest areas, constitutes the economic base of the inland coastal plain, while salt recovery and brackish water fishing are economically significant along the immediate coast. The initiation of government-sponsored programs of agricultural colonization has in recent years opened much of the region to settlement.

The regularity of the western Pacific coastline is interrupted only by a series of forest-rimmed lagoons. Despite these numerous lagoons there are no natural harbors, and the port of Champerico is therefore an open roadstead. Paralleling the coast is the Pacific Coast Highway, which is the principal means of access to the region. This road, about thirty miles inland from the Pacific Ocean, connects the important market towns of Coatepeque, Retalhuleu, and Mazatenango with Escuintla and Guatemala City.


GUATEMALA
WESTERN PACIFIC COAST REGION
ALL-WEATHER PAVED HIGHWAY
MAJOR SECONDARY ROAD
MEXICO
COATEPEQUE
RETALHULEU
MAZATE-
NANGO
PACIFIC OCEAN
MILES
BASE: "MAPA OFICIAL PRELIMINAR DE LA REPÚBLICA DE GUATEMALA", I.G.N., 1965

MAP 2

The Inland Pacific Coast

Settlement has expanded rapidly within the western Pacific coastal plain in recent years. The cultivated land is used extensively for cotton and sugar cane, while beef cattle are pastured on the savanna grasses. The Pacific Coast Highway serves as an outlet for the area's agricultural produce and has, to some extent, fostered the growth of tourism.

Physical Features

The inland portion of the western Pacific region includes the Pacific coastal plain and adjacent piedmont slopes of the Central American volcanic axis. The plain is generally low, flat, and largely covered with semi-deciduous forest, despite the widespread clearing of land for agriculture. The piedmont, composed of fan-like alluvial deposits, slopes gently toward the plain and gradually merges with it. Only a few isolated hills add to the local relief. Like the coastal plain, the piedmont is partially forested. Between Retalhuleu and Coatepeque, the Pacific Coast Highway traverses the lower margin of Guatemala's principal coffee-producing zone. Extensive areas of forest occur, with planted coffee trees commonly comprising the vegetative understory. Elsewhere in the piedmont, much of the land has been cleared for pasture or sugar cane cultivation. The rich volcanic soils found throughout the piedmont and coastal plain are drained by several sizeable rivers. Among the largest are the Río Naranjo, Río Bolas, and Río Samalá.

Settlement

Although the inland coastal region and piedmont have been inhabited since pre-Columbian times, these areas did not assume importance until the establishment of large-scale agriculture on the lower slopes of the Guatemalan highlands in the mid-nineteenth century. The production of indigo, cacao, and cochineal was initially predominant, but was subsequently replaced by coffee cultivation. By 1880, coffee production was well established and in terms of foreign exchange was by far the most important commodity of the Pacific piedmont. Yet except for a few isolated cattle estates, the coastal plain remained a sparsely populated wilderness until the recent advent of commercial cotton production and the implementation of government-sponsored agricultural colonization programs. The communities of Coatepeque, Retalhuleu, and Mazatenango have long been major coffee marketing centers, but today they serve much of the coastal plain as well.

The rise of cotton cultivation created a heavy seasonal labor demand which induced highland Indians to migrate into the coastal plain in search of employment. Many of these persons, though employed only on a seasonal basis, remained as permanent residents and often cultivated land to which they had no title. In addition to tapping the great agricultural potential of the coastal plain, one of the main objectives of the Guatemalan agricultural colonization program has been to relocate landless campesinos and end illegal squatting.[1] To date, nine

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[1]Minkel, Clarence W., "Programs of Agricultural Colonization and Settlement in Central America," Revista Geográfica, No. 66, June, 1967, p. 24.

agricultural development zones have been established in the western Pacific coast region, the largest of which is "La Máquina," between Tulate and Cuyotenango.

Economy

The economy of the western Pacific coastal plain is based mainly on the production of cotton and beef cattle, but the extraction of tropical woods is also of some importance. Cotton is the predominant crop and is grown chiefly between Champerico and Retalhuleu. Raw cotton is ginned and baled at the area's five cotton processing facilities, or desmotadoras, for export mainly to Japan and western Europe through the port of Champerico. Livestock production, especially the breeding and fattening of beef cattle, is important throughout much of the coastal plain. Most cattle are either of criollo or Brahman stock and are pastured on the savanna grasses of large haciendas. The primary markets for the cattle are the highland city of Quezaltenango, to the north, and Guatemala City to the northeast. However, some cattle are marketed locally and processed at a small abattoir in Champerico. The extraction of tropical woods is an activity of local importance, the principal varieties including mahogany, cedar, and guanacaste. Much wood is also sold both for home use and as fuel for salt producers near Champerico.

Tourism

Tourism throughout the inland Pacific region has been retarded in the past by factors such as poor access, lack of suitable facilities,

insufficient promotion, and distance from the national capital. Prior to completion of the Pacific Coast Highway, most tourists motoring through Guatemala traveled the Inter-American Highway which traverses the volcanic highlands. Tourist contacts with the western Pacific region were minimal, and promotional efforts to attract visitors to the area were few. Even today the lack of tourist accommodations along the Pacific Coast Highway is detrimental to tourism development. Equally important is the factor of distance. Most foreign tourists who visit the country arrive in Guatemala City by air and are attracted to the scenic and well-known highland tourist areas of Antigua, Chichicastenango, and Lake Atitlán, which are closer to the national capital. Nevertheless, tourism is becoming more important in the western Pacific region as travelers become aware of the faster, less mountainous coastal highway. This is reflected in the recent construction of two first-class motels, each with adjoining restaurant, at San Sebastián and Coatepeque.

Tourism Potential

The inland Pacific coast region in southwestern Guatemala does have some potential for tourism development, despite the present lack of visitors. In the future there should be a modest demand for additional visitor facilities, due to the area's location athwart the main lowland transportation route on the Pacific side of Central America. Additional hotels, motels, and restaurants constructed along the Pacific Coast Highway could provide more foreign exchange for Guatemala by attracting more tourists and consequently increasing tourist expenditures.

The Immediate Coast

The coastline from the Río Suchiate to the mouth of the Río Nahualate is a sparsely settled region of coastal forests and brackish lagoons. The only sizeable settlement within the coastal section is Champerico, while the settlement pattern elsewhere is one of isolated coastal villages dependent mainly on brackish water fishing and some salt recovery. Tourism is presently of little importance along the western Pacific littoral, except at Champerico on religous holidays. Most of the persons visiting Champerico during such times are residents of the surrounding rural areas, and the amount of foreign exchange derived from tourism is therefore negligible.

Physical Features

Steep and narrow grass-covered beaches, backed by forest and scrub thicket, are found along most of the western Pacific coast. Typical of such beaches are those between Tilapa and the mouth of the Río Samalá at San Luís. Elsewhere, particularly between the Guatemala-Mexico boundary and Ocós, and from La Verde to Tulate in the extreme east, the beaches are wider and more scenic. Although scrub thicket and semi-deciduous forest are the dominant vegetative types along much of the coastline, several varieties of palm occur at some locations. Palmetto backs much of the beach west of the Río Naranjo, and a few groves of coconut palms are found at Ocós and Tahuexco.

Moderate tidal ranges, heavy surf, and some undertow occur along the western Pacific coast. Tides are highest between June and

October, at which time a daily range of six feet or more is not unusual. Ranges of two to three feet are common between November and March, which is the period of lowest tides.[2] A steep seaward gradient is characteristic of most beaches, and heavy surf is common throughout the length of the coastal section except in the extreme west and near Tulate. In addition, some undertow occurs at Champerico and Tahuexco.

Settlement

Settlement of the immediate coast was retarded until recent years, despite establishment of some port locations for the export of agricultural commodities during the latter part of the nineteenth century. San Luís, at the mouth of the Río Samalá, was founded in 1853 and was primarily important for the export of coffee and sugar. The port was subsequently closed, however, in favor of a new port constructed at Champerico in 1871. A third port, Ocós, became a center for the export of coffee around 1880 but lost much of its importance following destruction of its pier by a severe earthquake in 1902. The development of such ports did not bring about any marked change in population growth, nor did it significantly alter the pattern of existing settlement. This was due mainly to the prevalence of tropical diseases, such as malaria, which discouraged migration into the immediate coastal area. In fact, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that a substantial population increase began in the Champerico

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[2] Tablas de sol luna, y mareas para 1966, Instituto Geográfico Nacional, Guatemala, C. A., Tables 4 and 5.

area. Main factors responsible for the change, in addition to malaria control, were the port's growing importance as a center for the export of cotton and the establishment of commercial shrimp fishing and packing operations about 1960.

Economy

The economy of the immediate coast is based chiefly on port commerce, shrimp fishing and processing, and salt recovery at Champerico, while brackish water fishing is important near river mouths and on lagoon margins elsewhere along the coast. Champerico, with its rail and highway connections to other parts of the republic, is now the main port of southwestern Guatemala. However, the port facilities are inadequate to handle the increasing amount of export commodities produced in its hinterland, since the open roadstead location requires all goods to be lightered to ships anchored offshore. The export of cotton and coffee in return for fertilizer, insecticides, and machinery comprise the bulk of Champerico's maritime commerce (Figure 3). The commercial shrimp fishing industry, though only recently established, is now of major significance. A small, modern shrimp freezing and packing plant operated by the Compañía Pesquera de Guatemala, S. A. (COPESGUA) and Pesca, S. A., processes shrimp for export to the United States and Puerto Rico. Shrimp processed at the facility are transported by truck across Guatemala to Matías de Gálvez, on the Caribbean Coast, for ocean shipment. Salt recovery is also important at several locations in the vicinity of Champerico, being centered chiefly at the Estero de Champericón and Salinas Acapán.

Figure 3

Recently-constructed warehouse at Champerico.

Figure 4

Churirín, a remote fishing village along the central Pacific coast.

Farther east, production is on a smaller scale at Chiquistepeque. Salt recovered at both Champerico and Chiquistepeque is marketed in Mazatenango, Retalhuleu, Quezaltenango, and Guatemala City. Brackish water fishing is the main economic activity in the remaing coastal areas, and is particularly important in the vicinity of Ocós, Tulate, Tahuexco, and Nueva Venecia. Where access permits, some fresh fish is marketed in the larger communities of the inland Pacific piedmont, while the remainder of the catch is consumed locally.

Tourism

Tourism is presently undeveloped along the immediate coast, except at Champerico. Nearly all visitors to the latter community are native Guatemalans who come to celebrate Holy Week or attend the annual fair in December. Most are residents of outlying rural areas and have only limited funds to expend on accommodations, food, and entertainment. Existing visitor facilities at Champerico are small, inexpensive establishments which reflect the limited economic means of the patrons. Although there is little local demand for first-class hotels or restaurants in Champerico, such facilities are essential if foreign tourists, particularly North Americans, are to be attracted to the area. Present tourist facilities are limited to one small hotel, two pensiones, and four food establishments, all of which are unacceptable to most foreign tourists because of inadequate utilities, poor food, and unattractive appearance.

A resort development at Tilapa, consisting of nine dwellings, has been built in recent years but is limited to private use.

A private landing strip has been constructed in conjunction with the resort because of the relative isolation of the development and poor access. Only an unimproved road, impassable during the rainy season, connects Tilapa with the Pacific Coast Highway.

Tourism Potential

The potential for tourism development along the western Pacific coast of Guatemala is quite limited, except at a few widely scattered locations. Along much of the coast, beaches are unattractive to visitors because of heavy surf and dangerous undertow. Most beaches and adjacent landward areas present a rather barren appearance, being covered by a sparse growth of short grass, backed by scrub thicket, while suitably equipped tourist accommodations are totally lacking (Figure 4, page 27). A few coastal locations do have potential for development, however, if the necessary visitor facilities are provided and if existing means of access are improved. Champerico, because of its paved link with the Pacific Coast Highway and present infrastructure development, possesses the greatest potential. Moreover, this community is the only logical site along the western coast where a protected deep-water port might be constructed in the future. The construction of such a port, if coordinated with regional tourism development efforts, could provide wharfage for pleasure craft and make possible the establishment of protected swimming areas. Some tourism development would also be feasible at Ocós, Tilapa, Tulate and Tahuexco. Investment would necessarily be on a smaller scale, however, since such villages will undoubtedly remain open roadsteads in the foreseeable future. Ocós

and Tilapa, at the mouth of the Río Naranjo, are favored with wide, gently sloping beaches, moderate surf conditions, and considerable scenic beauty. The lack of all-weather roads has retarded the growth of tourism at both villages, but a paved farm-to-market road has been projected to connect the nearby agricultural colony of "La Blanca" with the Pacific Coast Highway. The proposed road, if extended from La Blanca to Tilapa and Ocós, could stimulate some tourism and be self-financing as well, since the additional costs would be defrayed through tourist expenditures. Beaches having limited tourism potential are also found east of Champerico at Tulate and Tahuexco. Tulate has a wide beach and normally moderate surf conditions, while Tahuexco is adjacent to productive brackish water fishing areas. The beach is less attractive at the latter village, and the surf is generally heavier. Isolation, due to the lack of all-weather roads connecting Tulate and Tahuexco with the Pacific Coast Highway, is a major factor limiting tourism development. If the problem is to be alleviated, it will be necessary for any future farm-to-market road connecting Cuyotenango with the agricultural colony of "La Máquina" to be extended to the immediate coast.

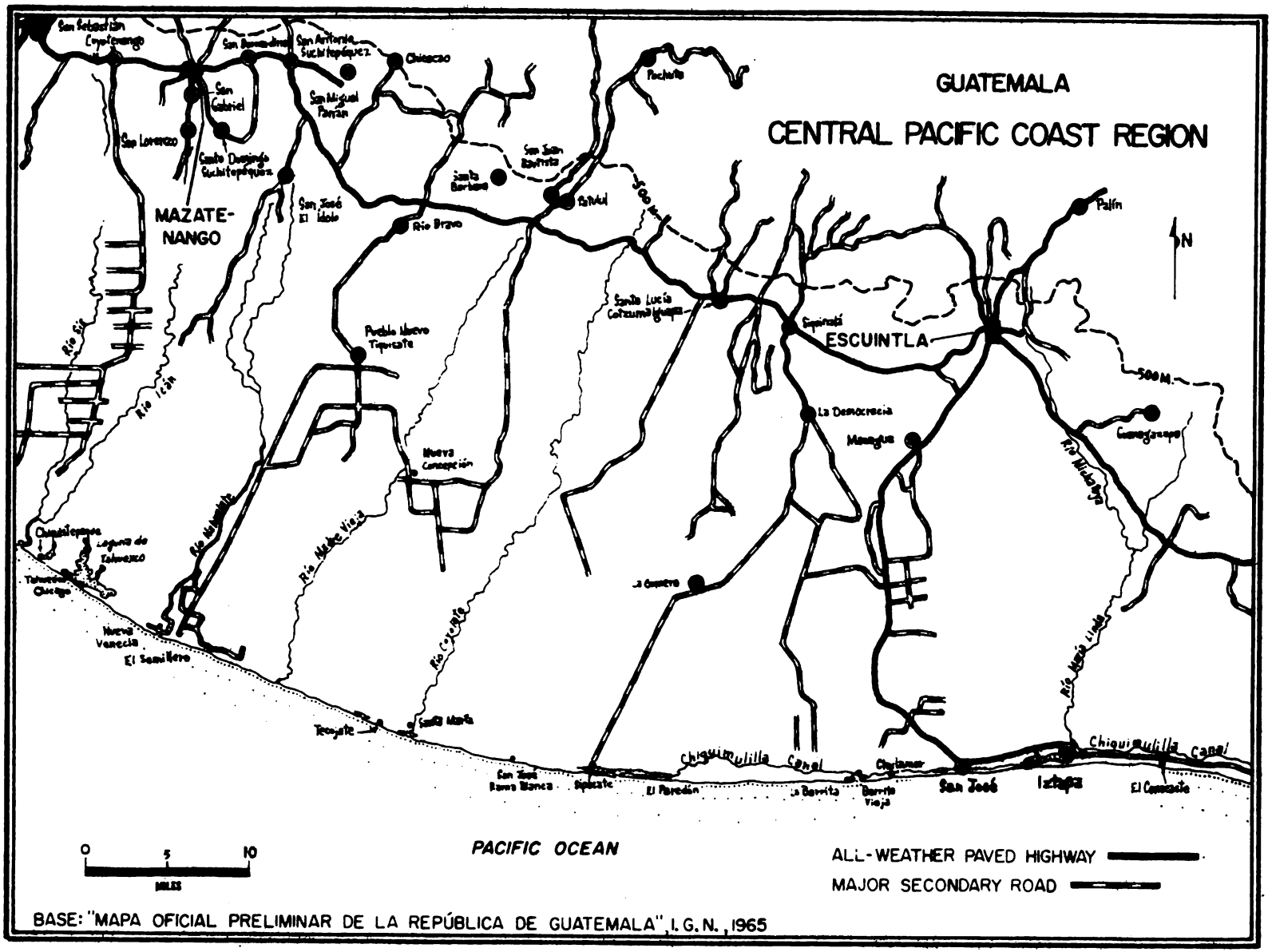
CHAPTER IV

THE CENTRAL PACIFIC COAST

The central Pacific coast of Guatemala extends from the Río Nahualate eastward to the village of Iztapa and inland to the Pacific piedmont (Map 3). Cotton cultivation and livestock raising are important in the region's economy, as is brackish water fishing and salt recovery. The central section of the plain is also the republic's principal sugar producing zone. The inland piedmont slopes, like those further west, are devoted mainly to coffee cultivation. Escuintla is the dominant trade center, while San José to the south is Guatemala's most important Pacific port and a developing tourist center. Large agricultural colonies within the region have necessitated the construction of new roads to serve the needs of agricultural marketing. Physically, the central coastal plain and piedmont, for the most part, resemble the areas further west. However, rivers are less numerous and there are fewer coastal lagoons.

The Inland Pacific Coast

In recent years, the central Pacific coastal plain has assumed great agricultural importance and is now the most productive agricultural region of Guatemala. The region is served by the Pacific Coast Highway which facilitates agricultural marketing, as does the paved


GUATEMALA
CENTRAL PACIFIC COAST REGION
MAZATE-
NANGO
ESCUINTLA
N
500 M.
PACIFIC OCEAN
0 5 10
MILES
ALL-WEATHER PAVED HIGHWAY
MAJOR SECONDARY ROAD
BASE: "MAPA OFICIAL PRELIMINAR DE LA REPÚBLICA DE GUATEMALA", I.G.N., 1965

MAP 3

road connecting San José and Escuintla with Guatemala City. These roads also serve as outlets for low-value manufactured goods and refined petroleum, both of which are produced at Escuintla.

Physical Features

The central portion of the Guatemalan Pacific coastal plain is low, generally flat, and grades into the rolling piedmont of the highlands to the north. Much of the plain, formerly forested, has been converted to savanna grassland by widespread burning of trees and clearing of land for cotton cultivation. Although considerable areas of forest are still found within the region, there is no area comparable to the large forested expanse west of Champerico near Manchón.

Settlement

Like the western Pacific coast, the central coastal region has been inhabited by man since pre-Columbian times. Historically, subsistence agriculture has been the principal means of livelihood. However, a significant seasonal migration of Indians into the coastal plain began with the introduction of commercial banana cultivation in the Tiquisate area in 1936, and further migration was stimulated by the rise of large-scale sugar cane and cotton cultivation. Illegal squatting became a widespread problem, and relocation of the area's large floating migrant population has been one of the primary objectives of the Guatemalan agricultural colonization program.

Economy

The economy of the inland coast is based chiefly on the production of cotton and beef cattle, while sugar cane and coffee are the principal piedmont and highland crops, respectively. Prior to 1964, bananas produced on the United Fruit Company's plantations constituted an additional commercial crop (Figure 5). Since that time, many abandoned tracts of land formerly under banana cultivation have been converted to cotton lands, which now account for nearly two-thirds of the nation's total production. Some savanna lands not utilized for cotton production support large numbers of beef cattle, most of which are marketed in Escuintla.

Tourism

Tourism, though not yet a major source of revenue in the area, is nevertheless more developed than elsewhere along the Pacific littoral. This is due mainly to the proximity of the central Pacific piedmont and coastal plain to the national capital. Not only are the tourist facilities more numerous, but they are also of higher quality. Some motel and restaurant construction has occurred in the Escuintla area in recent years, since the community is now the chief transportation hub of the Pacific coastal region. Other accommodations have been built at Masagua, to the south of Escuintla, and several first-class restaurants have been built along the Pacific Coast Highway.

Tourism Potential

Considerable potential for tourism development exists within the inland coastal plain and piedmont area. Escuintla possesses the

Figure 5

Bananas on the central Pacific coastal plain near El Semillero.

Figure 6

Estero de Pepesca (Laguna de Tecojate) near Tecojate.

most development potential, due primarily to its strategic location, paved highway connections, and proximity to Guatemala City. A negative factor is the unkempt appearance of the community.

The Immediate Coast

Considerable stretches of coastline from the Río Nahualate eastward to Iztapa consist of steep, narrow beaches backed by lagoons, swamps, and mangrove thickets. Isolated fishing villages form the predominant settlement pattern. The village of Sipacate is the western terminus of the Chiquimulilla Canal, a large natural intracoastal waterway that extends eastward almost to the Guatemala-El Salvador boundary.

Physical Features

The central Pacific coastline from El Semillero to Iztapa is backed by scrub growth, cropland, coastal lagoons and mangrove thickets. Scrub growth interspersed with cropland is common along some coastal margins, especially to the west. Farther eastward, mangrove lines the Chiquimulilla Canal. The mangrove is extensive from Sipacate to La Barrita, but occurs only intermittently near San José. Several sizeable lagoons are also found adjacent to the central Pacific coastline. Among these are the Estero de Pepesca, Laguna de Sipacate and Laguna de Quitasombrero, all of which are elongated bodies of water impounded by adjacent bar deposits (Figure 6, page 35). Most such deposits consist of exposed stretches of sand, often several miles in length, with steep beach gradients. The largest bar deposit along the central Pacific coast extends from Sipacate eastward to El Paredón, a distance of

approximately six miles (Figure 7). Elsewhere along the coast, steep grass-covered beaches occur and are generally unattractive for tourism development.

In general, surf conditions are very strong from El Semillero to Sipacate. Farther eastward, the surf tends to moderate somewhat but is nevertheless very heavy at times in the San José area. Of particular concern to swimmers is the problem of undertow, which seems most pronounced near Tecojate.

Settlement

Like the western Pacific coast, the central coastal section has supported a relatively small population dependent on fishing and salt recovery since pre-Columbian times. Although there has been a modest increase in the area's population in recent years, nowhere is there to be found densities as great as those of the inland piedmont and coastal plain, where the demand for agricultural labor has been a chief migration factor. San José is the largest and only prominent settlement along the central Pacific coast, followed by Iztapa and Sipacate. Elsewhere along the immediate coast, most settlements are less accessible and composed of only a few hundred inhabitants each.

Economy

The economy of the immediate central Pacific coastline is based chiefly on port commerce, shrimp fishing, salt production, and some tourism in the San José-Iztapa area, plus brackish water fishing in the coastal lagoons. San José is important for the export of coffee and

Figure 7

Chiquimulilla Canal near El Paredón. The barrier spit at left separates the canal from the open ocean.

Figure 8

Black sand beach west of Tecojate.

cotton, as well as some crude sugar. Main imports are machinery, fertilizer, and insecticides to supply the needs of the inland agricultural region and distributors in the national capital. In addition, petroleum for domestic use is imported at San José via offshore pipelines to a petroleum storage area consisting of several small tank farms maintained by major North American oil companies. Some crude petroleum is also imported at San José to supply a recently constructed refinery at Escuintla. As at Champerico, shrimp fishing constitutes a major sector in the economy of the San José area. A small fleet of shrimp boats, presently harbored between San José and Iztapa in the Chiquimulilla Canal, operates along the Guatemalan Pacific coast at distances up to twenty-five miles offshore. Most of the shrimp captured are sent to a nearby freezing and packing plant operated by the firm Mariscos de Guatemala. Shrimp processed at the plant are exported to the United States after shipment by refrigerator truck either to Puerto Barrios, on Guatemala's Caribbean Coast, via the Atlantic Highway; or to the international airport in Guatemala City for air express shipment.[1] However, the growth of both port commerce and the area's shrimping industry has been somewhat retarded because of San José's open roadstead location. Goods destined for export must be lightered to vessels anchored in the open ocean, and the shrimp industry lacks boat repair facilities and a safe harbor. Salt production is also of substantial importance at San José. The main producing area, Salinas Santa Rosa, is located immediately northeast of the community. Tourism, though of

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[1] Port Feasibility Study, Pacific Coast of Guatemala, C. A., p. 14.

little economic importance in the past, is now being developed on a limited scale with the construction of a small first-class hotel, installation of mercury-vapor beach lights, and improved visitor services. Elsewhere along the central Pacific coastline, brackish water fishing is carried out in the Chiquimulilla Canal area, particularly near Sipacate, and at the Estero de Pepesca near Tecojate. In addition, some salt is recovered by evaporation immediately west of Sipacate.

Tourism

Most persons visiting the immediate central coast are native Guatemalans, but the number of foreign tourists is gradually increasing. Three private resort developments have been built and financed by Guatemalans, and the amount of capital invested has been substantial. The largest development is at Likín, several miles east of San José near the Chiquimulilla Canal. Two other resort complexes to the west of San José occupy beach sites near the Laguna de Quitasombrero and at Chulamar. To stimulate tourism in the area, a travel agency in Guatemala City has for some time offered a one-day excursion by boat on the Río María Linda, near Iztapa. Yet, the lack of first-class hotels, motels, and restaurants; poor access; and open roadstead beach areas remain as obstacles to large-scale tourism development.

Tourism Potential

The greatest potential for tourism development along the central Pacific coast is in the San José area. Factors supporting this

observation include a higher degree of infrastructure development than elsewhere along the coast, paved highway connections with the national capital, the possibility of a deep-water port being constructed, and a concerted effort on the part of the Instituto Guatemalteco de Turismo to develop San José into a national tourist center. In addition, the small hotel currently under construction in San José, when opened, will be the first facility on the Guatemalan Pacific coast to offer first-class lodging accommodations along with ancillary recreational facilities. Such an establishment is likely to stimulate increased tourism and further investment in visitor facilities. Elsewhere along the coast, the lack of a protected harbor is likely to discourage large-scale investment. In the future, some modest tourism development may be feasible at Sipacate or Tecojate (Figure 8, page 38). Both are to be connected to the Pacific Coast Highway by paved roads and may assume importance as brackish water fishing centers catering to sport fishermen.

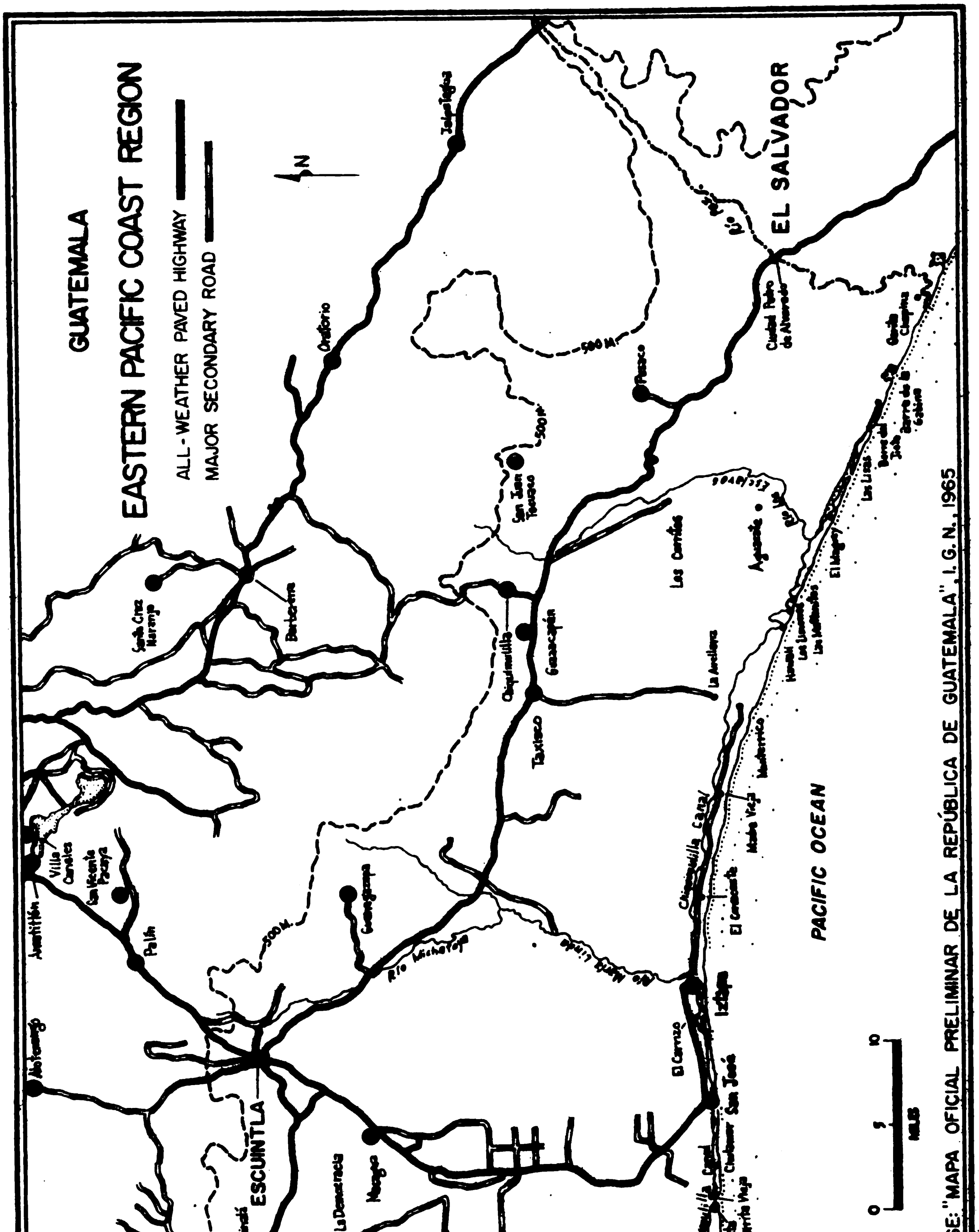
CHAPTER V

THE EASTERN PACIFIC COAST

The eastern Pacific coast extends from Iztapa to the Río Paz, which forms the Guatemala-El Salvador border, and is an area of coastal swamps and mangrove thickets backed by extensive savanna grasslands (Map 4). Cattle raising, as well as the production of some cotton and rice, is an important economic activity on the landward coastal plain. The production of coffee and sugar cane is significant only in the extreme west, near Escuintla.

The Inland Pacific Coast

The eastern Pacific coastal plain of Guatemala is narrower, more sparsely populated, and generally less productive of sugar cane and cotton than are the central or western lowlands. Also, coffee production along the Pacific slopes of the Guatemalan highlands is less significant than farther west. The nation's eastern Pacific lowlands contain few settlements and depend largely on the production of beef cattle and dry rice (Figure 9). Tourism is not yet developed within the area, but some potential exists, particularly along certain sections of the Pacific Coast Highway.


GUATEMALA
EASTERN PACIFIC COAST REGION
ALL-WEATHER PAVED HIGHWAY
MAJOR SECONDARY ROAD
N
EL SALVADOR
PACIFIC OCEAN
ESCUINTLA
Palín
Amatitlán
Villa Canales
San Vicente Pacaya
Santa Cruz Naranjo
Barberena
Oratorio
Jalpatagua
San Juan Tecuaco
Pasaco
Ciudad Pedro de Alvarado
Chiquimulilla
Guazacapán
Taxisco
Las Conchas
La Avellana
Monterrico
Iztapa
El Carrizo
San José
Masagua
La Democracia
Siquinalá
Guanagazapa
Río Michatoya
Río María Linda
Chiquimulilla Canal
El Cerrito
Madre Vieja
Las Lisas
Garita Chapina
500 M.
0 5 10
MILES
BASE: "MAPA OFICIAL PRELIMINAR DE LA REPÚBLICA DE GUATEMALA", I.G.N., 1965

MAP 4

Figure 9

Village of Pasaco, on the lower slopes of the eastern Pacific piedmont.

Figure 10

Piedmont slope and seaward plain in extreme southeastern Guatemala.

Physical Features

The inland portion of the eastern Pacific coastal plain, which gives way to the rolling interior piedmont, consists of large areas of savanna grassland and semi-deciduous forest. The plain is approximately thirty miles wide in the west, near Escuintla, but gradually narrows to about ten miles at Ciudad Pedro de Alvarado, in the extreme east. Several small inland lakes are found to the east of Chiquimulilla, but there are few large rivers other than the Río de los Escalvos, Río Michatoya and Río María Linda (Figure 10, page 44).

Settlement

The coastal plain is predominantly rural in nature, and the cattle hacienda, rather than the large commercial plantation, has been the predominant land holding type since the Spanish Conquest. Much of the eastern coastal plain remains sparsely populated, the limited agricultural potential having discouraged migration from other parts of the republic. Likewise, there has been only a limited effort at agricultural colonization by the national government, except near San José and Garita Chapina.

Economy

The raising and fattening of beef cattle on coastal plain pastures is the region's primary economic activity, but the production of dry rice is becoming increasingly important. In addition, significant numbers of cattle are driven annually from neighboring El Salvador and Honduras. The influx of cattle from Honduras is substantial. Approximately 40,000 to 50,000 steers are driven annually into the coastal

pastures of southeastern Guatemala and southwestern El Salvador. Most of the cattle are pastured on bunch grasses and marketed in Escuintla.[1]

Tourism

The majority of foreign travelers who visit the area are Salvadorans. However, some North Americans also use the Pacific coast route. A major problem confronting tourism development is the lack of suitable facilities for travelers. The communities of Chiquimulilla, Guazacapán, and Taxisco lack satisfactory lodging accommodations and restaurants and are therefore not well equipped to handle tourists. Ciudad Pedro de Alvarado, the eastern terminus of the Guatemalan Pacific Coast Highway, also lacks adequate visitor facilities. Tourists traveling eastward must continue on to El Salvador for lodging and food, with the result that potential foreign exchange for Guatemala is lost.

Tourism Potential

The eastern Pacific lowlands possess considerable tourism potential, particularly along the Pacific Coast Highway. Two roadside scenic turnouts have been constructed along the route east of Chiquimulilla and would offer attractive sites for new visitor facilities (Figure 11). In addition, Chiquimulilla and Guazacapán appear to have some potential. Both communities could attract tourists, if suitable facilities were provided, because of their location midway between Guatemala City and San Salvador.

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[1]West, Robert C., Augelli, John P., Middle America, Its Lands and Peoples, Prentice-Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1966, p. 421.

Figure 11

Laguna El Comendador and rolling Pacific piedmont near the Guatemala-El Salvador border from roadside turnout.

Figure 12

Canal de Ubíco, a tributary channel of the Chiquimulilla Canal near Likín.

The Immediate Coast

The immediate coast is an area of marsh, mangrove thicket, and intracoastal waterways. The Chiquimulilla Canal serves as the main fishing area, and most villages are located adjacent to this waterway. Landward, numerous cattle estates use the savanna grasslands to pasture livestock. However, during the dry season, when much of the savanna grass becomes unpalatable, the coastal marshes become a valuable source of livestock forage.

Physical Features

The most salient physical feature of the eastern Pacific littoral is the Chiquimulilla Canal, which backs nearly all of the eastern section of coastline (Figure 12, page 47). The waterway passes through flat, swampy coastal areas and is, for the most part, separated from the open ocean only by a series of narrow bar formations. Extensive areas of mangrove line the canal throughout most of its course, and sizeable reed patches occur particularly near Monterrico. Occasional stands of palms are also found, especially in the easternmost portion of the canal from Hawaii through Las Lisas to Barra del Jiote.

In general, steep beaches occur between San José and Monterrico, while farther east, wider and more gently sloping beaches predominate. Only a relatively small area extending from Barra de la Gabina to the mouth of the Río Paz is steep. Surf is generally strong in the west, near Iztapa, but moderates farther eastward. At Las Lisas surf conditions are generally light, and undertow is normally absent.

Settlement

Most settlements along the immediate coast are oriented toward nearby lagoons and the Chiquimulilla Canal. The actual village sites, in most cases, lie athwart sand spits between the canal or lagoons and the open ocean. Iztapa, in the extreme west, is the largest settlement and has a population of several thousand persons, while farther east Monterrico and Las Lisas are the primary settlements. There are no natural harbors along this coastal section, except the hazardous inlet near Iztapa. Most fishing villages line the canal in a string-like pattern and rely chiefly on the adjacent waterways from transportation.

Economy

The economy of the immediate coast is based on subsistence fishing and some commercial salt production. The Chiquimulilla Canal is the main fishing area and parallels the immediate coastline eastward to Barra del Jiote. The width of the canal varies from seventy-five feet throughout much of its course to 500 and 1,000 feet in the east near Las Lisas. The canal and adjoining waterways are used chiefly for fishing, but the canal also facilitates the marketing of salt produced in saltpan areas between Monterrico and Hawaii. Some salt production is likewise carried on near the Guatemala-El Salvador border several miles from Garita Chapina. There are approximately ten producing saltpans between Monterrico and Hawaii, and there are nine in the vicinity of Garita Chapina alone.

Tourism

Most tourism development has occurred along the Chiquimulilla canal west of Iztapa, while facilities are lacking elsewhere along the

eastern Pacific littoral of Guatemala. The resort development of Likín is an area of private homesites and is equipped with potable water, electricity, and adequate sanitation facilities (Figure 13). Public tourist accommodations, however, are totally lacking along the remainder of the coast except at San José. Thatched-roof beach houses are available at Las Lisas but are not suitably equipped for use by tourists. Likewise, restaurants catering to travelers are nowhere to be found along the eastern Pacific coastline of the country.

Tourism Potential

Despite the present lack of tourism, the eastern Pacific coast possesses considerable development potential. The surf, which is a detrimental factor in the central and western coastal sections, is generally more moderate to the east. Many beaches, especially those between Hawaii and Las Lisas, are wider and less steep and extend landward to the scenic Chiquimulilla Canal (Figure 14). Las Lisas and Hawaii appear to have the most potential and are probably the most picturesque settlements along the Guatemalan Pacific coast. Roads constructed to serve tourism in this area would be less costly than farther west near Escuintla, Mazatenango or Retalhuleu, since here the Pacific Coast Highway is located nearer the immediate coast. The attractive beaches at Las Lisas and Hawaii, though farther from Guatemala City, could attract some foreign exchange from Salvadoran tourists because of the eastward location.

Figure 13

Entrance to Likín, near the port of San José.

Figure 14

Wide, attractive beach at Las Lisas, along the eastern Pacific littoral.

CHAPTER VI

EXISTING TOURISM

During recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of tourists visiting Guatemala. In 1967, some 171,631 foreign tourists visited the country, as compared with 139,307 in 1966 and 153,453 in 1965. Likewise, there has been a proportionate increase in the amount of foreign exchange earned through tourism. The origin of foreign tourists and the extent of their expenditures are shown in Table 1.

Tourist Numbers and Expenditures

The two largest groups of tourists in Guatemala are (1) North Americans, and (2) visitors from other Central American countries, particularly El Salvador. Increasing numbers of North American tourists now enter Guatemala, and it is this group that accounts for over one-third of all foreign exchange earned from tourism. Central American tourists, mainly Salvadorans, comprise over one-half of Guatemala's visitors. However, most Central Americans spend considerably less than their North American counterparts, and the amount of foreign exchange received is therefore less than that from North American tourists. The fact that Salvadoran tourists comprise such a

TABLE 1

VISITOR ORIGIN AND TOURISM EXPENDITURES IN GUATEMALA, 1965-1967

Visitor Origin	-1965- Number	-1965- Expenditures	-1966- Number	-1966- Expenditures	-1967- Number	-1967- Expenditures
United States	37,039	3,666,861	38,292	3,860,208	47,846	4,736,754
Central America	86,573	4,285,363	71,363	3,530,142	88,402	4,375,899
South America	4,502	445,698	5,545	548,955	6,164	610,236
Mexico	8,405	416,047	9,422	466,389	11,302	559,449
Germany	2,988	295,812	2,570	254,430	3,355	332,145
Spain	2,037	201,663	1,657	164,043	2,278	225,522
Canada	1,157	114,543	1,560	154,440	1,748	173,052
France	1,427	141,273	1,489	147,411	1,710	169,290
Italy	1,364	135,036	1,008	99,792	1,453	143,847
Asia	1,155	114,345	914	90,486	980	97,020
Switzerland	810	80,190	828	81,972	834	82,566
The Antilles	1,024	101,376	898	88,902	810	80,190
Other	4,972	492,228	3,808	376,992	4,749	479,151
TOTAL	153,453	10,490,435	139,354	9,864,162	171,631	12,056,121

Source: Ingreso de divisas en concepto de turismo - años 1965, 1966, 1967, Centro Guatemalteco de Turismo, Guatemala, C. A., 1968.

large share of the total number can be attributed to the proximity of El Salvador, its high population density, and easy access via the Inter-American and Pacific Coast Highways. The number of tourists from each of the Central American countries, plus British Honduras and Panama, is shown for 1967 in Table 2.

TABLE 2

CENTRAL AMERICAN TOURISTS VISITING GUATEMALA, 1967

Country	Number of Visitors	Per cent
El Salvador	52,776	59.70
Nicaragua	13,678	15.47
Honduras	11,230	12.70
Costa Rica	8,036	9.10
Panama	1,769	2.00
British Honduras	913	1.03
TOTAL	88,402	100.00

Source: Estadísticas de turismo, 1967, Centro Guatemalteco de Turismo, Guatemala, C. A., May, 1968, p. 34.

Of the 171,631 foreign tourists who visited Guatemala in 1967, some 88,402 were from Central America and 47,846 from the United States. Mexico occupied third place with 11,302 tourists, while South America with 6,164 was the fourth largest source. In addition, a significant number of Europeans visited Guatemala. Central American tourists comprise by far the largest group of tourists, although visitors from the United States are the single most important source of foreign

exchange. Central American tourists usually spend less for food, lodging, and entertainment than do those from North America or Europe. The National Tourist Institute of Guatemala estimated in 1966 that Central American tourists spend approximately U.S. $10.00 daily while visiting the country, as compared with $20.00 spent daily by tourists of other nationalities and particularly North Americans and Europeans.[1]

Estimates for the year 1967 show a substantial increase in daily per capita visitor expenditures. Daily expenditures for Central American tourists increased from U.S. $10.00 to $15.00, while other foreign tourists, especially those from North America and Europe, spent $30.00 instead of $20.00. The average length of stay for all tourists in 1967 was three and one-third days, a slight increase over previous years.[2] Also, since daily per capita expenditures by Central American tourists are only one-half those of North Americans or Europeans, the income received is not commensurate with the number of tourists, but is instead governed by type and economic class of visitors.

For statistical purposes, the National Tourist Institute has officially adopted the term "visitor," which is defined by the United Nations as including both tourists and excursionists.[3] Foreign

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[1] Plan nacional de desarrollo turístico, Centro Guatemalteco de Turismo, Guatemala, C. A., November, 1966, Table following p. 6.

[2] Ingreso de divisas en concepto de turismo - años 1965, 1966, 1967, One-page table.

[3] Estadísticas de turismo, 1967, p. 7.

tourists are defined in the accepted sense as persons remaining in another country for a period of at least twenty-four hours for reasons of vacation, health, education, diversion, or business. In addition to the many Central Americans who are classified as tourists while visiting Guatemala, a significant number of other Central Americans, particularly Salvadorans, are classified as "excursionists" during their stay and are not included in national tourists statistics. This system of classification is based on the premise that many Central Americans spend only small amounts of money while visiting Guatemala, and the reason for travel is not touristic but personal or religious in nature.

Major Tourist Gateways

Guatemala has seventeen official points of entry, including the international airport "La Aurora," five maritime ports including San José and Champerico, and eleven terrestrial border points shared with Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, and British Honduras. La Aurora Airport, serving the national capital, is the most important gateway for foreign tourists, especially North Americans, and accounts for much of the foreign exchange received. Of the 61,481 tourists who arrived by air in 1967, some 32,644 were North Americans and 11,713 were Central Americans. The most important terrestrial gateway is Ciudad Pedro de Alvarado, bordering El Salvador at the eastern terminus of the Guatemalan Pacific Coast Highway (Figure 15). The number of tourists entering the country at this point in 1967 totaled 39,333 persons, or 22.92 per cent of the national total. Of these, 31,843 were Central Americans and 4,155 were North Americans. Valle Neuvo, located in the highland region bordering

Figure 15

The Río Paz, part of Guatemala's southeastern boundary with El Salvador, near Ciudad Pedro de Alvarado.

Figure 16

Heavy surf at Tahuexco, southeast of Champerico.

El Salvador, was the third-ranking tourist gateway in 1967 and accounted for 29,308 visitors. San Cristóbal Frontera and Angiatú, also highland border points, reported 8,343 and 871 tourist entries, respectively. Because of its location at the western terminus of the Guatemalan Pacific Coast Highway, bordering with Mexico, El Carmen is by far the most important gateway for North Americans motoring to Central America and accounted for 23,524 tourist entries in 1967. Ciudad Tecún Umán, to the south, reported only 2,720 for the same year. The remaining border points, including La Mesilla on the Inter-American Highway at the Guatemala-Mexico boundary, are relatively unimportant as tourist gateways because of poor access and remote locations. The number of tourists entering Guatemala through maritime ports is negligible. In 1967, only 1,022 tourists arrived by sea, of whom 280 were North Americans.[4]

Negative Tourism Factors

Various negative factors have contributed to the retarded status of tourism in the Pacific coast region. Among the more prominent are: (1) unfavorable climate, (2) unfavorable beach and sea conditions, (3) inadequate tourist facilities and services, and (4) poor access to most coastal locations.

High temperatures prevail in the Pacific coast region throughout the year, but are especially noticeable during the wet season from May through October. At this time conditions are unpleasant because of

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[4] Ibid, p. 41.

excessive humidity and the almost daily occurrence of heavy rains. Many North American and European tourists are neither accustomed, nor attracted to such a hot, humid lowland climate. Though not a major detraction, some severe squall activity also occurs at this time, and wind damage is sometimes widespread. Commercial banana cultivation on the the Pacific side of Guatemala has particularly suffered from such storms. One of several factors responsible for the closing of the United Fruit Company's large plantation at Tiquisate was that extensive banana losses resulted from repeated "blowdowns" associated with squalls during the wet season. During periods of severe weather, parts of the coast have been inundated and widespread damage has occurred, notably at Champerico.[5] The dry season, from November through April, is therefore the most desirable time for tourists to visit Pacific coast beaches, due to the absence of storms and high humidity.

A second negative factor is that most beach areas have unfavorable characteristics for tourism development. Beaches of black volcanic sand occur along the entire coast and radiate heat during period of high sun to an uncomfortable degree, in contrast with the white sand beaches of the Caribbean side of Guatemala. Coupled with the problem of heat is the fact that most Pacific coast beaches present a rather barren appearance, being for the most part unvegetated except for monotonous stretches of short beach grass backed by scrub undergrowth and savanna. Palm groves occur in a few localities along the coast but are restricted mainly to coastal inlets and parts of the Chiquimulilla Canal.

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[5]Estudio geográfico: Champerico, p. 7.

In many places sea conditions are hazardous to swimmers and boaters, since steep beach gradients continuing offshore result in dangerous drop-offs and a heavy surf (Figure 16, page 57). An exceptionally heavy surf occurs between Churirín and Tecojate, and undertow at the latter location is also a problem. Natural harbors along the Pacific coast are conspicuously absent, a situation detrimental to both port commerce and tourism development. At present, sport fishing is extremely limited, and craft used in shrimp fishing can enter the Chiquimulilla Canal only at a hazardous inlet between Iztapa and San José. The piers at San José and Champerico fulfill only a temporary berthing function for tugs and lighters, due to heavy sea and swell, while large ocean-going vessels must anchor at a considerable distance from shore. Sea conditions have also had a decidedly negative effect on the development of boating facilities and swimming areas with tourist accommodations. In addition, tidal ranges on the Pacific side of Guatemala are much greater than those of the Caribbean coast. Daily ranges of five to six feet are common from June through October, and during 1966 tidal ranges of over six feet were reported on a total of 101 days. June alone, had twelve days of such a range, while March was representative of the period having more moderate tides with only five such days.[6]

Inadequate facilities and services to meet the needs of tourists constitute a third major problem in the coastal areas. The few existing tourist facilities consist mostly of rather poorly constructed

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[6] Tablas de sol, luna y mareas para, 1966, Instituto Geográfico Nacional, Guatemala, C. A., 1966, Tables 4-5.

thatched-roof beach houses, lacking both utilities and proper sanitation. Although some first-class accommodations have recently been built along the Pacific Coast Highway to the north, a need still exists for improved lodging facilities along the immediate coast and particularly in the San José area. Food establishments are also inadequate to meet the demands of any tourist influx, especially with regard to sanitation.

Since most settlements along the Pacific coast are small, and in many cases remote, community services and communications are poorly developed. Iztapa, San José, and Champerico have post offices and serve as small but vital governmental communications centers for the region. Recreational and entertainment facilities are limited in these communities, however, due to their small size and lack of tourism promotion.

A fourth factor that has retarded tourism development is the lack of suitable access to beaches and coastal communities that are potentially attractive to visitors. Two all-weather paved highways presently connect San José-Iztapa and Champerico with the Pacific Coast Highway, but most other roads connecting beach areas and agricultural colonization zones have only a base of loosely packed sand or earth and are impassable during the wet season. As a result, some coastal communities are completely isolated for extended periods of time, especially in the west-central coastal section. Yet, the initiation of rural bus service linking coastal villages with Guatemala City and the major agricultural marketing centers of the Pacific coastal plain, has in recent years increased commercial contacts with other parts of the republic.

Positive Tourism Factors

Despite the many problems militating against the growth of tourism along the Pacific coast, some development potential does exist. Among the most important factors are: (1) the regional gateway function of the Pacific Coast Highway, (2) certain beaches that could be made accessible and attractive to tourists, and (3) the proximity of some Pacific coast beaches to the national capital.

The Pacific Coast Highway, completed in 1964, offers an all-paved access to the developing Pacific coast region. The highway is 213 miles in length and extends from the Talismán Bridge at El Carmen, bordering Mexico, eastward to the Guatemala-El Salvador boundary at Ciudad Pedro de Alvarado. Located approximately thirty miles inland, the highway roughly parallels the coast and traverses the coastal piedmont throughout most of its length. In so doing, it offers a faster and more direct route across the country than does the mountainous Inter-American Highway to the north. In addition, the route offers the tourist a different type of scenery than is usually associated with Guatemala, since it passes through extensive areas devoted to coffee, sugar cane, cotton, and the grazing of beef cattle. Since its completion, the road has played a key role in the economic development of the Pacific coastal plain and will undoubtedly assume even more importance in the future. Much of the Pacific coast, though previously isolated, is now an effective part of the national territory. Because of this road, agricultural products formerly sold locally can now be marketed nationally. The road is also a vital transportation

link with other parts of Central America, facilitating the distribution of goods produced for the Central American Common Market. The number of tourists using the highway is modest but growing. Likewise, the demand for tourist facilities and services has increased, as evidenced by the recent construction of restaurants, motels, and service stations along the route.

Most beaches along the Guatemalan Pacific Coast are unsuited for tourism development because of heavy surf, undertow, lack of access, and the relative unattractiveness of many coastal sites. However, some beaches having both a moderate surf and attractive physical settings are to be found at Tilapa in the west, Sipacate and San José along the middle segment of coatline, and at Hawaii and Las Lisas in the east.

The beach at Tilapa is the most favorable of any in the western coastal region in terms of tourism potential. A wide, sandy beach, moderate surf, and proximity to the agricultural colony of "La Blanca" are factors favoring development. In February, 1967, the Dirección General de Caminos was planning to undertake a feasibility study for the construction of an all-weather road connecting La Blanca with the Pacific Coast Highway. Such a road would not only serve an important farm-to-market function, but could promote tourism development at Tilapa as well.

At Sipacate the beach facilities are inadequate, and there is some undertow. However, the western terminus of the Chiquimulilla Canal is adjacent to the beach area, and the site offers excellent tropical lowland scenery as well as brackish water fishing. Sipacate

is presently accessible only by gravel road, but plans call for extension of the paved route between the Pacific Coast Highway and La Democracia to the coastal village.

San José and the adjacent settlements of Chulamar, Quitasombrero, Likín, and Iztapa constitute the most developed area of the Pacific coast in terms of access, communications, and public utilities. Considerable resort development has also occurred along the coastal inlets and Chiquimulilla Canal. Recreational activities such as pleasure boating and fishing remain oriented toward the coastal waterways, rather than the sea, due to the heavy surf. Foremost in regard to the potential growth of tourism in the area is the proposed construction of a deep-water port with an artificial harbor. Such a facility could provide a means of access to the open ocean for pleasure craft from the Chiquimulilla Canal and make adjacent beaches more secure for swimmers.

Hawaii and Las Lisas, located in the eastern section of the coast, possess significant tourism potential in terms of beaches, surf conditions, and scenic beauty. Wide, flat, sandy beaches are found at both locations, and surf conditions are favorable for swimming. The tourism potential of the two coastal villages is further enhanced by the proximity of the Chiquimulilla Canal, which could offer opportunities for fishing and boating. Although access to the settlements remains a problem, the outlook appears favorable. The national government is currently planning a paved road to connect the settlements of Los Cerritos and Aguacate for agricultural marketing purposes. When completed, it may contribute significantly to the development of tourism at Las Lisas.

Because the heavily populated highland centers of Guatemala, including Guatemala City, are situated much nearer the Pacific coast than the Caribbean, most Pacific coast beaches have a decided advantage with respect to time and distance from the national capital. The middle segment of coastline near San José offers excellent access and is only about sixty-five miles from Guatemala City. Iztapa, to the east of San José, is only eight miles farther from the capital city. The resort development of Likín, midway between San José and Iztapa, has benefited greatly from the adjacent highway. New roads have encouraged both the continuing expansion of facilities at Likín and additional investment planning by private interests. The private resort developments of Chulamar and Quitasombrero, west of San José, have also experienced considerable growth as a result of accessibility from the highway linking San José and Guatemala City. Sipacate, meanwhile, remains undeveloped because of poor access, rather than distance from the capital city. Champerico, on the southwestern Pacific coast 140 miles from Guatemala City, is connected with population centers to the north and east by a paved road, as is San José. Little resort development has occurred, however, due in part to the remoteness of the location. Isolation from the major national population center is also a problem at Hawaii, and particularly at Las Lisas. Tilapa is the most remote in terms of distance from Guatemala City, yet some private resort development has already occurred in the area. Due to the lack of improved roads, most visitors arrive by private plane and utilize coastal landing strips.

CHAPTER VII

TRANSPORTATION AS A FACTOR IN TOURISM

Development of beach areas for tourism along the Pacific coast of Guatemala depends upon their location relative to transportation routes, and specifically to all-weather roads. The lack of such roads along the Pacific littoral has proven to be a decidedly detrimental factor to tourism development. Isolation is a major problem throughout the immediate coastal area, since most beaches remain inaccessible from Guatemala's major population centers in the highlands to the north.

Highways

Two all-weather highways connect the Pacific coast region with the adjacent highland core. The communities of Iztapa and San José, almost directly south of Guatemala City on the nation's Pacific littoral, are linked with Escuintla and the national capital by the paved Southern Highway (Carretera del Sur). In the western part of the coastal region, a similar road connects the port of Champerico with Retalhuleu and Quezaltenango, the republic's second largest city. The highway to San José was completed in 1954 and is now the principal transportation corridor for cotton exports and for some crude sugar produced in the Escuintla area. In recent years the road has assumed additional importance as a transportation route for the shipment of

imported crude oil from San José to the new refinery at Escuintla and for marketing refined petroleum products in Guatemala City. The paved route from the Pacific Coast Highway southwestward through Retalhuleu to Champerico serves the need for marketing cotton, coffee, and shrimp. Elsewhere, gravel and earthen roads are the only means of access to beach areas, as well as to most of the Chiquimulilla Canal region. The problem of transportation remains acute, since beach sites that possess the greatest potential for tourism development are also the least accessible. Such picturesque locales as the eastern segment of the Chiquimulilla Canal and the nearby beaches at Las Lisas, Hawaii, and Monterrico are essentially inaccessible by road.

Secondary Roads

Existing secondary roads divide the coastal region into large segments that are practically inaccessible, since no road traverses the immediate coast to connect the various settlements and stretches of coastline having tourism potential. Access is especially difficult during the rainy season, from May through November, when roads become mired and coastal settlements are isolated from the main inland centers of economic activity. There is great need for the improvement of almost all secondary roads. Most are not graded, and nearly all are narrow, pitted and inadequate for standard types of motor vehicles. The majority of secondary roads in the Pacific lowlands have an earthen base and, because of their inaccessibility much of the year, are almost never used by tourists (Figure 17). Examples of such roads are to be

Figure 17

Farm-to-market road near the agricultural development zone of "Montúfar," in extreme southeastern Guatemala.

Figure 18

Mangrove flat at Likín, with Chiquimulilla Canal in background.

found at Ocós, near the Guatemala-Mexico border in San Marcos Department; in the Tahuexco area of Suchitepéquez Department; at El Paredón, in western Escuintla Department; near Hawaii and Las Lisas, in the department of Santa Rosa; and at Garita Chapina, in Jutiapa Department. Few roads penetrate the Chiquimulilla Canal region, except at several isolated locations such as in the San José-Iztapa area or near Sipacate.

Coupled with the problem of access to Pacific coast beaches is the factor of distance. Guatemala City is the leading gateway for North American tourists and the principal source of Guatemalans with funds to expend on tourism. The city of Quezaltenango is a second source of tourists but, because of its smaller size, is much less important than the national capital. Development of the Pacific coast for tourism will thus depend not only upon road types and conditions, but also upon distance from major visitor source areas.

Bridges

The lack of adequate bridges on the secondary roads is a major problem throughout the Pacific coastal plain. Due to the large number of heavy trucks transporting agricultural produce, existing bridges are inadequate and constitute a definite safety hazard. In some areas bridges have been closed because of unsafe structure, but most bridges along major secondary roads remain open regardless of their condition. The problem has been especially serious near the communities of Río Bravo and Tiquisate. In 1966, local government officials appealed to the national government to endorse a bridge and road improvement program for the area, with the costs to be financed primarily by taxes

levied on locally produced cotton and on insecticide purchases. However, the proposal has been strongly opposed by the large and influential cotton producers who would be most directly affected by the tax.

Airports

Air transportation is an important means of access throughout the coastal region, but it has been developed mainly in terms of private flying, since the area is tributary to Guatemala City for commercial air service. Small airfields and landing strips have been built throughout the area on private properties and along some beaches. The landing strips are centers for spraying and crop dusting operations and, in addition, serve as transportation links with the national capital and with other parts of the coastal plain. Two of the coastal airstrips which provide access to private resort areas are maintained by flying clubs. One such facility, having overnight accommodations for its members, is located along the Chiquimulilla Canal near Likín. Another in the extreme west, near Tilapa, serves a somewhat smaller resort development.

Waterways

An important means of access to many beaches having tourism potential on the Pacific coast is the Chiquimulilla Canal. The canal, an intracoastal waterway more than sixty miles in length, extends from Sipacate in the central coastal area to Barra del Jiote near the Guatemala-El Salvador border. From Sipacate to El Paredón, it backs a

barrier beach six miles in length. Eastward, it again borders barrier beaches from La Barrita to Iztapa and from Hawaii through Las Lisas to Barra del Jiote. The Chiquimulilla Canal has also been a strong locational factor with regard to settlements in the area. Its influence has been especially strong from Monterrico to Barra del Jiote, where a series of small coastal settlements depends on the canal for the production and marketing of fish as well as for contact with the rest of the republic. Two sections of the canal are neither adjacent nor readily accessible to the Pacific coastline and are separated from it by extensive areas of heavy undergrowth and mangrove (Figure 18, page 68). One such area occurs from El Paredón to La Barrita, and the other is found to the east between Iztapa and Hawaii. In the latter section, a series of lesser tributary canals provides limited access for small, shallow-draught boats and canoes to the many small settlements along the coast. A saltpan area east of Monterrico is dependent on the many small channels for the transport of salt and dried fish.

Beach areas from Sipacate westward to the Mexican border have, in general, remained more isolated than those adjacent to the Chiquimulilla Canal. There are numerous coastal estuaries west of Sipacate, but these are for the most part isolated from each other. Fishing villages on the margins of various lagoons are rarely visited by foreign tourists, because of remoteness. However, the lower course of the Río María Linda, immediately east of Iztapa, is occasionally visited by tourists using chartered boats.

The most important land connection with coastal waterways is a six-mile section of paved highway between San José and Iztapa, while an

airfield operated by the Aero Club offers access to the same area and is frequently utilized. From Iztapa eastward to Barra del Jiote there are secondary road connections with the Pacific Coast Highway at La Avellana, Papaturro and Casas Viejas. None are all-weather roads, however, and tourism is therefore limited. Other settlements, especially between Iztapa and Monterrico, rely soley on water transport. The latter two communities are connected by an unimproved and little used road backing the beach on the seaward side of the Chiquimulilla Canal. This beach section has remained isolated, since there is no suitable bridge or other means of access for motorists wishing to cross the intracoastal waterway. The majority of coastal lagoons on either side of the Chiquimulilla Canal possess considerable beauty but remain inaccessible to most tourists.

Railroads

Railroad transportation in Guatemala is provided by the former International Railways of Central America (Ferrocarrilles Internacionales de Centro-America), which also serves part of neighboring El Salvador. A large part of this system, now operated by the Guatemalan government, is concentrated on the Pacific coastal plain. The ports of San José and Champerico are thus connected with the piedmont area and with Guatemala City. In the extreme west, a line connecting Ocós with Ciudad Tecún Umán has been abandoned. Today, the railroads are engaged mainly in the transportation of goods to and from the ports of San José and Champerico. Most of the rolling stock is outdated, the railroads themselves are of narrow-gauge construction. Freight service,

rather than passenger transport, is emphasized. Consequently, little has been done to attract the potential traveler. Although passenger service is available on a few trains, it is rarely used by Guatemalans and almost never by foreign tourists.

CHAPTER VIII

TOURIST FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Since tourism is undeveloped in most areas on the Pacific side of Guatemala, the level and quality of food establishments remain generally low. Lodging accommodations are not significantly better, nor are recreational facilities well developed. Yet, some progress is being made toward the resolution of these problems.

Food Establishments

Most restaurants or dining rooms catering to the tourists and the general public are small, poorly equipped, and offer only a limited choice of food. Other establishments, popularly termed refresquerías, sell soft drinks and alcoholic beverages but serve little in the way of meals. In addition, sanitary conditions and food handling practices are unsatisfactory, especially in establishments depending on the local trade. Food inspection is lacking, and the paucity of refrigeration is responsible for much food spoilage and a high incidence of sickness among local residents.

While there are almost no restaurants along the immediate coast, some facilities have recently been constructed farther inland along both the Pacific Coast Highway and the highway connecting San José with Escuintla. A total of eight restaurants on these routes

offer the tourist potable water, reasonable food choice and quality, and adequate sanitation. The restaurants along the Pacific Coast Highway are in or near the communities of Coatepeque, San Sebastián, Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa, Escuintla and Chiquimulilla. Those along the Southern Highway are at Masagua, south of Escuintla. Six of the eight establishments operate as restaurants in conjunction with motels, while those at Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa and Chiquimulilla operate only as first-class restaurants. With the Pacific Coast Highway now completed, the construction of such restaurants and motels reflect an increased demand for improved travel facilities. Prices are somewhat higher than those of non-tourist establishments, since the clientele is mostly North American and European tourists. However, increasing numbers of Central Americans with above-average incomes are also patronizing these facilities. Travelers are now able to take advantage of first-class restaurants and lodging accommodations near most of the region's larger communities. Escuintla, the gateway for tourists visiting beaches in the San José-Iztapa area, has recently become a center for good accommodations and food. San Sebastián, near Retalhuleu, serves a similar function for persons visiting the western piedmont and coastal area.

Lodging Accommodations

Lodging accommodations, like food establishments, are of limited number and quality in the Pacific lowland region. Few communities along the immediate coast, with the exception of San José, offer

the tourist much in the way of hotels, motels, or hostelries. First-class facilities of this type are found almost exclusively in the inland piedmont communities. Even Champerico, despite its importance as a Pacific port, is lacking these essentials for tourism growth. Champerico's potential appears limited compared with that of San José, because of its poor accommodations.

For purposes of tourism promotion, the Instituto Guatemalteco de Turismo has listed seventy-one lodging places in the Pacific coast region (Map 5). These have been classified "A," "B," "C" and "D," depending on the quality of accommodations and services offered. Of the seventy-one, only five are considered to be Class A, ten are Class B, Twenty-five are Class C, and thirty-one are Class D.[1]

Hotels

At the time field work was conducted for the study, only one hotel in San José was rated Class A by the Guatemalan government. However, a small luxury hotel under construction in San José was scheduled to open sometime in 1968. The latter was planned to offer complete visitor services and recreational facilities. Among these were a golf course for use by hotel guests, tennis courts, restaurant, bar and improved beach area.[2] No other hotels of this type were contemplated

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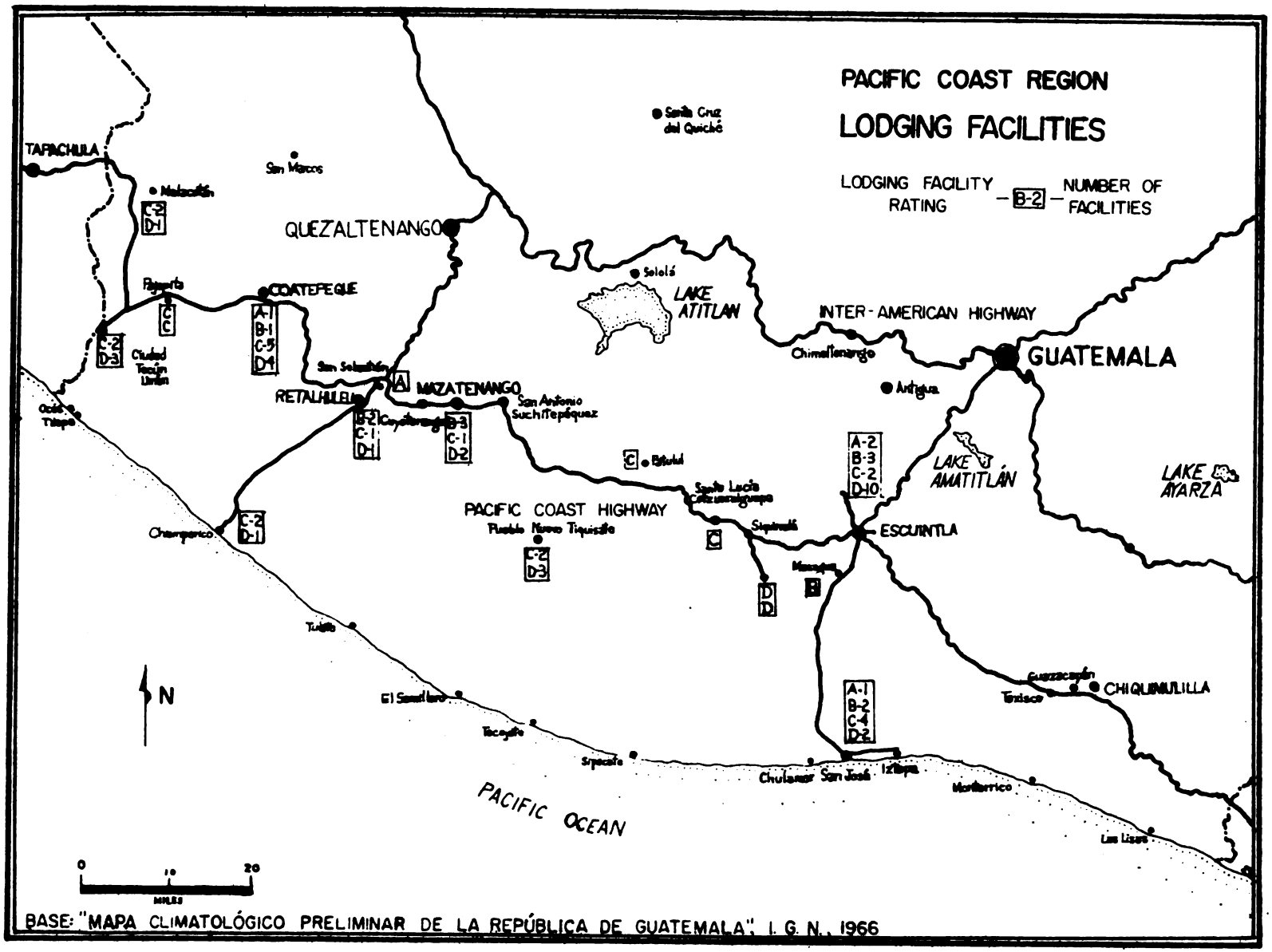
[1]Directorio de hoteles y pensiones de la república, Centro Guatemalteco de Turismo, Guatemala, C. A., 1966, 62 pp.

[2]"Ingreso de divisas en concepto de turismo aumentó en 1967; se espera que en 1968 será substanciosamente incrementada", Boletín no. 021, Instituto Guatemalteco de Turismo, Guatemala, C. A., 1968, p. 2.


PACIFIC COAST REGION
LODGING FACILITIES
LODGING FACILITY RATING — B-2 — NUMBER OF FACILITIES
TAPACHULA
Malacatán
C-2 D-1
San Marcos
QUEZALTENANGO
Santa Cruz del Quiché
Sololá
LAKE ATITLAN
INTER-AMERICAN HIGHWAY
Chimaltenango
GUATEMALA
Antigua
Retalhuleu
C-2 D-3
Ciudad Tecún Umán
COATEPEQUE
A-1 B-1 C-5 D-1
C-1 C-2
San Sebastián
A
MAZATENANGO
San Antonio Suchitepéquez
B-2 C-1 D-1
B-3 C-1 D-2
Ocós
Tilapa
Champerico
C-2 D-1
PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY
Pueblo Nuevo Tiquisate
C-2 D-3
C
Esquintla
Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa
Siquinalá
ESCUINTLA
A-2 B-3 C-2 D-10
LAKE AMATITLÁN
LAKE AYARZA
Masagua
B
D D
Tulate
El Semillero
Tecojate
Sipacate
Chulamar
San José
Iztapa
Monterrico
Las Lisas
Guazacapán
Taxisco
CHIQUIMULILLA
A-1 B-2 C-4 D-2
N
PACIFIC OCEAN
0 10 20
MILES
BASE: "MAPA CLIMATOLÓGICO PRELIMINAR DE LA REPÚBLICA DE GUATEMALA", I. G. N., 1966

MAP 5

anywhere else along the entire coast. Farther inland, some small second-class hotels are operated in Retalhuleu, Mazatenango and Escuintla, but these generally attract few tourists, due to their poor condition and lack of promotional efforts.

Pensiones

The pensión is by far the most common type of lodging facility in the Pacific coast region. However, these are totally inadequate to meet the needs of present-day tourists. Of the forty-nine Pacific coast pensiones listed in the Directorio de hoteles y pensiones de la república, only one has rooms with individual baths and many have no such facilities whatsoever. Sanitation is therefore a major problem. Most of the pensiones are strictly substandard in terms of building safety, cleanliness and utilities. Potable water is lacking in many, as is electricity. Consequently, they have little appeal to foreign tourists, unlike the first-class pensiones found in Guatemala City or Quezaltenango. None of the forty-nine pensiones or hostels is rated Class A, and only one is considered even of second-class quality. Of the remainder, nineteen are rated Class C and twenty-nine as Class D. Such facilities fail to meet minimum tourist standards of health, safety and comfort and thus can do little to stimulate tourism in the area.

Most pensiones operate on the "American Plan," with meals included in the room price. Rates vary from $2.00 to $3.50 per day, with meals included, depending on the class of establishment.

Facilities of similar quality operating on the "European Plan" have rates of $0.75 to $1.00 per single unit.[3]

Motels

A considerable number of motels have been built along the Pacific Coast Highway, and most offer first-class accommodations which include dining facilities. At present, there are four first-class motels along the highway, including two at the important junction of the Pacific Coast Highway and the Southern Highway in Escuintla. A third motel is located in San Sebastian, immediately west of the junction of the Pacific Coast Highway and the highway to Quezaltenango. Just west of Coatepeque, a fourth motel offers excellent facilities for persons visiting the westernmost part of Guatemala or who are en route to or from Mexico. The condition of all four establishments is excellent. Rooms are well appointed and clean, especially in comparison with other lodging facilities in the region. Restaurants are operated in conjunction with each of the motels, and sanitation standards and food choice meet the approval of most foreign tourists. Three of the four motels maintain private swimming pools for use by their guests. The motels are well maintained, including grounds which are well kept in all cases, while rates are comparable to those for similar accommodations in the United States. All of the facilities are locally owned and independently operated, with no motel or hotel chains being represented anywhere in the study area at the time of field research. Few tourists have yet patronized some of the motels, due mainly to the lack of

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[3]Directorio de hoteles y pensiones de la república, comparative figures listed on each page.

tourism promotion in this part of Guatemala. Nevertheless the number of tourists visiting the region is increasing, as is reflected by the construction of additional tourist units at one motel in Escuintla during 1967. Expansion of facilities in Escuintla has been especially favored by the proximity of that community to the national capital. The less frequented motels at San Sebastián and Coatepeque are 115 miles and 141 miles, respectively, from Guatemala City, while those of Escuintla are only thirty-five miles from the capital. Because of their location, the lodging and eating establishments in the western piedmont and coastal region are dependent to a greater extent on foreign tourists in transit from Mexico. The facilities near Coatepeque and San Sebastián are patronized mainly by foreign tourists, while the hotels and motels in Escuintla are patronized by a growing number of Central American tourists and businessmen as well.

There are only two second-class motels in the coast region that cater primarily to tourists. One is located approximately one-half mile east of Escuintla along the Pacific highway, while a second is eight miles south of the city on the highway to San José at Masagua. Facilities at both locations are adequate, with prices comparable to those in the United States for similar accommodations. A small restaurant is operated in conjunction with the motel near Masagua and caters to both foreign and domestic travelers.

Service Stations

Although much of the region is deficient in lodging facilities, food establishments and developed recreational areas, numerous

service stations have been constructed in recent years. These serve the many vehicles engaged in transporting agricultural produce and also those of a small but growing number of tourists. The number of stations appears adequate to serve the needs of the area at the present time. During the period of field work, 110 service stations, or gasolineras, were in operation within the study area.[4] As elsewhere, most of the facilities were concentrated along the main transportation routes, and particularly in the market communities traversed by the Pacific Coast Highway. In addition, some stations are located at important junctions of farm-to-market roads, so as to provide service for the many trucks in the area. Service stations also have been constructed along the highways connecting San José-Iztapa in the east, and Retalhuleu and Champerico in the west, with the Pacific Coast Highway.

Major concentrations of service stations are located in Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa, San Antonio Suchitépequez, Mazatenango, Retalhuleu, Escuintla and San Sebastián. However, Chiquimulilla is the only significant service center along the piedmont route between Escuintla and the Guatemala-El Salvador border.

Lesser concentrations are located in the San José-Iztapa area, at Taxisco on the Pacific Coast Highway west of Chiquimulilla, and at Champerico. Also, a considerable share of the total number of stations is found in rural areas, especially near the large government-sponsored

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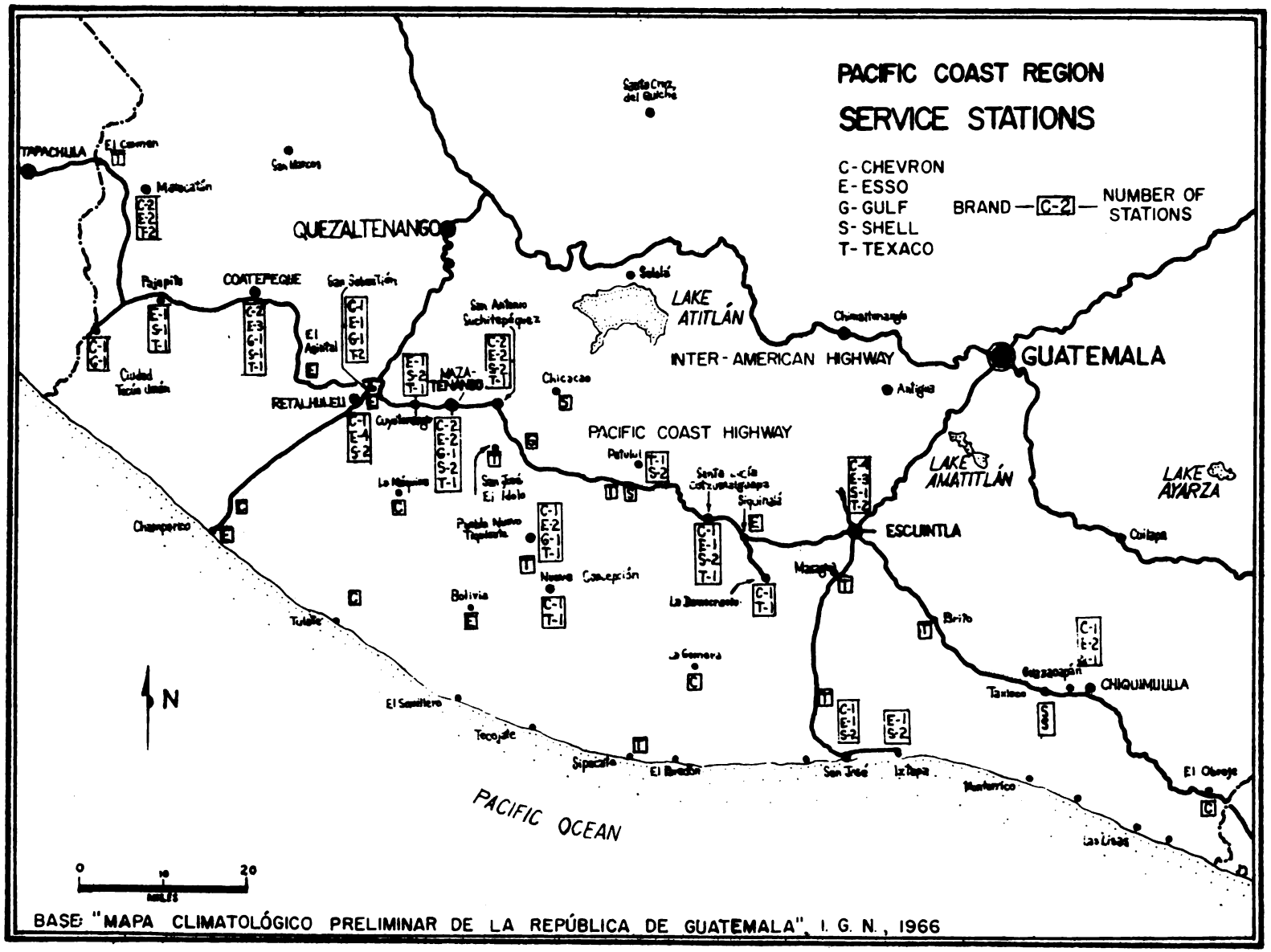
[4]Figures obtained through field research were cross-checked with data supplied by each of the petroleum companies operating in Guatemala.

agricultural cooperatives. Mechanized farm implements, in addition to highway vehicles, are commonly served by these stations, and extensive repair shops are associated with most. In addition to the sale of petroleum products in rural areas, some foreign-owned oil companies engage in the distribution of pesticides and insecticides for use in commercial cotton cultivation. One such concern, the Shell Oil Company, maintains a sizeable agricultural chemical products sales and storage operation near Río Bravo, in an important cotton producing area.

Guatemala, unlike Mexico with its government-controlled petroleum monoply (PEMEX), depends on foreign-owned enterprises to provide the necessary marketing and distribution facilities. Five major foreign oil companies now operate within the country. These include ESSO Central America, Gulf Oil Corporation, Shell Oil Company, Standard Oil of California (Chevron) and the Texas Company (TEXACO).

Of the 110 service stations in operation within the Pacific plain and piedmont region during the period of study thirty-two pertained to ESSO and twenty-five to Chevron. Shell and Texaco each operated twenty-four stations, while Gulf had only five (Map 6). With the continued development of new petroleum refineries and tank farms, particularly at San José and Puerto Barrios, the latter outside of the study area, it appears that Guatemala will be dependent on foreign petroleum enterprises throughout the foreseeable future.

Most of the service stations in Guatemala are modern structures of open-air tropical design. In many cases, they are individually named in honor of a nearby landmark, community, or prominent national



BASE: "MAPA CLIMATOLÓGICO PRELIMINAR DE LA REPÚBLICA DE GUATEMALA", I. G. N., 1966

MAP 6

figure, which adds considerably to their touristic appeal. In addition to the sale of gasoline and oil, most stations are equipped to undertake minor automobile repairs. A considerable number are operated in conjunction with small restaurants, usually adjacent to the stations, an arrangement not unlike the familiar "truck stop" in the United States. A detrimental factor for tourism is the lack of national road maps at the service stations, such as are usually available to the motoring public of the United States at no charge. This is due in part to the government's discouragement of map distribution for reasons of national security during periods of political crises.

Recreational Facilities

Due to the lack of natural harbors, and the undeveloped status of tourism along much of the Pacific coast, pleasure craft marinas are confined mainly to the San José-Iztapa area. Even Champerico, despite its importance as a commercial port, has no facilities for pleasure craft at its open roadstead location. Coastal lagoons in the Champerico area are not connected directly with the open sea. Consequently, the best anchorages for pleasure craft are found between Iztapa and San José along Chiquimulilla Canal. Of major interest to tourists in this area is the pleasure boat rental facility near El Carrizo. Approximately thirty small craft, of which most are runabouts, can be rented by visitors. In addition, outboard motors, gasoline, motor oil and general boating accessories can be procured. The facility caters mainly to the public, and rental fees are reasonable. A short

distance to the east, at Iztapa, a small ESSO dock and marine service has been established on the north bank of the Chiquimulilla Canal.

The private resort development of Likín, approximately midway between Iztapa and San José, possesses the only small boat marina on the Pacific side of Guatemala. The facility is of modest size by North American standards, but adequate for the present needs of tourists and resort tenants. The marina provides berthing space for approximately ten small pleasure craft. A boat ramp has also been built, and boating accessories can be purchased at the marina.

Water transportation in the coastal lagoons is little developed, due to the remoteness, shallow depth, and small area of many such bodies. Subsistence brackish-water fishing is the chief economic activity, and a long hand-crafted canoe known as a cayuco is the principal means of transportation (Figure 19). Outboard motors are few in most such areas because of their high cost and the hazards imposed by numerous muddy shallows and flats which impede motorized navigation, particularly at low tide. Although high-priced pleasure craft are unavailable in most sections of the Pacific littoral, canoes can be hired for a nominal sum at almost any coastal fishing settlement. Canoes equipped with outboard motors can be rented at Las Lisas, La Avellana, San José and Sipacate, and it is possible to traverse much of the canal region at a moderate price. However, there is only one excursion along the Pacific coast that is promoted elsewhere in Guatemala. The cruise is offered as the main feature of a one-day tour package offered by one of the large travel agencies in Guatemala

Figure 19

El Paredón, on the leeward bank of a barrier spit separating the Chiquimulilla Canal (left) from the open ocean. Note cayucos in the foreground.

Figure 20

Black, sandy beach at village of Hawaii.

City. With tourism increasing in the stretch of coastline from Chulamar eastward through San José to Iztapa, and the likelihood of a deep-water port being built within the near future, it appears that pleasure boating will eventually assume considerable significance.

Large sections of the Pacific coastline are unsuitable for swimming because of the heavy surf, but several stretches of beach offer considerable potential. Surf conditions are especially severe in the central and western coastal sections, due mainly to steep-sloping beaches, adjacent deep water areas, and the lack of inlets or promontories to provide sheltered coves. Dangerous undertow is common in areas of heavy surf, and many beaches are especially unsafe for swimming between April and October when sea and swell are heaviest. The San José, Sipacate, El Semillero, Tahuexco, Tulate and Champerico areas are characterized by especially rough seas, but conditions moderate farther westward. Ocós has a wide, attractive beach that is much less subject to undertow than is so common in the central Pacific littoral.

In general, the most favorable swimming areas are found between San José and the Guatemala-El Salvador boundary. From San José eastward, surf conditions gradually moderate to Monterrico. A section of coastline about midway between San José and the Guatemala-El Salvador border appears to have the most tourism development potential. Excellent beaches for swimming are found particularly at Hawaii and Las Lisas (Figure 20, page 86). These have wide, gently sloping surfaces and are essentially devoid of heavy surf and dangerous undertow.

However, suitable tourist facilities will have to be constructed, and access improved, if the area's potential is to be realized. At present, the beach areas near San José have the advantage of proximity to Guatemala City, greater infrastructure development, better access and a higher level of investment. They are also the most frequently visited by foreign tourists, even though natural conditions of the beach and sea are less attractive than elsewhere.

CHAPTER IX

UTILITIES AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

In the more economically advanced portions of the world, the availability of electricity, potable water and sewage facilities are so near universal as to be commonly taken for granted. Yet, in the less-developed countries, such as Guatemala, the paucity or poor condition of these utilities present formidable obstacles to economic advancement. Significant improvements are now being made, particularly in the generation and distribution of electricity, and should have a salubrious effect upon the growth of tourism within the study area.

Electricity

The availability of electricity in the Pacific coast region of Guatemala is limited mainly to the principal cities and towns, the large landholdings, and areas immediately adjacent to transmission lines for electricity produced in the piedmont and highlands. Power is thus supplied to areas isolated from each other, and there is no grid to connect the important piedmont communities with the small coastal settlements or government agricultural cooperatives. San José and Champerico must rely upon electricity produced locally by their respective port authorities. Unfortunately, the Diesel electric generators at these ports are inadequate to meet the urgent requirements

for electric power in the outlying areas. As a result, most small villages along the coast and adjacent inland area are completely without electricity.

There are only two power transmission lines at present on the coastal plain, and these serve a very small area. One line extends from Mazatenango to Retalhuleu, while the second links Retalhuleu with a small military installation about four miles to the southwest. Elsewhere, electric power in the rural areas is available only on large fincas, which produce electricity by Diesel generators. Private resort development, such as Likín and Chulamar, also operate their own Diesel generators. Such power production is adequate for present needs, but future developments will require greater sources of electricity than are now available.

Electric power in the Mazatenango-Retalhuleu area is supplied by a sixty-nine kilowatt transmission line connecting the two communities with a Diesel generating station at San Felipe Retalhuleu, immediately to the north in the upper piedmont. Farther eastward, near Escuintla, large fincas provide much of the electrical power, but additional electricity is supplied to the area by the Empresa Eléctrica de Guatemala, S. A. via a sixty-nine kilowatt transmission line from its gas turbine plant at Amatitlán in the highlands.[1] In the eastern

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[1]Map entitled Plan de inversiones públicas, 1965-1969, Instituto Nacional de Electrificación, Guatemala, C. A., September, 1965.

piedmont, power is supplied by a thirteen-kilowatt hydro-electric plant at Los Esclavos which began operation in 1966.[2]

Several new power plants are projected or now under construction in the Guatemalan highlands which, when completed, should serve as an impetus to further economic development in the Pacific lowlands. The most significant project is the large hydro-electric plant "Jurún Marinalá" currently under construction between Escuintla and Palín, on the Pacific slopes of the Guatemalan highlands, which should be in operation by 1970. A second large hydro-electric installation is under construction in the highland region south of Lake Atitlán and should be completed by 1972.[3] Expansion of the hydro-electric plant at Los Esclavos in the eastern piedmont is also underway. When completed, this facility will supply most of the eastern highlands with electric power, via a sixty-nine kilowatt transmission line. In addition, ancillary lines are to be constructed from this plant to Jalpatagua, Chiquimulilla, Guazacapán and Taxisco in the adjacent piedmont to the south.[4]

Coupled with the construction of new generating plants will be a large-scale program to expand the network of transmission lines. when completed, the lines will form part of an extensive power grid,

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[2]Chart entitled Demanda máxima y capacidad instalada, programa de desarrollo hasta 1974, Instituto Nacional de Electrificación, Guatemala, C. A., October, 1966.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Plan de inversiones públicas, 1965-1969.

the southern margin of which will traverse the entire length of the Pacific piedmont. In the near future, large amounts of power will thus be available throughout the piedmont, while feeder lines will be extended to Ciudad Tecún Umán, Champerico, the agricultural development zone of "La Máquina," Pueblo Nuevo Tiquisate, and Chiquimulilla.

The increased availability of electricity will be of great benefit to the region's tourism development. At present the lack of electricity is a major problem throughout the lowlands and has been especially detrimental to the construction of tourist facilities such as first-class hotels.

With the completion of the electric grid, branch lines can be constructed to specific beach areas having tourism potential. A new fifty-kilowatt line is projected to connect Retalhuleu and Champerico.[5] This is in response to the increasing need for electricity at the port facility, but it could also serve as a stimulus to tourism in the area. An additional line could be extended the fifteen miles from La Máquina to Tulate, and another from Nueva Concepción to El Semillero. Both Tulate and El Semillero are coastal locations with tourism potential, and the availability of electric power would do much to bring this section of the Pacific coast into the economic mainstream of the nation. Of particular significance along the middle segment of the coast would be the extension of power from Escuintla to Sipacate, San José and Iztapa, where there is already a relatively high

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[5] Ibid.

level of infrastructural development. Hydro-electric power produced at Los Esclavos could stimulate tourism at Las Lisas and Hawaii, an area of scenic beauty which might eventually rival the San José area in tourism development. In the future, electrical power could readily be supplied to this area by constructing a power transmission line from Chiquimulilla, a distance of approximately twenty miles.

Potable Water

Since few public facilities have been provided, safe drinking water can be obtained throughout most of the study area only from isolated wells. Champerico, however, has a municipal water system, a public swimming pool, and public sanitation facilities. Resort developments such as Likín, Laguna Quitasombrero and Chulamar also provide such conveniences, using private rather than municipal facilities (Figure 21 and 22).

On the Pacific piedmont, springs, wells, and some rivers constitute the main sources of water supply, while coastal villages depend chiefly on adjacent lagoons. Contamination of drinking water is particularly widespread along the coastal margin, due to high water tables and the small but dense populations which characterize most of the fishing villages. These villages have no municipal water supply or sewage disposal systems, as is reflected in the high incidence of disease among the residents.

Two municipal water supply systems were to be constructed in the Retalhuleu area in 1967, while a third was planned for the agricultural

Figure 21

New residential construction at Likín.

Figure 22

Large swimming pool adjacent to residential area in Likín.

development zone of "La Máquina," south of Cuyotenango.[6] The construction of such public works will not only substantially improve the health and standard of living of Guatemalans, but will also stimulate further tourism development. The capital outlays required for construction of new tourist facilities will be reduced with the increase in community development.

Sanitation

The lack of adequate plumbing and waste disposal facilities in both community and rural dwellings throughout the Pacific lowlands is a major problem confronting economic development within the region. More important is the health hazard imposed upon the area's residents due to the shortage of such facilities. Disease remains widespread, including outbreaks of typhoid fever and malaria associated with stagnant and contaminated water. Conditions are especially serious in villages on the shores of brackish lagoons and along the margins of the Chiquimulilla Canal in the San José-Iztapa area. In the latter communities the lack of sanitary facilities in nearly all residences, and the absence of municipal sewage disposal systems, has resulted in untreated sewage being discharged into the canal and lagoon areas. At present, only poorly-built rustic structures perched on the canal bank serve

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[6] Map entitled Construcción de edificios y obras públicas: programas de inversión, Dirección General de Obras Públicas, Guatemala, C. A., January, 1967.

the needs of area residents. The effect has been detrimental to recreational use of the canal, to adjacent flora and fauna, and to public and private sources of drinking water.

Inadequate sanitation is detrimental to tourism growth, since most tourists who encounter conditions hazardous to their health will simply vacation elsewhere. Furthermore, the lack of municipal waste disposal facilities forces potential investors to expend additional capital to provide safe drinking water systems, modern plumbing, and sewage disposal facilities. Throughout the coastal plain and along the Pacific beaches, the problem of sanitation is ubiquitous.

Because of existing health hazards, the national government embarked upon a public works program to include the construction of twenty-two municipal water and sewage disposal systems on the Pacific side of Guatemala between 1967 and 1970.[7] Development efforts in the past have been focused primarily on providing sewage systems for the larger agricultural trade centers of Escuintla, Mazatenango and Retalhuleu. Although much remains to be done in these communities, substantial improvements have been made in recent years. Sewage disposal facilities were also planned for Jalpatagua in the extreme eastern piedmont, and at La Gomera in the Pacific lowlands inland from Sipacate.

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[7]Interview with Ing. Gonzalo Barillas Flores, Director-General Dirección General de Obras Públicas, Guatemala, C. A., February, 1967.

CHAPTER X

FUTURE AREA DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM POTENTIAL

One of the principal objectives of this study has been to evaluate and classify the Pacific coast beaches in terms of potential for tourism development. Another has been to analyze government plans and projects designed for general development of the study area. The latter takes note of the problem of access and the need for improved facilities. Tourism investment, plans for a deep-water Pacific port, and the tourism potential of the Chiquimulla Canal are also included.

Classification of Beaches

The physical characteristics of various segments of the Pacific coastline, which largely determine their potential for development as recreation areas, fishing grounds, swimming areas and hotel sites, have been classified into the following categories: (1) favorable, (2) marginal, and (3) unfavorable. In general, the most favored area for tourism development is from Sipacate, located midway along the Pacific coastline, eastward to Barra del Jiote and the Guatemala-El Salvador border. This coastal segment is backed almost throughout its length by the Chiquimulilla Canal. The sub-section from Chulamar to San José and Iztapa is especially favored, due to proximity to Guatemala City, access, and existing development. The construction of a

deep-water port at San José would be still another advantage. Yet, it is a more easterly sub-section that has the more attractive physical settings and beach areas. Of particular appeal are the beaches at Barra del Jiote, Las Lisas and Hawaii (Figures 23 and 24). These are the most favorable in terms of sea conditions and scenery of any along the Guatemalan Pacific coast. The beach at Sipacate could also be developed to some extent for tourism. Although the San José area is presently the most developed tourist area along the Pacific littoral, the excellent beaches in the Las Lisas-Hawaii area would hold a greater appeal to tourists, if suitable facilities were provided (Map 7).

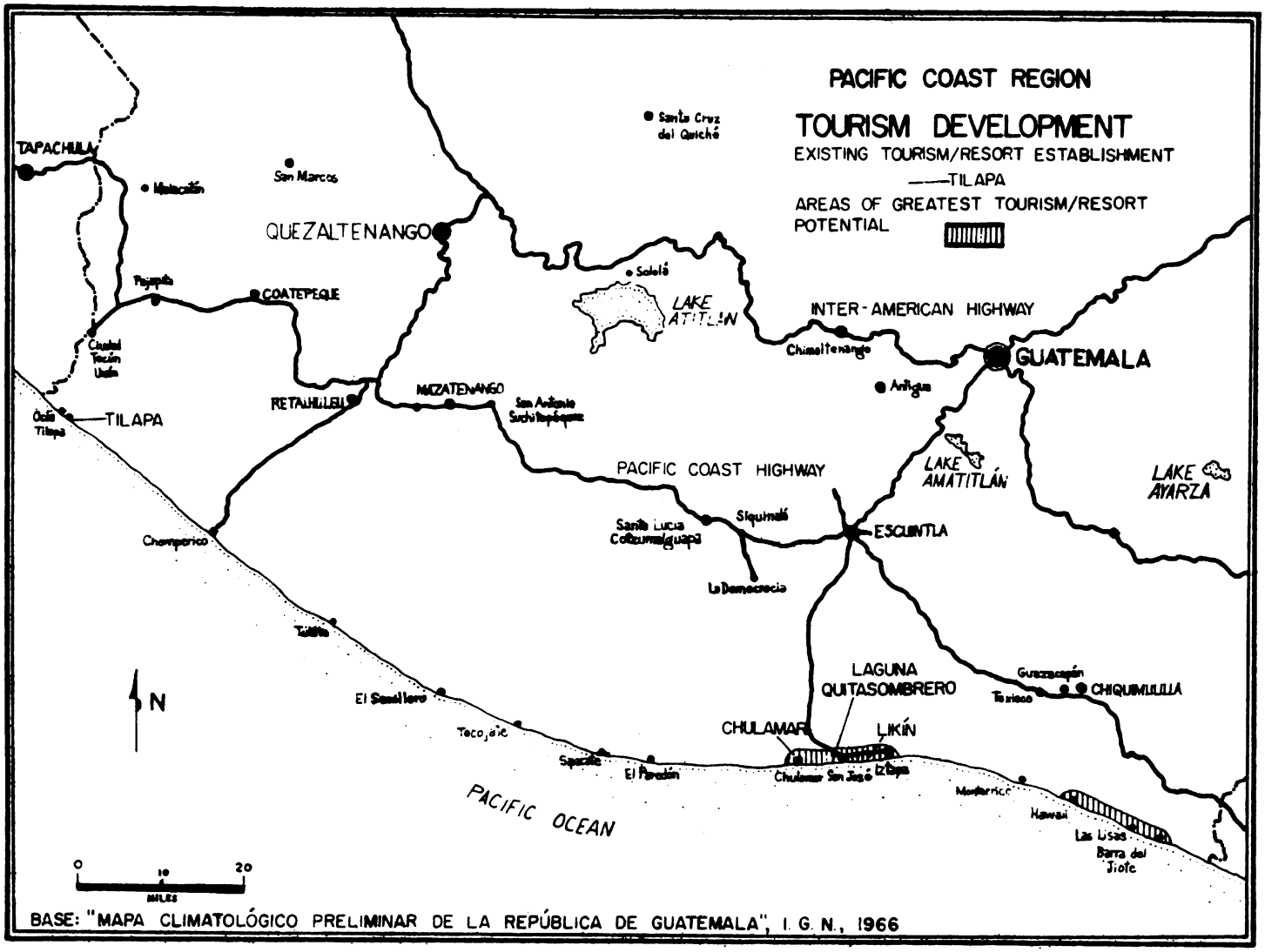
Large sections of the Pacific coast must be termed marginal for tourism development. Many areas have attractive beaches but are isolated or lacking in facilities for tourists. And, most such beaches are not sufficiently favorable to warrant the necessary capital improvements. Other marginal areas may be fairly well developed in terms of tourist facilities, access and public utilities, but the beaches are unattractive and sea conditions unsafe. Beach areas that have been classified as "marginal" include the coastal segment from Iztapa to Monterrico. Farther westward, the Pacific littoral to the Guatemala-Mexico border is of a similar category. Heavy surf and undertow, plus an unattractive beach, have militated against tourism development at the port of Champerico. This is despite the fact that potable water and utilities are available, and access by all-weather road to other parts of Guatemala and nearby

Figure 23

Wide, attractive beach and light surf immediately west of Las Lisas.

Figure 24

Palm grove on the leeward side of barrier spit at Las Lisas.


PACIFIC COAST REGION
TOURISM DEVELOPMENT
EXISTING TOURISM/RESORT ESTABLISHMENT
—TILAPA
AREAS OF GREATEST TOURISM/RESORT POTENTIAL
TAPACHULA
Mazatán
San Marcos
QUEZALTENANGO
Santa Cruz del Quiché
Sololá
LAKE ATITLAN
Pajapita
COATEPEQUE
INTER-AMERICAN HIGHWAY
Chimaltenango
GUATEMALA
Antigua
Ciudad Tecún Umán
RETALHULEU
MAZATENANGO
San Antonio Suchitepéquez
Ocós
TILAPA
PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY
LAKE AMATITLÁN
LAKE AYARZA
Champerico
Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa
Siquinalá
ESCUINTLA
La Democracia
LAGUNA QUITASOMBRERO
Guanagazapán
CHIQUIMULILLA
Tarrisco
El Semillero
Tecojate
CHULAMAR
LIKÍN
Iztapa
El Paredón
Chulamar San José
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BASE: "MAPA CLIMATOLÓGICO PRELIMINAR DE LA REPÚBLICA DE GUATEMALA", I. G. N., 1966

MAP 7

Mexico are good. The village of El Semillero is likely to be connected by an all-weather road to the interior of the republic and has an attractive setting. However, heavy sea conditions, undertow, and an open roadstead location will limit significant development. Similar factors preclude development at Tecojate to the east, while Tulate to the west is likely to remain isolated because of its distance from the interior piedmont. Ocós, near the Guatemala-Mexico border, possesses excellent scenery but suffers from isolation and underdevelopment.

The majority of locations along the Pacific shoreline appear to have little or no potential. Steep, unattractive beaches, often barren in appearance, plus isolation, poor swimming conditions and the lack of community development contribute to the retarded status of tourism in these areas. The least favorable coastal segment extends from Tecojate, in the central coastal section, westward nearly to the Guatemala-Mexico border, but excluding the Ocós-Tilapa area. Much of this segment remains isolated from the remainder of Guatemala, and most settlements are completely unequipped for tourists. The lack of protected harbors, coupled with heavy surf and strong undertow, appears to have severely limited the tourism potential in most of the area. Other smaller segments of coastline of that were classified as "unfavorable" include the section from Sipacate to Tecojate, because of dangerous surf, undertow, and barren appearance. The coast from El Paredón to Barrita Vieja lacks roads and is backed by an unnavigable segment of the Chiquimulilla Canal, and similar conditions exist from Iztapa to Monterrico and from Barra del Jiote through Barra de la Gabina to the Guatemala-El Salvador border.

The Problem of Access

A number of all-weather highways to connect isolated coastal population centers with communities in the interior piedmont are projected by the Guatemalan government as part of a national roads penetration program. The projected roads are to be financed jointly by the Guatemalan government and the Inter-American Development Bank. However, the availability of foreign capital depends upon a report of economic justification prepared by the Planning Unit of the Dirección General de Caminos. If the projects are economically sound, and a sufficient return on investment capital is assured, the Inter-American Bank will supplement Guatemalan capital allocated for such construction.[1]

Broad construction expenditures between 1967 and 1972 are estimated at U. S. $6.2 million, which includes the construction of 104 miles of all-weather roads within the study area.[2] Most significant is the proposed construction of three highways that will interconnect important agricultural areas and coastal locations with the Pacific Coast Highway and piedmont to the north. Included is a road thirty-four miles in length from Río Bravo to Pueblo Nuevo Tiquisate and the and the coastal village of El Semillero. A parallel road to the east, thirty-six miles in length, will connect Cocales with the coastal settlement of Tecojate. A third road will extend six miles east-west, through the agricultural cooperative of "Nueva Concepción," to serve

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[1] Correspondence from Dr. James R. Snitzler, representative of the firm Consultora Latinoamericana Ltda., Guatemala, C. A., April, 1967.

[2] Ibid.

as an interconnecting link with the piedmont-coast roads.[3] The total cost of this project is estimated at $3.1 million. However, considering the agricultural potential of the region, the roads are both economically feasible and essential for economic development. Yet another all-weather road, twenty-eight miles in length, is planned from La Democracia to Sipacate, the cost of which is estimated at $1.1 million.[4]

Other smaller road projects within the 1967-72 program may cost an additional $2.2 million.[5] An all-weather farm-to-market highway is planned to connect Cuyotenango, on the Pacific Coast Highway, with the agricultural colony of "La Máquina." Another, to connect Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa with the small agricultural colony "El Cajón" has been planned, while a third road has been projected between Pajapita and the agricultural colony of "La Blanca" to the east of Ciudad Tecún Umán. A fourth road would link Aguacate and Los Cerritos with Chiquimulilla, the chief agricultural marketing center of the eastern Pacific coast.

Although the primary objective is to connect important agricultural production zones in the coastal plain with the piedmont communities by a network of farm-to-market roads, additional economic

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[3] Composición areas de producción de la zona de influencia del proyecto, (Map), Dirección General de Caminos, Guatemala, C. A. November, 1966.

[4] Dr. James R. Snitzler.

[5] Ibid.

benefits would accrue if the projected roads were extended to the immediate coast. Thus, in addition to agriculture, such roads could foster the growth of fishing and tourism.

With the completion of some farm-to-market roads, certain areas along the coast will become accessible for the first time from other parts of the republic. This should stimulate lagoonal fishing on a commercial basis, since the transportation of fish to inland piedmont markets will be facilitated. Furthermore, the problem of spoilage will be greatly reduced. Of considerable significance is the fact that fresh fish marketed in the inland piedmont would serve as a valuable source of protein in an area where protein deficiency constitutes a major health problem. Specifically, the construction of all-weather roads is likely to have a considerable effect on the fishing industry at Nueva Venecia, El Semillero, and Tecojate. Additional fishing potential could be tapped if the respective roads to La Blanca in the west, Sipacate on the central coast, and Los Carritos in the east were extended directly to the Pacific shore.

Tourism could be stimulated at several coastal locations by the construction of multi-purpose roads. Las Lisas is not far from a projected road to Aguacate, while primitive roads already provide some access to Sipacate and El Semillero on the central coast. In the westernmost coastal section, development could be stimulated at Tilapa or Ocós if the farm-to-market road presently projected to La Blanca were extended to the Pacific shore. The evolution of these communities

as tourist centers, however, is likely to take place only on a long-term basis, and in conjunction with substantial increases of infrastructural development.

The Need for Improved Facilities

If tourism is to be developed as an industry on the Pacific side of Guatemala, a concerted effort must be made to eliminate existing obstacles. Major problems include the lack of suitable motels, eating establishments, and public utilities.

At present there are few first-class hotels and motels, but their number is growing. It thus appears that the problem of lodging is being resolved along routes presently frequented by tourists, and particularly so along the Pacific Coast Highway and in the San José-Iztapa area. Tourism near San José will be greatly enhanced by the opening of the new Hotel Chulamar, which will provide facilities and services unequaled in other parts of the Pacific coast region.

In the future there will also be an increasing demand for better eating establishments catering to tourists. To meet this demand, existing facilities must be substantially improved and enlarged.

The lack of sanitation remains a serious problem, evidenced by the high incidence of disease within the region. Municipal water plants and sewer lines are being constructed at a few locations, but where public works projects are accomplished largely by manual labor progress is necessarily slow. Meanwhile, water and sewage systems must be included in the overall planning of any new hotel or motel

since they are presently unavailable as public utilities anywhere except at Champerico.

The development of additional power stations, the extension of transmission lines, and improved electrical service have been projected or are under construction within the study area. Of particular significance to tourism development would be the availability of electricity in the Las Lisas-Hawaii area, at Sipacate in the central coastal section, and at Ocós near the Guatemala-Mexico border. San José and Champerico are presently supplied with electricity by the respective port authority of each community from large Diesel generators.

Drinking water from existing sources is nearly always contaminated, necessitating the use of bottled water at all tourist hotels, motels, and first-class restaurants. This will be necessary until such time as potable water is available from municipal sources, which is unlikely in the near future in many areas along the shore or on the inland coastal plain. Bottled water must meanwhile be transported to the eastern coastal region from Guatemala City, and to the western coast and piedmont from Quezaltenango.

Communications, although limited in comparison with North American standards, are relatively adequate in some areas and do not greatly limit the potential for tourism development. Telephone service is available in the larger communities of the piedmont, such as Retalhuleu, Mazatenango and Escuintla, and at the Pacific ports of San José and Champerico. In addition, most tourist facilities are

equipped with radiotelephones for communication with other parts of the republic. The lack of telephones in certain areas may actually be an advantage in promoting tourism, since some tourists are seeking both relaxation and seclusion. However, an integrated nation-wide telephone system is an objective and will aid the general economic development of the country.

Telegraph facilities are available in the larger communities of the study area, as are postal facilities. Although telecommunications are not highly developed outside of the national capital, the relative proximity of the Pacific coast to Guatemala City is an advantage. Much of the coast is less isolated than some highland portions of the country or the sparsely-populated lowlands of the Petén.

Investment

The government of Guatemala has discouraged the sale of property to foreign nationals generally and specifically prohibits such sales of ocean shoreline or property located within twenty-five kilometers of an international boundary. However, this policy does not preclude the purchase of property in such locations through joint partnerships, since the only requirement is that of a Guatemalan signatory. Foreigners may also purchase property in "urbanized areas" or "developments" such as Likín, where restricted resort homesites are available complete with utilities, paved streets and club privileges. Although some national land must remain under government ownership for a period of at least fifty years before it can be sold to foreign

nationals, government policy has not been so strict as to prevent all foreign investment. In many cases the acquisition of land does not involve an actual purchase. Instead, a concession is granted to an investor on lease, usually expiring after a period of five or ten years. Since taxes are low and the possibility of government seizure or nationalization of such properties is remote, the investment is reasonably secure. Investment guarantee legislation has provided an added incentive for foreign investment in Guatemala, despite present conditions of political instability. However, it must be noted that in both the past and present, domestic political crises have caused the loss of much foreign exchange in business investment and tourist dollars.

Tourism investment in the Pacific coastal region, although modest, is increasing in response to the national tourism development law of 1968, which was promulgated specifically to attract foreign visitors and investment. Private investment in general is centered on the tourist developments of Chulamar, Quitasombrero and Likín, the latter being the largest resort development on the Pacific side of Guatemala. The new Hotel Chulamar at San José, however, represents the most important facility in which public, rather than private, funds were expended to develop a tourist resort. Continued investment along such lines should significantly stimulate tourism in the San José area.

Future tourism investment is likely to be carried out in close association with the construction of a deep-water port. Without

a protected harbor, such investment and growth will probably not increase substantially. In fact, the study area's visitor industry may well languish if a new port is not constructed. Development efforts might then be concentrated at other locations on the Pacific side of Central America, such as Acajutla or La Libertad in El Salvador, Puntarenas in Costa Rica, or even in neighboring Mexico.

A Deep-Water Pacific Port

The construction of a protected deep-water port on the Pacific coast of Guatemala would favor economic development generally, and especially tourism. The Guatemalan coastline is distinctly regular in configuration, and sheltered harbors and anchorages are lacking throughout. Lagoons and intracoastal waterways adjacent to beach areas, are, for the most part, shallow and unnavigable. Deposition of riverine sediment is especially prevalent near lagoonal inlets, and only near Iztapa can small ocean-going craft, mainly shrimp boats, negotiate an inlet to seek shelter in the protected Chiquimulilla Canal. Even at this inlet, boats negotiating the passage must wait for favorable tide and sea conditions, and the operation is sometimes hazardous to both life and property.

Nearly all coastal settlements are on open roadsteads, and deep-draught cargo ships must consequently anchor at considerable distances offshore to avoid the heavy surf. San José and Champerico are presently the only active seaports along the coast. Facilities at both locations consist of timber decked piers supported by iron pilings, which extend a safe distance offshore beyond the heavy surf

so that lightering can be successfully effected. With the exception of a new freight warehouse at Champerico, the facilities and structures at both ports are outmoded and inadequate to handle the increasing volume of export and import goods.

The Guatemalan government has been increasingly active in recent years in seeking ways to assure the continuing development of the Pacific coast. One way would be through the construction of the proposed deep-water port. A port feasibility study was conducted by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, in conjunction with the Guatemalan government in 1963. This study was to be used as a basis for obtaining funds from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), as well as from other international lending agencies.[6] The choice of port sites was quickly narrowed to Champerico and San José, because of their locations and relatively high infrastructural development. Champerico is an important gateway for the export of coffee produced on the slopes of the western highlands and cotton from the coastal plain. San José, however, has a more central location along the Pacific littoral and relative proximity to Guatemala City. A final port site had not been determined at the time of this research, since there was considerable controversy as to which location would be most suitable.

The port feasibility study favored the construction of a port with facilities for shrimp fishing boats and medium-draft ocean-going

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[6] Port Feasibility Study, Pacific Coast of Guatemala, C. A., p. 12.

cargo ships, while tankers would continue to discharge petroleum from anchorage in the open ocean via offshore pipelines. The projected port, regardless of location, will have a jettied entrance from the ocean, and berthing space for both ships and small fishing craft will be provided by dredging coastal marsh and lagoonal areas adjacent to the beach. The port will initially provide berthing space for two large cargo vessels and twelve shrimp fishing craft. During storms the port could serve as a haven for other small craft as well, since fishing boats could be double-moored and the turning basin used as additional anchorage space. Ancillary facilities such as dockside transit sheds, a shrimp freezing and packing plant, a small boatyard, and appropriate truck and rail facilities will also be built.[7]

The proposed Pacific port, particularly if it is constructed at San José, could be developed partially in the interest of promoting tourism. In future years the projected boatyard could be expanded to serve pleasure craft, especially deep-sea sport fishing boats. The additional cost would be offset by increased tourism expenditures, particularly when the sport fishing potential in the adjacent ocean is considered. Most important is the fact that any deep-water port built in the San José area is likely to be adjacent to the Chiquimulilla Canal. A suitable entrance channel within the protected port basin would provide safe access to the open ocean from such already developed resorts as Likín, Colonia Waikiki, Laguna Quitasombrero and Chulamar. Furthermore, since the resort areas are located some distance away

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[7] Ibid, p. 4.

from the proposed port site, small craft would use the entrance channel only for access to the Chiquimulilla Canal and would not interfere with the normal commercial function of the port. The jettied harbor entrance could be utilized as a fishing pier, while providing a more sheltered swimming area on its leeward side.

The development of shrimp fishing, port commerce and tourism would seem to be the best assurance of continued economic growth. Although tourism has lagged behind both fishing and port commerce, the planned development of tourism in conjunction with a new deep-water port would put the Guatemalan Pacific coast in position to compete successfully with other developing resort areas on the Pacific side of Central America.

The Chiquimulilla Canal

The Chiquimulilla Canal area possesses considerable potential for tourism development, offering brackish water fishing, boating, a wide variety of tropical flora, and some of the most picturesque scenery south of the highland mountain axis.

Good brackish water fishing is available in numerous areas along the canal. The two most favored sites are at Sipacate, the western terminus of the waterway, and in a section of the canal approximately fifteen miles long from Monterrico through Hawaii and Las Lisas to Barra del Jiote. Small fishing boats can be rented at Sipacate, and guides can also be hired. In addition, boating accesories, fuel and outboard motors can be rented. The canal area between Sipacate and El Paredón, six miles to the east, is used extensively

for sport fishing. There are also attractive beaches in this area, since the canal section from Sipacate to El Paredón is actually an elongated coastal lagoon which parallels the shoreline and is enclosed by a barrier beach. The landward side of the canal is covered with an extensive growth of mangrove which adds further to the area's appeal. Moreover, much of the canal region serves as a refuge for a variety of tropical marine birdlife that includes spoonbills, cormorants and pelicans. In the second locale, between Monterrico and Barra del Jiote, sport fishing is concentrated near the villages of Hawaii, Casas Viejas and Las Lisas. Boats, motors and accessories are available in Casas Viejas and Las Lisas, and guides can be hired. Sport fishermen can travel for extensive distances along the canal, and trolling often results in large catches. Subsistence fishing, on the other hand, is conducted mostly from anchored canoes by net casting.

Pleasure boating is concentrated mainly at Chulamar, San José, Likín and Iztapa. Dock space, marine fuel and minor repair facilities are available at each of these locations, although facilities at Likín are the most complete. A small marina, which includes a boat repair facility, has been constructed at Likín in conjunction with the rest of the project. Motors and accessories are available, and a boat ramp has also been constructed.

Although nearly the entire length of the Chiquimulilla Canal is navigable at high tide for shallow-draught pleasure craft, the advent of low tide poses serious problems in some areas. This is particularly true near Iztapa and Monterrico, where mud and sand bars

are a hazard. Dredging has been done on a small scale near Iztapa but has met with little success. Additional dredging and the installation of buoys to mark treacherous channels should be included in any plan for tourism development.

The Chiquimulilla Canal possesses great scenic beauty in many areas and provides refuge for a wide range of tropical flora and fauna representative of the Pacific lowlands of Central America (Figures 25 and 26). Pollution of the canal in populated areas, particularly near San José, is becoming a major problem. Therefore, future tourism projects should be planned in conjunction with an overall plan for preservation of certain parts of the canal in its natural condition and encouraging rational development in the remaining area. There are several sites along the course of the canal that would be suitable for natural preserves, and it seems essential that at least one such area be set aside by the national government for this purpose. Two favorable sites for such preserves were noted during the course of field work. One extends from Sipacate eastward to El Paredón. The other is an extensive marsh and mangrove area between La Avellana and Monterrico, including adjacent mangrove-lined waterways extending eastward to the village of Hawaii.

Figure 25

The Chiquimulilla Canal at Las Lisas.

Figure 26

Pelican in mangrove at El Paredón.

CHAPTER XI

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

During the course of this study it became apparent that the prospects for long-term tourism growth could be improved if major problems were identified and vigorous efforts made toward their solution. Four topics appear particularly worthy of attention within the study area: (1) a deep-water Pacific port, (2) secondary roads, (3) international border crossings, and (4) conservation.

Recommendations

The most serious problem confronting the study area from the standpoint of tourism development is the lack of a protected harbor and marina facilities for pleasure craft anywhere on Guatemala's Pacific coast. However, this problem could be eliminated if the projected deep-water port were to be built in San José. If tourism is to become an important factor in Guatemala's economic development, it should be placed on an equal priority with agriculture or manufacturing. Therefore, the proposed Pacific port should be a multi-purpose facility serving the needs of tourism, in addition to being a commercial and fishing port. The port should serve as a refuge for transient pleasure craft and as a means of access to and from the open ocean for craft harbored at existing resorts such as Likín.

Farm-to-market roads should be constructed or improved so as to stimulate tourism in the Pacific coast region. Of particular significance would be the opening up of new tourist areas at Sipacate, Tecojate, El Semillero and Tilapa, if existing farm-to-market roads were extended to these beach areas. In addition, it is recommended that an all-weather coastal highway paralleling the Pacific shoreline and extending the length of the coast be constructed, so as to bring presently isolated fishing villages into contact with each other and with other parts of the nation. Such a highway would open up many of the region's most attractive beaches, now inaccessible to the motoring public. The road would serve as a transportation corridor for coastal produce and would offer the tourist a third route by which to traverse Guatemala, in addition to the Inter-American Highway and the Pacific Coast Highway farther inland.

The lack of a "tourism consciousness" on the part of the national government, and failure by the general public to recognize tourism as an industry in its own right, has greatly retarded tourism development. Excessive and often unnecessary customs procedures at Guatemala's main ports of entry have frequently been demoralizing to arriving and departing visitors. Moreover, many customs check points are in operation no more than eight hours daily, with the result that the international borders of Guatemala are closed to tourists at least two-thirds of the time. Visitors arriving at the border after closing hours are delayed until the following day and caused much inconvenience. Such conditions discourage tourism, create an unfavorable image of Guatemala, and result in the loss of much foreign

exchange. It is clearly advisable that the customs facilities at border checkpoints on both the Inter-American Highway and the Pacific Coast Highway be kept open on a full-time basis and that the quality of service rendered be substantially upgraded.

The creation of a national preserve along the Chiquimulilla Canal is essential for the conservation of wildlife in the Pacific coast region. One such preserve should be established between Hawaii and La Avellana. However, the decisions as to the specific boundaries of such an areas would necessarily have to be negotiated by government leaders, landowners and conservationists.

Conclusion

The long-term outlook for tourism growth on the Pacific side of Guatemala is reasonably promising at some sites, such as San José, Iztapa, Sipacate, Hawaii and Las Lisas. These locations possess considerable scenic beauty, offer the possibility of a future deep-water port, or have excellent beaches. Although good tourist accommodations and services are not available at Hawaii or Las Lisas, the quality of the beaches would seem to warrant the construction of first-class facilities as soon as these communities become more accessible. Elsewhere along the coast, tourism potential appears limited, due mainly to the open roadstead location of nearly all villages, heavy surf and undertow, or a flat scrubby shoreline with poor beaches.

Whether tourism as an industry of national importance becomes firmly established in Guatemala depends largely upon the stance taken

by various units of the national government. Clearly, much of the task of tourism promotion rests with the national tourism office, but ultimate success depends also upon those government agencies responsible for funding and for assigning priorities within the national budget. Although the government has been slow to recognize tourism as a means of economic development, its importance as a foreign exchange earner is now firmly established. The government has recently taken a much closer look at the visitor industry, in part as a result of depressed prices for Guatemala's principal export commodities and particularly for coffee.

Political unrest has had a particularly detrimental effect on Guatemala's tourism industry. Despite national legislation designed to protect and guarantee foreign investments from expropriation, many developers are reluctant to invest in a nation that has a history of political instability. In recent years, rival political factions have been in armed conflict with one another, culminating in widespread terrorism. Potential tourists regard such events with grave misgivings and will vacation elsewhere rather than risk involvement. Potential investors, foreign and domestic, likewise become disenchanted. Funds normally available for investment are now commonly deposited in banks outside Guatemala for security purposes, and tourism is but one of the economic activities adversely affected.

How well Guatemala develops its tourism potential depends largely upon whether or not the national plans for tourism development meet with general acceptance and are expediently implemented.

Likewise, the future of tourism on the Pacific coast is largely dependent upon governmental approval for the construction of roads, utilities, and a deep-water port.

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