

Joya de Ceren

On land | El Salvador | about 600 CE | Grades 3-5

Name _____ Date _____

At Joya de Ceren, scientists found a Maya village frozen in time, with dinner dishes still on the shelves.

Read the story

Around 600 CE, Joya de Ceren was a small Maya farming village. Families lived in houses made of a mix of wood, clay and thatch, called wattle and daub. They had kitchens, storehouses, a sweat bath and a community building.

One evening, the ground shook and a nearby volcanic vent called Loma Caldera began to erupt. The villagers ran away, leaving everything behind. Ash and volcanic rock buried the village about 5 meters deep.

Because it was buried so quickly, Joya de Ceren is called the Pompeii of the Americas. Unlike Pompeii, no human remains have been found, so it seems everyone escaped.

How it ended

The Loma Caldera eruption, around 600 CE, buried the village under ash. People never returned to live on that spot. It stayed hidden until 1976.

Key words

- wattle and daub: a building method using woven sticks covered with mud or clay
- eruption: when a volcano pushes out lava, ash and gas
- manioc: a root vegetable also called cassava

Wow facts

- Archaeologists found ash-covered fields still showing rows of crops.
- Pots still held food remains, and a few seemed to have been in use when people fled.
- No bodies were found, so the villagers likely escaped.

Talk about it

1. What would archaeologists learn if your house were buried today?

2. Why is studying ordinary people's homes just as important as studying palaces?

Try this

Draw a map of Joya de Ceren as it looked at its busiest. Label three things people did there.

Quick quiz

Circle the best answer.

1. What buried Joya de Ceren?

- A. Volcanic ash
- B. Sand
- C. Snow
- D. Mud from a flood

2. What nickname does it have?

- A. The Pompeii of the Americas
- B. The Rome of Asia
- C. The Lost Atlantis
- D. The Ice City

3. How was it found?

- A. A bulldozer hit a building
- B. A plane crash
- C. A fisherman's net
- D. A treasure map

Go further

Open ruinscape.live/joya-de-ceren/ for photos, the Then and Now picture where there is one, and links to museum collections and research. On the globe, Lyra Kael can fly the class there and answer questions.

Answer key (for teachers)

1. A. A nearby volcanic vent erupted around 600 CE.
2. A. It was buried quickly by a volcano like Pompeii.
3. A. In 1976, a bulldozer found a building while clearing land.