

## 5 Tips for Travel in the Mayan World in 2012

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The Mundo Maya, or Mayan World, consists of the modern day countries of Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. This year, the entire world has been captivated by the prophecies of the ancient Mayan civilization. According to the Mayan calendar, December 21, 2012 marks the world's rebirth: the end of a 5,125 year cycle and the beginning of a new era. What does this mean? Well, for travelers, it means that 2012 is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to experience the special year-long celebrations and discover the mysterious and beautiful Mundo Maya firsthand.

Read on for our 5 tips to make the most of your trip to the Mundo Maya in 2012!

### 1) Hidden history

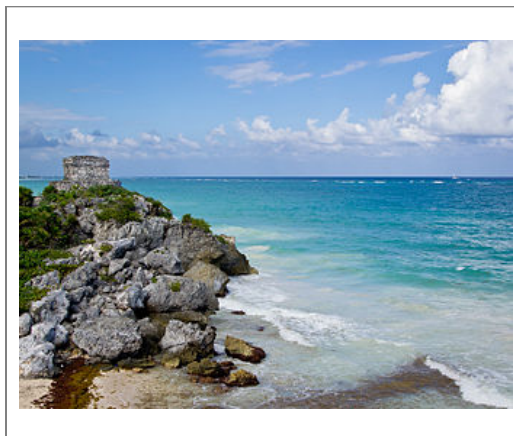
There are many world-famous Mayan sites to explore, but did you know that there are also tons of lesser-known ruins tucked deep in the jungle? These hidden ruins, surrounded by dense forest, where only the calls of birds and monkeys accompany you, leave quite a different impression than the crowded museum-like experience of the more popular Mayan sites. The forests of the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico are full of these hidden petroglyphs (stone carvings) and pyramids, their already mysterious air compounded by the overgrown foliage and desertedness. The ruins at Calakmul in



Mexico are one of the most impressive of these off-the-beaten-path destinations.

## 2) The early bird...

Despite the crowds, the breathtaking magnificence of the frequently visited Maya sites makes them also worth the trip. (Hey they're popular for a reason, right?) Among the most popular sites are Chichen Itza and Tulum in Mexico, Tikal in Guatemala, Copán in Honduras, and Altun Ha in Belize. When you do go, make sure you arrive in the morning - the earlier, the better. For one, you'll beat the majority of the tourist traffic, and second, you'll avoid the oppressive afternoon heat. As an added bonus, you're far more likely to see wildlife in the morning, as most animals retreat into the shade to escape the midday sun.



## 3) Consider your impact

Keep in mind that the Mayan ruins you'll be visiting are thousands of years old and are thus in varying degrees of deterioration. One person climbing on the stone may not cause any visible damage, but the sum of millions of tourists stepping on the same spots each year eventually causes noticeable erosion. To make these amazing sites last for generations to come, make sure to respect all roped off areas and signs. And don't gripe about the nominal fee you may have to pay to enter the park - that money goes directly to protecting and

preserving these cultural landmarks, so be proud of the contribution you're making!

## 4) The Mundo Maya lives!

The Mayan World isn't just a relic of the past -- it still lives on in the descendants of this ancient civilization, who still practice some of their ancestors' traditions to this day. Engage with them, learn from them, and you'll see the Mundo Maya come alive! You can learn about Mayan customs, sacred shamanic rituals, cosmology, medicinal plants, and traditional recipes. Some groups even offer travelers a chance to participate in activities such as spiritual ceremonies, chocolate making, and traditional healing.

## 5) Take a tour

If you're not an archeological expert yourself, a local guide can really enrich your experience by explaining the history and meaning behind the architecture and petroglyphs and drawing your attention to the best and most interesting spots. A tour operator can also set up the aforementioned cultural activities with local Mayan people. There is nothing wrong with being an independent traveler, but when it comes to the Mundo Maya, going on a tour can really enhance your experience - that is, IF you pick the right company. Be sure to pick a responsible tour operator that hires locally, like the ones in the [SustainableTrip.org](http://SustainableTrip.org) directory.



We hope you found these tips for travel in the Mundo Maya in 2012! If you're looking

for environmentally and socially sustainable accommodations to book for your trip, check out some of the highlights from our directory below:

- **Hotel & Bungalows Mayaland**, Mexico - Built alongside the temples of Chichen Itzá on the Yucatan peninsula and within driving distance of over a dozen Mayan archeological sites, including Cobá, Tulum, Ek Balam, and Uxmal.
- **Proyecto Ecoturístico Los Robles**, Mexico - Located in the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve along the access route to the Calakmul archaeological zone.
- **Ecolodge El Sombrero**, Guatemala - An ecolodge offering tours to the famous Tikal ruins, as well as the ruins of Yaxhá, Topoxte, Nakum, Naranjo, and El Kuch.
- **Black Orchid Resort**, Belize - A resort near the Mayan sites of Altun Ha, Lamanai, Caracol, and Xunantunich.