

Visit the Lost Cities of Ancient Maya

Visit the Ancient Maya

Excavations of the Mexican and Guatemalan jungle have revealed the intriguing remains of the lost cities of Ancient Maya which seemed to be abandoned at the height of their power. The mysterious ruins left behind by the Ancient Maya civilisation are amongst the most fascinating historical sites to be found on Earth. A visit to one of these mystical sites offers lots for both the history expert and the interested sightseer alike. So, why not plan that special trip? Use our travel guide to help you decide which of these amazing places you should visit first.



Chichen Itza

The most popular and well-known of all Maya sites is Chichen Itza. Dating from the 6th Century, this UNESCO World Heritage Site is located in the depths of the Yucatan Peninsula in Southern Mexico. It has recently been named one of the New Seven Wonders of the World and is one of Mexico's most famous tourist destinations. This may be because the site is just a two-hour bus ride from the popular tourist resort of Cancun and can receive over one million visitors per year.



Chichen Itza is actually comprised of many buildings, including the El Caracol observatory temple, the Great Ball Court and the Temple of the Warriors. However, the most recognisable structure is the huge stepped pyramid which is known as El Castillo or 'the castle'. This dominates the northern skyline and is approximately 30 metres high and 55 metres wide!

Palenque

If you want to avoid the busy Chichen Itza, then why not try the breath-taking jungle ruins of Palenque. This is one of the best examples of Ancient Maya architecture in Mexico. The picturesque and atmospheric site is located in the area now known as Chiapas, Mexico, which is 128 kilometres south of Ciudad del Carmen. It is a much smaller site than Chichen Itza, but has some of the finest Maya sculptures and carvings that have ever been discovered. The site was swallowed by the surrounding jungle, but was excavated and restored, so it has now become a world-famous archaeological site. It is said that less than 10% of the total area of the city has actually been uncovered, which means there are more than 1000 structures still hidden. The most famous structure in Palenque is the Temple of Inscriptions which is so called due to the many symbols found preserved in the temple's structure.

Tikal



Tikal is one of the most interesting and important Ancient Maya sites to visit. It is located in the far north of Guatemala, 300 kilometres north of Guatemala City. It was once a bustling city, home to over 60,000 inhabitants and became one of the most powerful kingdoms in Ancient Maya.

Despite being much quieter than both Chichen Itza and Palenque, it is still visited by many visitors throughout the year. It is also a smaller site than other more popular destinations, but Tikal has some of the finest sculptures and carvings that have ever been discovered. The site features many temples and pyramid structures, including the famous Lost World Pyramid. The current site covers over 16 square kilometres of land, with almost 3000 structures present there. However, it is estimated that only a small percentage of the site has been excavated, even after years of archaeological digging. Like Palenque, Tikal is surrounded by dense jungle, including trees such as the Giant Kapok Tree. The money raised by visits to the site help to protect the local rainforest.

Naachtun

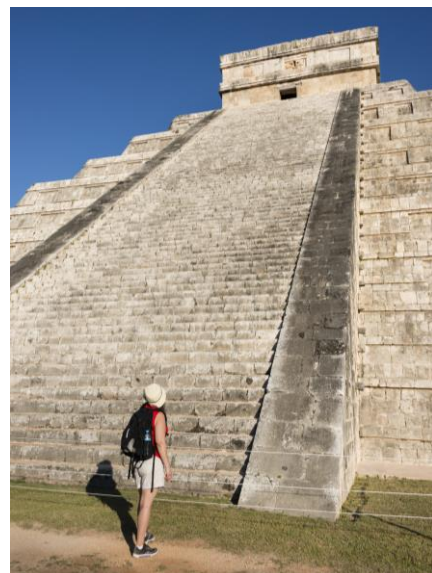
Another authentic Ancient Maya site to be found in the far northern region of Guatemala is Naachtun, which is just 1 kilometre south of the Mexican border. Discovered in 1922 by an archaeologist called Morley, Naachtun is known as the 'Forgotten Mayan City', and it remains one of the most remote and least-visited sites in the area.

It was located at the centre of a very powerful kingdom, between two huge Maya cities: Tikal and Calakmul. This meant that it held a strategic position and was often vulnerable during wartime. The site was influenced by both sides which can be seen in the architecture within the area.

Making your Visit

Tickets will need to be purchased prior to making a visit to any of these sites, as well as transport arrangements. The climate is hot, humid and sunny in these areas and so you will need to dress lightly. Remember, you will be climbing up many steep steps and monuments, so make sure you wear comfortable footwear. In some locations shade can be found due to the canopy provided by the trees, but not always.

Last of all, don't forget to pack your camera as you will want to take lots of photographs!



Section A

1. How do the pictures help the reader?

2. In which countries can you find many of the Ancient Maya sites?

3. The text refers to 'intriguing remains'. What does the word 'intriguing' mean in this context?

4. Which is the most popular and well-known of the Ancient Maya Sites?

5. From reading the section 'Chichen Itza', give three reasons why you think it has so many visitors.

6. Why does Naachtun feature in many different architecture styles?

7. What is the climate in these locations?

Section B

8. Why do you think the title refers to the 'Lost Cities of Ancient Maya'?

9. Summarise the main ideas in the first section 'Visit the Ancient Maya'.

10. What is the purpose of this travel guide?

11. The text describes Palengue as 'atmospheric'. What does this word mean in this context?

12. Make a list of the reasons why a visitor may choose Tikal as a place to visit.

13. Which words and phrases does the writer use to make the reader believe Ancient Maya sites are worth visiting?

Section C

14. The Palenque jungle ruins are describes as ‘breath-taking’. How does this word help to create a picture in the reader’s mind?

15. Create a list of questions which will help your understanding of Ancient Maya.

16. Which of the four sites mentioned would you like to make a visit to and why?

17. What is the purpose of the final section ‘Making Your Visit’?

18. Find three examples of facts from the text.

19. Find three examples of opinions from the text.

20. Why do you think that the writer suggests you will want to take lots of photographs?

Section D

21. What does the word civilisation mean in this context?

22. Who would you recommend this text to and why?

23. Naachtum is described as holding a 'strategic position'. Explain what this means

24. Do you think this is an effective travel guide? Explain your answer.

25. Which words and phrases, in regards to the Ancient Maya, capture your interest and imagination?

26. How does a travel guide like this compare to an information text?

27. Do you think the text is mostly fact or opinion? Explain your answer.

Section A

Match each word from the text to its meaning.

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| 1. excavate | a. a person or animal that lives in or occupies a place |
| 2. intriguing | b. the uppermost layer of a forest; something that hangs over and shades something else |
| 3. el castillo | c. something fascinating that provokes one's curiosity or interest |
| 4. inscriptions | d. susceptible to physical or emotional attack or harm |
| 5. inhabitants | e. the castle |
| 6. remote | f. words engraved or etched, as on a monument or book |
| 7. vulnerable | g. remove earth carefully from an area in order to find buried remains |
| 8. canopy | h. a place situated far from the main centres of a population |

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Section B

Tick the correct answer.

Chichen Itza dates as far back as what century?

3 rd century		4 th century		5 th century		6 th century	
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How much of Palenque is estimated to have been uncovered?

>10%		10%		<10%		100%	
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What site has recently been named one of the New Seven Wonders of the World?

Palenque		Chichen Itza		Tikal		Naachtun	
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How much land does the current site at Tikal cover?

15km ²		16km ²		>16km ²		>16km	
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Naachtun's strategic position meant it was what during wartime?

powerful		vulnerable		imposing		concealed	
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Section C

Decide whether the following statements are true or false. Correct the false statements below.

Statement	True	False
Trees such as the Giant Kapok Tree can be found surrounding some Ancient Mayan sites in Guatemala and Mexico.		
Chichen Itza is a popular destination because it is relatively unknown and is usually quiet for tourists.		
Archaeologists have discovered thousands of structures since fully uncovering Palenque.		
Naachtun held a strategic position because it was located between Tikal and Calakmul; two huge Maya cities.		
Ancient Maya sites are free for the public to view, and most are easy for the public to access by foot.		

Section D

Fill in the table with information from the text.

	Country	Archaeological Features	Interesting fact
Chichen Itza			
Palenque			
Tikal			
Naachtun			