

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!

