LOST WORLD OF THE MAYANS

DETAILED ITINERARY | GUATEMALA, MEXICO, HONDURAS AND BELIZE | Oct 24/25

Chichen Itza

ElderTreks' 20-day journey to the Lost World of the Mayans is probably the most exhilarating Mayan trip you will ever encounter. This fantastic adventure includes the great Mayan cities of Tikal (Guatemala), Copan (Honduras), Caracol or Xunantunich (Belize), Palenque, Uxmal, Chichen Itza and Tulum (Mexico). We also journey to seldom-visited Calakmul, Tikal's great rival. We explore remote Yaxchilan, accessible only by boat, before crossing the border into Guatemala. Visit Quirigua, the site which includes the stelae with its Mayan calendar referring to in the "end of the world" predictions for Dec 21, 2012. The demise of the Mayan civilization - the end of the world as foretold in the astrology and beliefs of the Mayan, have long created intrigue and mystery. Our exciting journey includes so much more than Mayan ruins. We explore lagoons and rivers teeming with birds as well as monkeys, crocodiles, turtles and much more. Experience the Caribbean culture of Livingston and the traditional Indigenous cultures of Chichicastenango, featuring its vibrant and colorful

FACTS & HIGHLIGHTS

• 20 land days • Maximum 16 travelers • Start in Cancun, Mexico and finish in Antigua, Guatemala • All meals included • Explore Tikal and its main rival, the seldom-visited Calakmul • Visit 13 magnificent Mayan sites including Palenque, Chichen Itza, Tikal, Calakmul, Caracol (or Xunantunich) and Copan • 9 UNESCO Sites • Visit the colonial gems of Antigua, Campeche and Merida • Hear the call of howler monkeys • Superb bird watching at most Mayan sites, as well as river excursions along Rio Dulce and the lagoon at Celestun • Search for crocodiles, toucans, macaws, hummingbirds and monkeys • Visit the colorful market in Chichicastenango • Enjoy the Caribbean culture of Livingston • Boat journey on Lake Atitlan, surrounded by volcanoes

DEPARTURE DATES & PRICE

Jan 06 - Jan 25, 2026	-	**$8995 USD**
Jan 05 - Jan 24, 2027	-	**$8995 USD**

Activity Level: 2-3 *Some (optional) steep climbs of temples involved.

Comfort Level: Some long drives, at times roads can be rough and dusty. Hot and humid in the jungle.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Comfortable hotels/lodges with private bathrooms.

market held on Thursdays and Sundays. And, we cannot forget about the colonial gems of Merida, with the oldest cathedral in the Americas, the seaside fortress of Campeche, Lake Atitlan, surrounded by 3 volcanoes and finally Antigua, a true colonial masterpiece! We hope you can join ElderTreks' unique journey to the Mayan world that promises to be nothing short of memorable.

DAY 1 ARRIVAL IN CANCUN, TO PLAYA DEL CARMEN

Pick up at airport and transfer to our hotel in Playa del Carmen. The day is free to rest up at the hotel or explore on your own. In the evening, meet your tour leader and fellow travelers for our welcome dinner and orientation meeting.

Overnight in Playa del Carmen.

DAY 2 OCEANSIDE RUINS OF TULUM, SWIM IN THE PRISTINE FRESHWATER OF A CENOTE

This morning we explore the Post-Classic ruins of Tulum with our guide who will explain the history and stories behind this amazing site. Dating from the 12th century, its many temples are dedicated to the worship of the Falling God, the Temple of Wind or the Setting Sun. The centerpiece of the site is the Castillo facing inland but occupying the cliffs overlooking the ocean.

Next we will visit one of the more fascinating cenotes (a cenote is a sinkhole with exposed rocky edges containing groundwater), with its pristine fresh water connected by a series of underground rivers in a beautiful natural setting. We can explore all 3 cenotes in this relaxing place where one can enjoy a refreshing swim or even snorkel.

Dinner and overnight in Chichen Itza.

DAY 3 CHICHEN ITZA, CONVENT OF IZAMAL, TO MERIDA

We have an early start to enjoy Chichen Itza before the heat of the day. Flourishing during the Classic Period and influenced by the Toltecs, at a time when the culture of the Maya and the Toltec were gradually fusing together. However, there is still some debate as to the influence that the Toltecs had on the city and its architectural styles. The pyramids, temples and ball-court (where life and death played a role in appeasing the gods) are adorned with astonishing sculptures. Whatever its origins and influences though, little can detract from what is, for many, the quintessential image of a Mayan city. Chichen Itza is dominated to the north by the imposing presence of El Castillo (also known as the Pyramid of Kukulkan), a remarkable building that is in fact a stone representation of the Mayan calendar. One unique feature of the building occurs at sunset on the spring and autumn equinoxes, when the heads of the serpents at the foot of the staircases are joined to their tails at the top by the shadows cast by the setting sun. The Temple of the Warriors and the Group of a Thousand Columns along with the ball-court that occupies its western edge is the largest of its kind anywhere.

Early this afternoon we visit the Convent of Izamal, located at a once important Mayan ceremonial site that became a focal point in the Spanish attempts at converting the locals. The colonial forces built the imposing Convent of Izamal, a huge building that claims the honor of possessing the second largest atrium in the world.

Dinner and overnight in Merida.

DAY 4 MERIDA

This morning, we explore Merida, which is known as the "White City" - famed for its beautiful Spanish/Moorish-style architecture. Merida is the capital of the state of Yucatan and its center reflects its colonial heritage, with a church or mansion on every street and its plazas alive with markets and entertainment. Merida was founded in 1542 by Francisco de Montejo. Trade with Europe brought the city much of its wealth and at one time a substantial proportion of the world's rope was manufactured from Yucatan henequen. Merida went on to become one of the richest cities in the country and boasts the oldest cathedral in Latin America, the imposing Cathedral of San Idelfonso. In 1849, during the Caste Wars, the Mayan armies besieged the city and came within a whisker of taking it and thus regaining control of the entire peninsula. With its trading franchises all but forgotten and the riches of the past all but a distant memory, the city still retains an air of elegance and vitality. We visit one of the most greatest and major Mayan Culture museum named Gran Museo del Mundo Maya where it will provide us of plenty information around the great Mayan Culture from past until nowadays.

Dinner and overnight in Merida.

DAY 5 MERIDA, TO LAGOON OF CELESTUN

In the morning, we make our way to explore the lagoon of Celestun by boat, enjoying the abundance of birdlife, often a favorite feeding spot for flamingos. We also keep an eye out for crocodiles, turtles, iguanas and other lagoon inhabitants. In the afternoon we continue heading over the route named "Ruta Puuc" to enjoy our lodge in the Archeaological site of Uxmal.

Dinner and overnight in Uxmal.

DAY 6 UXMAL, TO CAMPECHE

Encircled by hills we head south to Uxmal, expansive in its design, with majestic palaces, temple-pyramids and long geometrical friezes that rank amongst the most splendid examples of Mesoamerican art seen anywhere. The incredible Pyramid of the Magician and the beautiful Governor's Palace must also rate as two of the finest examples of Mayan art on the entire continent. Today, we visit this extraordinary site, spending some time exploring what for many is considered the crowning glory of Puuc architectural style, with its classical lines and abstract designs.

After lunch, we take a leisurely drive to explore the pleasant colonial city of Campeche, the state capital and at one time, one of Spain's main ports in Mexico. This evening, we visit the city's main square, which is full of energy, folklore and friendly, charming locals who come here to engage in traditional entertainment.

Dinner and overnight in Campeche.

DAY 7 CAMPECHE FORT, TO CALAKMUL

After breakfast, visit the city's fort which dates back to the 18th century and sits at the highest point in the city, overlooking the ocean. During our city tour of Campeche, we learn more about this UNESCO World Heritage Site. Campeche, with its historic 17th century city walls is an excellent example of a fortified city.

We now continue to Calakmul (UNESCO), once ranked as Tikal's greatest rival, yet one of the lesser-known Mayan sites located deep in the jungle, just 35 kilometers (22 miles) from the Guatemalan border. Throughout the Classic Period, Calakmul was one of the largest and most powerful of the ancient cities. The political posturing between Calakmul and Tikal was a clear struggle between two Mayan super-powers.

Dinner and overnight in Calakmul.

DAY 8 EXPLORE SELDOM-VISITED CALAKMUL, TO PALENQUE

We embark on our exploration very early to the biosphere which surrounds Calakmul (UNESCO), a city once reputed to have over 50,000 inhabitants and the center of the "Snake Kingdom". There are over 6,000 ancient structures attributed to this city, one of which, Structure 2, is over 148 feet high, making it one of the tallest Mayan pyramids. Be prepared for walking this morning as the site is spread over 7 square miles. Calakmul is the modern name for this incredible city. Its name is derived from ca (two) lak (adjacent) mul (pyramid) - City of "Two Adjacent

Calakmul

Pyramids". Its old name was "Ox Te' Tuun". In the heat of the day we will return to our lodge for lunch.

After lunch we drive to the state of Chiapas and Palenque. While enroute, you will notice a change from the flat jungles of Calakmul to the hilly terrain of Palenque.

Dinner and overnight in Palenque.

DAY 9 IMPRESSIVE MAYAN SITE OF PALENQUE, TO VALLESCONDIDO

Evidence indicates that Palenque was first occupied more than 1500 years ago and reached its zenith during the Classic Period when many of the plazas and buildings were constructed, all without the use of metal tools, pack animals or the wheel. Palenque flourished for some 600 years, between the 4th and 10th centuries, but it was under the reigns of Pakal and Chan-Bahlum during the 7th century AD that saw it reach the peak of its prestige and power. Many of the buildings that we see today date from this period, including the Temple of the Inscriptions and its tomb. At the center of the city lies El Palacio, with its unique tower and intricate reliefs. The entire site, shrouded by the steamy rainforest, has an aura of deep mystery. Its towered palace and pyramid tomb are breathtaking and were only discovered in the 19th century. Once the choking forest was cleared, the ruins revealed the tomb of the high priest Pakal, his body adorned with a marvelous jade death mask - one of the most prized relics of the Maya culture, only discovered in 1952. In the morning, we explore the intricate labyrinth of buildings that surround the palace and temple, with its four-story tower dominating the city.

After lunch, we bid farewell to Palenque and head towards the Guatemalan border (which we cross the following day) and stay at our unique ecolodge surrounded by rainforest.

Dinner and overnight in Vallescondido.

DAY 10 BOAT JOURNEY TO REMOTE YAXCHILAN, TO FLORES, GUATEMALA

Today, we have an early start as we head to the Mexico-Guatemalan border where we travel downstream on the Usumacinta River to Yaxchilan, hidden in the trees. Only Yaxchilan's distinctive roof combs can be seen from the river. This is a more remote Mayan site as it is away from the popular tourist routes and is only accessible by boat. After our visit, we return to the 'Frontera' Corozal border crossing and continue to the town of Flores. We arrive at our lodge (11 km or 7 miles) outside of Flores, surrounded by nature and filled with wildlife, including resident macaws, deer and even a crocodile, who makes its home in the lake near our lodge's restaurant.

Dinner and overnight at our lodge on Laguna Patenchel (near Flores).

DAY 11 EXPLORATION OF TIKAL

Today we journey to the famous Mayan ruins at Tikal. Tikal can easily be compared with the masterpieces of ancient Egypt and Greece. Initially settled during the Pre-Classic Period (about 600 BC), it was abandoned by its rulers around 890 AD and totally deserted a hundred years later. Rediscovered in 1848, the site itself comprises of many great temples and pyramids, covering an area of more than 16 square kilometers (9 sq. miles), with palaces, causeways, ball-courts, spacious plazas, and hundreds of other architectural ruins - a superb example of sophisticated Mayan engineering. At its height, the extended area of the city and its environs covered some 100 kms (62 miles) and its population was estimated at between 50,000-100,000. Many of the main buildings were completed between the 6th and 9th centuries, in what was called the Late Classic Period. During this time Tikal traded with Qui-

rigua, Copan and even Teotihuacan to the far west. Economic instability, civil unrest and warfare finally brought the city down, echoing a general demise amongst the Mayan civilization. The remote jungle setting, with the constant companionship of howler monkeys and parrots, gives the site a feeling of true isolation, while its pyramid towers slicing through the lush canopy affords it an almost mystical feel. We will have all morning to explore Tikal to fully understand this amazing culture.

In the late afternoon, we can spend some time exploring Flores. Once the domain of the fierce warriors of Kanek, the town was conquered and settled by the Spanish in the late 18th century, finally bringing an end to the last bastion of an independent Mayan culture. Flores was named after Cirilo Flores, who was one of the first Guatemaltecos to call for independence from the colonial powers. The city of Flores is built over the old city of Tayasal and in the center of the plaza some stelae remain. Enjoy walking about the charming streets and alleys as the sun sets on this ancient village, followed by dinner in a local restaurant.

Overnight at our lodge on Laguna Patenchel (near Flores).

DAY 12 THE MAYAN SITE OF CARACOL, BELIZE

Today we depart for Belize and its most impressive Mayan site, Caracol, which was occupied as early as 1200 BC (Pre-Classic Period). Caracol grew to become one of the largest Mayan sites, covering approximately 168 sq. km or 102 sq. miles, and supported a population of perhaps as much as 150,000 inhabitants. Similar to Calakmul, Caracol was one of Tikal's main rivals. The journey to Caracol is not an easy one as the road to Caracol takes you through jungle and rural areas along an often bumpy dirt road (Please note: during very rainy periods, we may have to substitute our visit to Caracol with Xunantunich or Yaxha as the roads may be impassible). Keep an eye out for wildlife including the ever elusive jaguar. The site rarely gets more than 15-20 visitors per day due to the challenges of getting there but the reward is a stunning Mayan site. The Caana or "sky-palace" is the largest building at Caracol. Climbing this massive pyramid offers panoramic views of the surrounding jungle. On our return, enjoy a refreshing dip in the water at the base of a small waterfall. We will return to the Belize/Guatemala border and return to our lodge for dinner.

Dinner and overnight at our lodge on Laguna Patenchel (near Flores).

DAY 13 TO THE CARIBBEAN TOWN OF LIVINGSTON VIA RIO DULCE

Today we head south by road before transferring to our speedboat to journey along the beautiful Rio Dulce, running from Lake Izabal, in the eastern part of Guatemala, to the Caribbean. The river itself is exquisite, with graceful birds and tall cliffs overflowing with lush flora. We begin our river journey with a view of a castle (Castillo de San Fillipe), built by the Spanish to fight off English pirates and later turned into a prison after 1700 AD. Our journey takes us to the Caribbean town of Livingston, where we enjoy our accommodations overlooking the ocean. You can relax, looking out over the ocean or explore the quaint Caribbean town of Livingston easily on foot right from our oceanside resort.

Dinner and overnight in Livingston.

Tikal

DAY 14 BOAT TO PUERTO BARRIOS, QUIRIGUA, TO COPAN, HONDURAS

Leaving early this morning we head to Puerto Barrios, where we transfer to our bus and continue to the small Mayan site of Quirigua, which lies on the western fringes of the Sierra del Espiritu Mountains. Once an important trading center between Tikal and Copan, this UNESCO World Heritage Site is home to the tallest stelae to be found anywhere amongst the ruins of the ancient Mayans. Explored by Catherwood and Stephens in the mid 19th century, Quirigua became an independent kingdom that controlled much of the surrounding Motagua valley, before being abandoned sometime during the 9th century. The impressive stelae tell of the wars with nearby Copan, of the beheading of the Copan king and the emergence of Quirigua from the shadow of its powerful neighbor. The tallest of the stelae reached an impressive 12 meters and over a period of some 55 years the rulers of this tiny kingdom had a new monument erected every 5 years. It is here at Quirigua, inscribed in stone on one of the stelae, where one can find the Mayan calendar predicting the end of the world on December 21, 2012. After our exploration of Quirigua, we continue to Honduras.

Dinner and overnight at Copan.

DAY 15 COPAN, HONDURAS

Surrounded by hills and with a recently discovered archaeological stelae, we visit the remarkable UNESCO World Heritage Site of Copan. Everyone familiar with Catherwood's incredible drawings (which first appeared in John Stephens' 1841 narrative - 'Incidents of Traveling Central America and Yucatan') will recognize scenes and objects from this marvelous site. Our exploration of the archaeological park begins with the Great Plaza, one of the most amazing achievements of the Classic Mayan Period (750 AD), and which contains the greatest collection of Maya sculpture anywhere in Mesoamerica. Next to the Great Plaza is the Acropolis, a group of massive pyramidal structures where elite power was once concentrated, and which hold beneath them a wealth of information about Copan's ancient past. Ascending from one structure is the famous Hieroglyphic Stairway, composed of some 2,500 individual hieroglyphs, its sides flanked by serpentine birds and snakes. This is the New World's longest inscribed Pre-Columbian text. The subject of exploration and investigation since the 1830s, continuing discoveries by archaeologists show a Mayan resurrection. These finds have made Copan the most researched of all Mayan sites.

Dinner and overnight in Copan.

DAY 16 TO ANTIGUA, GUATEMALA

After our visit to Copan, Honduras we return to Guatemala for our drive to Antigua where we will overnight. Surrounded by volcanoes, Antigua is known for its vibrant culture and streetscapes of pastel facades.

Dinner and overnight in Antigua.

DAY 17 COLORFUL MARKET OF CHICHICASTENANGO, TO LAKE ATITLAN

We drive this morning to Chichicastenango, known for its famous market held on Thursdays and Sundays, and arguably the most colorful market in the Americas. Situated over 6,500 feet above sea level, in the Guatemalan highlands, Chichicastenango has a true Mayan ambiance.

This vibrant and colorful market draws not only the

K'iche' Maya of the surrounding region, but vendors from all over Guatemala, including Mams, Ixils, Kaqchikeles and others, each selling their products in a crazy mix of color, dialects, costumes, sounds, smoke, and smells. After our unforgettable visit to this famous market, we make our way to Lake Atitlan.

Dinner and overnight in Lake Atitlan.

DAY 18 LAKE ATITLAN BOAT TRIP, TO ANTIGUA

Lake Atitlan is located in the Guatemalan highlands, populated mostly by K'iche' Maya. It is a deep lake surrounded by three volcanoes. The views of the lake are nothing short of stunning. Today we take a boat ride on the lake to enjoy the surreal beauty and to visit one of the nearby towns on the shores of Lake Atitlan. Following our exploration of the lake we depart for the colonial town of Antigua.

Dinner and overnight in Antigua.

DAY 19 EXPLORING ANTIGUA

The stunning city of Antigua is set in a beautiful valley between the volcanoes Agua, Fuego and Acatenango. This graceful old colonial city, with its cobbled streets and magnificent old buildings, identifies it as one of the most charming in the country and shows how it can justly claim to be one of the most picturesque in Central America, despite the damage caused by a series of earthquakes and floods that it has received over the ages. This morning we explore this city by foot with a local guide, visiting the churches of San Francisco, Santa Clara, La Merced and Las Capuchinas. Once the country's graceful capital and the first fully planned settlement amongst Spain's New World colonies, much of the city has been repeatedly devastated by earthquakes, yet has still managed to retain an elegant charm, whilst its buildings and ruins give it the air of a snapshot in time.

Tonight we enjoy our farewell dinner and overnight in Antigua.

DAY 20 DEPART ANTIGUA

This morning leave Antigua and bid farewell to our Mayan adventure. Transfer to the Guatemala City airport for our departure flights home.

Antigua

Lake Atitlan

Uxmal

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. HOW BIG ARE THE GROUPS?

Each group is limited to 16 participants. Small groups are an important ingredient in adventure travel. They allow for more interaction and more personalized service throughout the itinerary.

2. WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

All accommodations throughout; all meals, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); bottled drinking water throughout the trip; all internal transportation; airport transfers on day 1 and departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); all day trips and entrance fees as outlined in the itinerary; tips for hotels (porterage), national guide, and bus driver, restaurants and spot guides; services of a trip leader.

3. WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

International flights, tips to ElderTreks tour leader, alcoholic drinks, visas and travel insurance.

4. ARE THESE "EDUCATIONAL" TOURS?

Yes, in the broadest sense of the word, "educational". We visit cultural centers and historical sites, and have talks and discussions on many aspects of history, culture and nature. But this is only a portion of the educational experience. We believe that it is equally educational to meet local people on a non-commercial basis, visit their homes and even try to learn a few words in the native language. Sometimes the most "educational" moments are spent sipping a cold drink in a street market or trying some newly learned Spanish phrases.

5. HOW DO WE TRAVEL DURING THE TOUR?

All local transportation is included in the land price of the trip. We use minivans or bus for our land travel and we take several boat journeys during our Mayan adventure.

6. WHAT ARE OUR ACCOMMODATIONS LIKE?

We always stay in good accommodations — both hotels and lodges, where rooms have a private bath or shower.

7. WHAT ABOUT THE WEATHER?

The Yucatan Peninsula is hot year-round. The two distinguishable seasons are the wet season and the dry season. The best time of the year to visit the region is during the dry season (generally from November through May) when the humidity is relatively low. Average temperatures during these months are 82°F (27.7°C) for the highs and 69°F (20.5°C) for the lows. Expect cooler temperatures in the evening and early morning in the highlands of Guatemala. While rain is not common during this time be prepared for the chance of precipitation anytime.

8. WHEN IS PAYMENT DUE?

A non-refundable deposit of $500 USD (plus insurance if you require it) is due at time of booking and will reserve your place on the adventure. Payment of the full land cost is due 120 days before departure. Cancellation charges are applicable and are outlined in the "Terms and Conditions" section of our brochure.

9. IS MEDICAL INSURANCE REQUIRED?

Insurance coverage is not included in the cost of your trip. Please note that medical insurance is not required for this adventure but is recommended. ElderTreks offers comprehensive travel insurance and we are happy to provide you with a quote if you call our office. If you are purchasing insurance elsewhere, please ensure you provide the details to ElderTreks as soon as possible.

Please note those travelers with pre-existing medical conditions must take out travel insurance at the time of deposit

10. WHAT SHOULD I TAKE ON THE TOUR?

There is a detailed "What to Take" list in our Trip Kit, which we will send to you after you have booked the trip.

11. WHAT MEALS ARE INCLUDED?

All meals during the itinerary are included, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day. We eat a variety of local foods prepared in a wide range of settings. In many cases, we simply order a number of dishes and share, allowing you to sample new foods.

12. CAN YOU ARRANGE MY FLIGHTS?

We would be happy to take care of your air arrangements. ElderTreks offers personalized flight itineraries — not group flights. Stop over en route, come in a few days early, or extend your stay. Call us for a customized itinerary.

13. WHAT IF I WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION?

If you have any further questions about the trip, please do not hesitate to contact our office for additional information. A Trip Kit containing further details on the destination will be sent to you once you have booked the trip.

Sunrise at the jungles of Aguateca

Quirigua

Caracol