

MAYAN MUSEUM HAS OPENED IN CANCUN



With weeks to go before a date on the Mayan calendar that doomsday prophets predict will mark the end of the world, a Mayan museum has opened in Cancun, one of Mexico's most popular tourist attractions.

The 5,100-square-meter museum celebrating the Mayan past took six years to build at a hefty sum of \$15 million and will compete with Cancun's beaches, nightlife venues, and the prestigious hotels in its vicinity.

The Mayans were renowned for their advanced knowledge of astronomy and mathematics, and the museum captures this knowledge along with over 300 pieces of art and craft from private collections.

Back in 2002, 10,000-year-old human skeletal remains were found in one of Cancun's many underwater caves. These remains, nicknamed 'La Mujer de las Palmas' (or 'The Woman of the Palms') form one of the many exhibits on display at the new museum.

Not that tourists in Mexico have a scarcity of Mayan attractions. Less than 100 kilometers away from Cancun is the old Mayan port of Tulum. And less than 200 kilometers away is Chichen Itza, home to El Castillo (or the Temple of Kukulcan), a large stepped pyramid made of stone that was acknowledged as one of the New Seven Wonders of the World in 2007.

The doomsday event is supposed to occur on December 21, 2012.

Many believe that the Mayans, who thrived from 300 AD to 900 AD, prophesied a series of cataclysmic events, a solar shift and numerous earthquakes among them. Some skeptics of the doomsday event prefer to interpret it as a widespread spiritual transformation, whereas other skeptics are incredulous of the entire matter altogether.

Tourism is booming in the Mayan hot spots of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras (hotels are almost completely occupied in Tikal, a Guatemalan hub of Mayan activity). And the excitement is expected to peak just before December 21, when tourists will be either joyful or sorrowful, depending on which Mayan interpretation they fancy.

Perhaps reflecting their own skepticism about the end-of-world phenomenon, museum officials have projected an estimated 1 million visits each year, a twelfth of Cancun's yearly visits. The adult admission price is \$5. Children under 12 and seniors over 60 will get in free.

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