

Yucatan: Off The Beaten Path MEXICO

WITH DR. STANLEY GUENTER



**FAR
HORIZONS**

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL TRIPS

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MEXICO'S YUCATAN: OFF THE BEATEN PATH

with Dr. Stanley Guenter



Venture into the secluded southern regions bordering Guatemala, where recent excavations have unveiled the remnants of pyramids and cities that were once nearly inaccessible. The discoveries made here, including transformative hieroglyphic texts, reshape our understanding of the Maya, revealing a history concealed for over a millennium. Dzibanché showcases fragments of vividly painted stucco and graffiti, hinting at the influential family glyphs of Kaan.

This location might have once been a powerful center, predating Calakmul. Meanwhile, Balamkú boasts striking stucco murals that retain their original polychrome paint.

This compelling Yucatán tour offers visits to four UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Explore Calakmul, now recognized as the capital of the Kaan (or Snake) Kingdom. This mighty realm once rivaled Tikal for dominance. Marvel at Uxmal's intricately adorned structures and Chichén Itzá's impressive Great Ballcourt, Mesoamerica's largest. Lastly, step back in time to Campeche, a city established in 1540 and fortified against pirates in the 17th century. Journey with Dr. Stanley Guenter, a renowned archaeologist, and Maya hieroglyph expert. Gain insights into the intense struggles for supremacy among the Maya rulers, as depicted on their monumental edifices. This is no ordinary Yucatán tour: it's an immersive Mexico educational tour into the heart of the Maya civilization.

Daily Itinerary

Day 1

Arrive in Mexico

Fly to Cancún, the most populous city in the Mexican state of Quintana Roo, located on the northeast coast of the Yucatán Peninsula. Transfer to Tulum and our boutique seaside resort for one night. (D)

Day 2

Tulum, Balam Na church

Our first stop today is Tulum. Built in the compact style of the Postclassic period, this fortified settlement was still inhabited when the Spanish Conquistadores sailed past in the 16th century. Recent archaeological work indicates that the population of Tulum primarily consisted of foreigners to this area and likely came from the area of Champoton, off the southern coast of Campeche. Delicate multi-colored paintings decorate the interior walls of one of the flat-roofed temples, and a protective wall surrounds the city. Time permitting, we will stop by the Balam Na church. One hundred and fifty years ago, this was the center of the town of Chan Santa Cruz, the capital of the independent Maya who, in the 19th century caste wars, rebelled against their treatment of the haciendas.

Overnight in the Hotel Laguna Bacalar, overlooking a lake of the same name. (B/L/D)

Day 3

Dzibanché, Kinichna, Kohunlich

As we move west, our first stop is Dzibanché, a site once hidden in the forest and rarely visited. Hieroglyphic steps found here contain texts extolling the captures and victories of many Snake Kingdom lords, indicating that this was the capital of the kingdom during the 6th century. Large temples tower over important tombs; one temple contained a carved wooden lintel recording the accession of a kaloomte' (a Maya imperial title) in 551 AD. A few miles north lies Kinichna, with a huge pyramid dominating the landscape.

Our final stop will be Kohunlich, discovered in 1971 just before looters could steal a series of spectacular stucco masks thought to portray the Sun God, K'inich Ajaw.

Overnight for two nights in the charming, environmentally friendly Chicanná EcoVillage Resort. (B/L/D)



Tulum ruins



Day 4

Hormiguero, Becán, Xpujil, Chicanná

Our explorations take us to four breathtaking sites. Encircled by a steep, dry moat built to ward off invaders, Becán once covered at least 60 acres, and stunningly beautiful buildings stand as mute testimony of the city's former importance.

At Chicanná, massive doorways represent the earth monster's mouth (and the entrance to the underworld) that swallows all those who step across its imposing teeth.

Xpujil is noted for its false stairways that climb three steep towers to artificial temples on top. Each imposing edifice is decorated with breathtaking masks.

Nearby, Hormiguero is located deep in the forest and is rarely visited. The center contains many striking structures, but the colossal Temple I is the most impressive. It is extravagantly decorated with two soaring, false-staircase towers on either side of a huge monster mouth portal. (B/L/D)

Day 5

Balamkú, Calakmul, Drive to Campeche

Begin the day at Balamkú, a lovely temple containing an exquisitely painted stucco façade. Standing two stories tall, the frieze consists of four lords who are depicted as being born out of the mouths of frogs seated atop sacred mountains.

Then it's on to Calakmul, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Located deep within the heart of the forest near the border with Guatemala, this was one of the largest and most powerful Maya cities of the Late Classic period. During this time, the site served as the capital of the Kaan Kingdom, which competed with Tikal for domination of the Maya world. In antiquity, an interconnected series of canals and bajos (low swampy areas) encompassing more than 40 square miles protected the city. Excavations have uncovered fascinating structures and tombs filled with precious grave goods, including at least four jade mosaic masks. Over 100 carved monuments dating from 435 AD to 900 AD impart stories of mighty rulers and the rituals they carried out to honor their gods.

In the afternoon, depart the Rio Bec region and drive north to the historic fortified town of Campeche, founded in the 16th century by the Spanish and, since 1999, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Overnight one night in Campeche at the 4-star Hotel Plaza Campeche. (B/L/D)

Daily Itinerary *(cont'd)*

Mayan Pyramid at Kabah



Day 6

Edzná, Kabah, Uxmal

Begin the day at Edzná, where the monumental zone of the center covers more than two square miles. The remains include fragments of at least 32 stelae, and one of the buildings on the central plaza is decorated with intricate, impressively intact carvings of the sun god with remnants of red stucco still visible.

Continue on to Kabah to view the façade of the Codz-Pop temple. Decorated with masks of the long-nosed rain god, Chac, it is one of the most characteristic works in the Puuc style. We will watch as the setting sun casts a breathtaking light upon the repeating baroque pattern of the curling noses of Chac across the front of the building.

This afternoon will be spent exploring dazzling Uxmal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. With its splendid geometric friezes made of thousands of hand-carved stones, Uxmal displays the peninsula's finest example of Classic Puuc architecture. The impressive Pyramid of the Magician is 100 feet tall and dominates the city. The Governor's Palace stands on three terraces overlooking the plain.

Overnight in the charming Lodge at Uxmal. Enjoy the optional sound and light show this evening. (B/L/D)

Day 7

Celestún Biosphere Reserve, Hacienda Yaxcopoil

Today we leave the ruins behind and head to the Celestún Biosphere Reserve, a coastal sanctuary where brilliant pink flamingos wade through shimmering lagoons. A boat tour through this breathtaking reserve reveals a pristine landscape of mangroves and hidden beaches, home to an array of exotic bird species.

After lunch at a beachfront restaurant, journey inland to Hacienda Yaxcopoil, a beautifully preserved 17th-century estate that was once one of the most important rural estates in the Yucatan. In the 18th century, the ranch covered almost 22,000 acres of land and operated first as a cattle ranch and later rode the boom years of henequen production. Today, the estate is a museum.

Continue to Mérida, founded by the Spanish in 1542 and built upon the ruins of the Maya city of Tiho. The city once fancied itself the "Paris of the Western World" due to its cobbled streets, shaded plazas and colonial facades that recall the grace of old Europe.

Overnight for two nights at the charming Rosas and Xocolate Hotel. (B/L/D)



Daily Itinerary *(cont'd)*

Day 8

Mérida: Mundo Maya Museum and walking tour

Opened in 2012, Mérida's new Mundo Maya Museum houses a plethora of fabulous artifacts inside an award-winning building created with three levels, representing the three worlds of the Maya: the sky, earth, and underworld. Celebrating Maya culture, the museum is home to a collection of more than 1100 stunning artifacts of the civilization.

After lunch at a traditional Yucatecan restaurant, we will have a walking tour of the colonial city center and some free time to explore Mérida's bustling market. Along with bundles of colored flowers, pungent tropical fruits and local foods, Maya merchants display such traditional handicrafts as embroidered huipiles (blouses) colorful hand-woven hammocks, and Panama hats made in nearby caves. (B/L/D)



Day 9

Izamal, Chichén Itzá

Spend the morning at the grandest of the colonial monasteries, Izamal, a place of pilgrimage before the arrival of the Spanish that looms spectacularly atop an enormous Maya temple platform. Steeped in history, the mission was built for Fray Diego de Landa, the controversial Bishop of Yucatán. Dedicated to the Virgin of Izamal, the beloved patron saint of the Yucatan, the rambling building sits atop one of the four principal temples in a ceremonial center sacred to Itzamná, Lord of the Sky and the principal deity of the Itzá Maya. We will see the 16th-century Franciscan Monastery and its Atrio, the huge enclosed front courtyard that is the most remarkable feature of the mission, unique for its great height, its vast scale, and its elaborate design.

Continue to Chichén Itzá with time to explore this UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Overnight for two nights at the colonial-style Ikal Chichen (formerly the Mayaland Hotel), adjacent to the ruins. (B/L/D)



Chichén Itzá

Daily Itinerary *(cont'd)*

Days 10

Ek Balam, Chichén Itzá

Drive to nearby Ek Balam, which rose to power in the late 8th century AD. The central district of Ek Balam was encircled by three walls, most likely used for both defense and to limit access during ceremonies. The founder of the Ek Balam dynasty built most of the Acropolis, which also houses his tomb. The incised stucco façade of the building where he was buried is truly spectacular – covered with life-size warriors and sacred imagery. When found by archaeologists, this mural was in pristine condition as it had been carefully buried upon his death.

Return to Chichén Itzá and enjoy another afternoon exploring the site. Although other Maya centers were abandoned during the tumultuous 9th century, magnificent Chichén Itzá rose to become the most important city of its time. In its great ball court, the lords of the city constructed an expression of the new age they intended to rule. Among the structures we will explore are the Castillo towering high above the plaza; the Caracol, a round temple constructed on a series of platforms probably used for tracing astronomical events; and the Temple of the Warriors, where sculptured columns form colonnades that once supported mammoth roofs.

We will also walk to the cenote, known as the "Great Well of the Itzá," where artifacts of gold and jade, along with copal incense, have been found. (B/L/D)

Day 11

Depart Mexico

Transfer early this morning to the airport in Cancún for our flights home. (B)

PLEASE NOTE: This is a sample itinerary that is typical of our trip offerings. In general, you can expect a very similar program, though days may be swapped depending on availability, opening hours, and other affecting factors.

Why Take This Tour?

Tour four UNESCO World Heritage Sites:

Calakmul, Chichén Itzá,
Uxmal, Campeche

Learn the history of the Kaan, or Snake Kingdom, the fierce empire that challenged Tikal for power

See Dzibanché, Kohunlich, Xpujil, and Balamkú, hidden for centuries in the southern jungle

Spend time in the colonial city of Mérida, capital of the Yucatán state

Limited to a maximum of 14 participants

Pre and Post Trip Extensions

Far Horizons offers pre or post extensions for many of our trips. We can also arrange extra nights at the arrival and departure hotel should you wish to arrive early or depart later. Please contact us for details.



Tour Information

Pricing

For current pricing, please visit farhorizons.com and navigate to our trip page.

Inclusions

Price based on double occupancy and includes:

- Internal flights during the trip (if applicable/unless otherwise noted)
- The accompaniment of your scholar throughout the entire trip
- Local English-speaking guide
- Hotel accommodations (3 or 4 stars; or best available based in the area)
- Ground transportation
- Airport transfers for arrivals and departures
- Most meals as noted in the itinerary
- Entry fees to all included sites and museums
- Gratuities to guides, drivers, and restaurant and hotel staff
- Coordination for any private presentations or tours

Trip prices are based on a minimum number of participants. If this minimum number is not met, trip prices are subject to change. Should the prices need to change, Far Horizons will reach out to registered guests to discuss directly.

Single Supplement

Should a roommate be requested and one not be available, the single supplement will be charged.

Exclusions

- International round trip airfare
- A separate donation check of \$150.00 per person to a designated donation project
- Passport or visa fees
- Required vaccines or tests
- Airport or departure taxes
- Alcoholic drinks, beverages or food not included on set menus
- Excess baggage charges
- Personal tips and hotel incidental expenses
- Laundry or other items of a personal nature

Donation Checks

As a tour company that benefits from the cultural and natural riches of our destinations, we have a policy of donating to the scientific and cultural sites and projects which we visit. This has created a bond between Far Horizons and the academic and local communities that has helped us establish an extensive list of lecturers and contacts in each of our destinations. We ask that each participant donate to the noteworthy project we designate. The donation amount is \$150.00 per person. Note that the donation is required as part of your registration for the trip and that it is non-refundable.

Exchange Rate Fluctuations

Prices are based on currency exchange rates keeping below a projected level. While it is unlikely, if the exchange rates should change substantially, Far Horizons reserves the right to charge an additional amount to the trip cost.

Registration

A deposit of \$1000 per person is required along with your registration & health forms, which will be linked in the email confirmation you receive once you pay your deposit on our booking platform. Final payment is due 120 days before departure. Prior to departure, you will be sent a reading list and a tour bulletin containing travel information.



Tour Information *(cont'd)*

Cancellation

Cancellations received in writing at least 120 days before departure will receive a refund less a \$500 per person administrative fee. Cancellations received less than 120 days before the departure date will not receive a refund. If for any reason you are unable to complete the trip, Far Horizons will not reimburse any fees. Upon registering for the tour, the purchase of travel protection with both trip cancellation and emergency evacuation is strongly advised. Links to recommended insurance policies will be included in the email you receive confirming receipt of your deposit.

Expectations During Travel

Our trips are designed for flexible, energetic people who like to be active, have a spirit of adventure and a positive attitude. We have designed this trip to be as comfortable as possible, while also aiming to visit some remote or unique sites that other companies do not attempt to include in their itineraries. There may be days where we have very long drives and the conditions of the roads may vary. Hotels and transportation in some remote areas may not be up to western standards. There may be times when no bellhops are available; please pack with the understanding that you need to be able to handle your own luggage at times. Sometimes we may be walking over uneven trails for a mile or more; hiking boots are strongly recommended. Not every meal will be haute cuisine and several lunches may be picnics or box lunches. By maintaining a flexible attitude we will soon be captivated by the beauty of the natural scenery, the hospitality of the local people, and the fascinating sites we will see. Your flexibility and patience will be appreciated.

Air Ticketing

International round trip flights are not included in the cost of the trip. If Far Horizons must change the trip dates or cancel the trip for any reason, Far Horizons is not responsible for any air ticket you may have purchased. Please send your complete air schedule as soon as you have it. NOTE: Please contact Far Horizons if you would like for us to handle your air ticketing.

Private Tours and Talks

The private tours of archaeological sites and talks by specialists are scheduled in advance and include a donation to each. Specialists working at these sites are excited about showing their work to interested enthusiasts. However, please be aware that there may be times when the director or a member of the staff may not be on site when our groups arrive due to other commitments.

Walking and Standing

Far Horizons expects all participants to be physically active and able to walk and climb independently throughout the full touring days. This includes walking over uneven terrain (uphill and downhill) for 2 miles or more at each site. You should expect to be on your feet for much of each day, averaging as much as 5 miles of walking per day. **As such, each participant should be able to walk unaided at a pace of 3 miles per hour for at least an hour at a time, and to stand unsupported for at least 60 minutes.** Bearing this in mind, we suggest that, if you have not already done so, you begin walking several miles every day, ideally including stairs and hills. If you have questions about your ability to keep up with the group or the strenuous nature of this trip, please contact the Far Horizons staff.



Travel Insurance

We strongly recommend that you consider purchasing travel insurance. Should illness or an unforeseen event force you to cancel your travel plans after your final payment or during your trip, it would be doubly unfortunate to incur a significant financial loss. Trip cancellation protection will enable you to be reimbursed for the loss of your payment if you are unable to travel for any of the covered reasons in the "Outline of Coverage" section, or should you have an accident or suffer from any medical conditions during the trip.

Far Horizons offers customized protection plans through Travel Insured International (a Crum & Forster Company) with the following benefits:

- Trip Cancellation and Trip Interruption for covered reasons
- Trip Delay
- Baggage Loss and Baggage Delay
- Emergency Medical Expenses and Emergency Medical Evacuation
- 24-Hour Accidental Death & Dismemberment
- 24-Hour Travel Assistance & Concierge Services
- Option to upgrade to 'Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR)

We recommend reviewing the language in detail so you are aware of specific parameters; Depending on the policy, to waive the Pre-Existing Medical Condition Exclusion or to upgrade to CFAR coverage, the plan must be purchased within 14 to 21 days of the initial trip deposit, full trip cost must be insured, and traveler is medically fit at time of plan purchase. Otherwise, coverage may be purchased at any time prior to departure.

To obtain a personalized quote and/or purchase a plan through Far Horizons/Travel Insured International, simply click [HERE](#). For specific questions regarding the Worldwide Protector Plan, please contact Travel Insured International's Customer Care Center at 1-800-243-3174 or by email at customercare@travelinsured.com, and refer to Far Horizons' account number: 54070.

Itinerary Changes

Changes in our itinerary, accommodations, and transportation schedules may occur while traveling. While we are committed to keeping as close to the published details as possible, sometimes it is simply not possible. Weather events, government affairs, or other factors out of our control sometimes come into play. A good book to read as well as patience, flexible attitude, and a sense of humor are essential.





Meet Your Study Leader...

Dr. Stanley Guenter

Stanley Guenter was first introduced to the Maya culture and ancient script at the age of ten. He has been studying the Mesoamerican cultures ever since. He obtained his undergraduate degree at the University of Calgary, his Master's Degree at La Trobe University in Melbourne Australia, and his PhD in Archaeology from Southern Methodist University.

He has worked on archaeological projects in eastern Tabasco, Mexico and is currently an epigrapher and archaeologist with two archaeological projects in Guatemala: The Regional Archaeological Investigations of Northern Petén, Guatemala (RAINPEG) and the Southern Methodist University El Peru/Waka' project.

Stanley is one of the outstanding rising stars of Mesoamerican writing systems and has taught and presented at many conferences in Canada, the United States, Australia, Germany and Denmark.

He has done a full study of the inscriptions of Dos Pilas in relation to Tikal (you may see the readings on mesoweb.com).



The background of the entire graphic is a photograph of a large, ancient stone wall made of irregular blocks. In the lower-left foreground, a set of stone steps leads up towards the wall. The sky is a clear, bright blue. The text is overlaid on this image in white and dark green boxes.

What People Are Saying About...

Dr. Stanely Guenter

“Stanley is an excellent leader. He managed by his presence and manner to make the group a cohesive unit while allowing for individual differences in ability and pace. We also respect his knowledge and willingness to share his opinions and back them up with facts and logical arguments.”

- ANNE AND JOE FRANKEL

Journeys That Change Your Perspective

✦ **PhD-LEADERS: Your Scholar Is Your Travel Companion**

We place scholars at the heart of each journey, accompanying you throughout your trip. Our experts transform passive tourism into immersive intellectual adventures, offering insights into ancient civilizations through narratives shared over meals, during site explorations, and in evening discussions.

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We negotiate entry to restricted archaeological sites, private artifact collections, and untold cultural stories, creating experiences that transcend traditional tourism and reveal hidden historical wonders.

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We believe the most meaningful souvenirs are invisible. Our expertly guided explorations of ancient sites catalyze deeper understandings of human ingenuity and cultural complexity, creating moments of clarity that forever change how you see past civilizations and contemporary society.

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We foster intimate interactions where archaeological passion creates unexpected connections. Through shared discoveries at remote ruins, animated discussions over local cuisine, and collective moments of wonder, our travelers forge friendships that extend far beyond the journey's end.

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We architect each trip as a masterwork of scholarly travel, balancing intellectual depth with comfort and discovery. Our itineraries reflect research, planning, and refinement to ensure every moment offers something meaningful for the curious mind that standard tours simply cannot deliver.

✦ **LEGACY OF EXCELLENCE: Countless Returning Travelers**

Our 40+ years of archaeological exploration and support for preservation have fostered a deeply personal relationship with our guests, resulting in an exceptionally high return rate that speaks to our individualized attention, and the lasting connections we create with each member of our travel family.



READY TO TRAVEL TO THE YUCATAN? MEXICO

WITH DR. STANLEY GUENTER

Email with Questions
journeys@farhorizons.com

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