

## GLOSSARY

**13.0.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 8 Kum'ku** – The creation date of the Maya Long Count calendar, corresponding to 11 August 3114 BCE in the Gregorian calendar.

**13.0.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 3 Kank'in** – The end date of the Maya Long Count calendar, corresponding to 21 December, 2012 in the Gregorian calendar.

**4<sup>th</sup> Maya Era/4<sup>th</sup> Creation** – Within the Maya world view, or cosmology, we are now living in the 4<sup>th</sup> era of creation. Some scholars believe that the 4<sup>th</sup> era will end in 2012 and that a 5<sup>th</sup> era will begin with a new cycle of the Maya Long Count calendar on December 22, 2012.

**Ajaw/Ahaw/Ajaw/Ahau** – One of the twenty days in the Maya sacred calendar. This word means “lord” in several Mayan languages. For the K'iche' people of Guatemala, Ajaw is a sacred being, the “Owner of the Earth” or the “Earth Lord,” who is the owner and caretaker of the land and everything on its surface. For many Maya, Ajaw is also the fundamental principle of time and space.

**Ajq'ij/Ajq'ijab'** – In K'iche' Mayan language, Ajq'ij (Ajq'ijab' in its plural form) means “of the days” or “in charge of the days.” Ajq'ijab are specially trained people in the highlands of Guatemala who have a calling to become calendar keepers, and who use the Maya sacred calendar of 260 days as a symbolic system of values to orient and guide people in their communities.

**Alux/Aluxo'ob** – Alux (aluxo'ob in its plural form) is the name given to a mythical “goblin” or spirit in the Maya tradition of the Yucatán Peninsula. It is believed that aluxo'ob are small and are generally invisible, but can take physical form in order to communicate with or scare humans. Some contemporary Maya still believe that aluxo'ob are guardians of the corn fields, help grow the corn, call for rain, and watch the fields at night. They whistle to scare off predators or thieves.

**Atole** – A pre-Hispanic beverage consumed mainly in México, Guatemala, Honduras and other Mesoamerican countries. In its original form, it is a sweet beverage of corn meal cooked in water and typically sweetened with honey.

**August 11, 3114 BCE** – Date in the Gregorian calendar corresponding to the beginning date of the Maya Long Count calendar.

**Axis Mundi** – The “World Axis,” is a concept and symbol found in many cultures. The idea expresses a vertical connection between the Earth and the sky.

**Backstrap Loom** – A simple loom comprising two sticks or bars between which the warp threads are stretched. One bar is attached to a fixed pole, and the other to the weaver, by means of a strap around the back. For thousands of years, Maya women have been weaving complex textiles on this type of loom using ancient techniques and patterns.

**Baktun/B'ak'tun** – One of the cycles of the Maya Long Count calendar containing 144,000 days.

**Balustrade** – Architectural feature running down the side of a staircase.



**Bloodletting** – The ancient Maya practiced bloodletting as a ritualized act of self-sacrifice. Bloodletting was done by cutting or piercing the body. It served ideological and cultural functions. When performed by ruling elites, the act of bloodletting was crucial to the maintenance of sociopolitical structures and of reciprocal relationships between the rulers and the ancestral spirits and deities.

**Caldera** – A volcanic feature formed by the collapse of land following a volcanic eruption.

**Camioneta** – The most common form of public transportation in Guatemala, also known as “chicken buses” because of the live cargo accompanying many passengers. *Camionetas* are frequent, crowded, and affordable.

**Caracol** – The name given to the observatory-like structure in the ancient Maya city of Chichén Itzá. It is named after the building’s interior spiral staircase that resembles the inside of a snail’s shell.

**Cartouche** – Similar to Egyptian hieroglyphs, Maya hieroglyphs representing the twenty days of the Maya sacred calendar are enclosed in a *cartouche*. The *cartouche* is oval with three rounded “feet” underneath.

**Ceiba** – A large tree found in tropical areas including Mesoamerica. Ceiba trees can grow to 230 feet tall or more. It has a straight, largely branchless trunk, and is crowned in a huge, spreading canopy. It has buttress roots that can be taller than a grown person. The tree figures prominently in Maya cosmology, or view of the world. The concept of the central world tree is often depicted as a Ceiba trunk. It connects the planes of the Underworld, the terrestrial realm, and the skies. Ceiba trees are often planted at the center of many rural Maya towns.

**Cha’a Chac** – A traditional Maya ceremony to petition for rain.

**Chac** – The Maya god of rain and thunder.

**Chac Mool** – A type of stone statue depicting a human figure in a reclining position with the head turned to one side. It is an example of the confluence of Maya traditional styles with those from the city of Tula in central México. The resulting architectural style is called “Maya-Toltec.” The meaning of the ancient name for Chac Mool remains unknown. Chac Mool should not be confused with the rain god Chac, who is of ancient Maya origin.

**Chaya** – A shrub native to the Yucatán Peninsula, México, that is similar to spinach.

**Chile** – *Chile* is the fruit from Capsicum plants, also known as chili pepper. Since 8000 BCE, chili peppers have been a part of the human diet in the Americas. They vary in levels of “hotness.” Originally from South America, the habanero chili is one of the hottest and most popular in the Yucatán.

**Chol Q’ij** – The name of the Maya sacred calendar in the K’iche’ Mayan language.

**Cinta** – The Spanish word for “ribbon,” and a component of traditional Mayan clothing. Maya women from Chiapas and Guatemala use ribbons to decorate their hair. In some places, ribbons have a cosmological meaning, representing the Feathered Serpent, Kukulkán, or a two-headed serpent.

**Cistern** – A waterproof receptacle for holding water. *Cisterns* are often built to catch and store rainwater.

**Cocoyoles** – Plural of Cocoyol, a type of tree nut with a hard outer shell.

**Codex/Codices** – A Codex is a book written by the ancient Maya. These codices (plural) are folding, bark-paper books written using hieroglyphs. Thousands were burned and destroyed during the Spanish conquest. Only four of these books survived. Three are named after the cities that now house them, Dresden, Paris, and Madrid. These four books contain historical records, astronomical tables, and mythological events of the ancient Maya.



**Cofradía** – Confraternities or honorary councils of Maya religious leaders common in Chiapas and Guatemala. Cofradías interpret Catholic ritual and symbolism using Maya beliefs and worldview.

**Comal** – Traditional Maya cooking hearth.

**Constellation** – Defined patterns formed by groupings of prominent stars in the night sky.

**Copal** – A type of tree resin used by the Maya as incense.

**Corbel Arch** – Corbel, or corbeled, arches are the classic Maya method of spanning an interior space. Carefully calculated load and vectors of weight produce the angle and height of these vaults. A capstone takes the place of a keystone to close the vault, giving the corbel vault unequaled stability and harmonious proportions.

**Corte** – Skirt of the traditional Maya dress worn by women in Guatemala and southern México.

**Cosmology** – Theory, model, or idea that seeks to understand the origin, structure, and evolution of the cosmos or universe.

**Day Keeper** – Specially trained people in the highlands of Guatemala who have a calling to become calendar keepers. Maya calendar keepers use the sacred 260 day calendar as a symbolic system of values to orient and guide people in their communities.

**Death Lords** – Maya gods of the Underworld.

**December 21, 2012 CE** – End date of the 5,125 year cycle of the Maya Long Count calendar.

**Decipher/Decipherment** – The analysis and interpretation of script and codes in ancient languages where knowledge of the written language has been lost.

**Día de la Santa Cruz** – Day of the Holy Cross, an important holiday with both Catholic and ancient Mesoamerican indigenous significance that is celebrated on May 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**Día de los Muertos** – Day of the Dead, an important holiday with both Catholic and ancient Mesoamerican indigenous significance that is celebrated on November 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>.

**Don** – Title given to a man as a sign of respect.

**Doña** – Title given to a woman as a sign of respect.

**Earth Lord** – Spirit of the Earth, the Mesoamerican belief that all things have spirit, including the Earth. The Earth Lord is a representation of the concept of reciprocity held by the Maya people.

**Ecliptic** – Ecliptic is the apparent path of the Sun on the celestial sphere as seen from the Earth's center. It is the path of the Sun throughout a year with respect to the apparently fixed background of stars.

**Emblem Glyph** – A combination of glyphs with the consistent words “holy lord” and a main sign that changes depending on the Maya city. Emblem Glyphs are found in connection with cities and territories controlled by a “holy king.”

**Equinox** – Equinox is the time of year when day and night are approximately 12 hours each, everywhere on Earth. It happens twice a year, on March 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> and September 22<sup>nd</sup> or 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Fourth Creation** – In Maya mythology, we are living in the Fourth Creation of the Universe, which began on August 11, 3114 BCE.



**Gregorian Calendar** – The Gregorian calendar is an international standard. It is a solar calendar, meaning that it is designed to maintain synchrony with the solar, or tropical, year. The average year length is 365.2425 days per year, a close approximation to the tropical year.

**Haab** – The Maya solar calendar of 18 months of 20 days, plus five additional days, that make a total of 365 days.

**Heliacal Rise** – The heliacal rise of a star or other celestial body other than the Sun occurs when it first becomes visible above the eastern horizon, for a brief moment just before sunrise, after a period of time when it had not been visible in the night sky.

**Hero Twins** – Principal characters in the creation story of the Maya, called Hunahpú and Xbalanqué.

**Hieroglyphic Inscriptions** – The script or writing system of the ancient Maya of Mesoamerica, found inscribed in stone, pottery, bone, jade, accordion folded books, stucco, and other surfaces.

**Hieroglyph/Glyph** – The basic unit of the writing system of the ancient Maya.

**Highlands** – A geographical area in western Guatemala and south-western México that has been populated by the Maya for thousands of years.

**Huipil/Huipiles** – The traditional dress of Maya women. In the Yucatán the huipil (pronounced “ee-pil”) is a dress, while in Chiapas and Guatemala, the huipil (pronounced “wee-pil”) is worn as a blouse.

**Huracán** – Supreme deity in the story of creation of the Maya.

**Iconography** – Interpretation of the content of images.

**Iguana** – Reptile native of tropical areas of México and Central America.

**Inferior Conjunction** – Alignment of Mercury or Venus with the Sun as seen from Earth. During the superior conjunction, the planet is behind the Sun, and during the inferior conjunction, the planet is in front of the Sun.

**Itza/Itzaes** – The Itza or Itzaes are an ethnic group of Maya that historically descended from a Yucatec Maya lineage. They inhabit the Petén department (state) of Guatemala.

**Itzá Mayan** – The language of the Itza Maya people, similar to Yucatec Mayan.

**Jade** – The term jade refers to two different minerals, jadeite and nephrite. Jade is hard and tough, and was used by the Maya to make jewelry, weapons, and tools. The color varies from black to lilac, but is most commonly green.

**Kan Kab’** – Red clay found in the Maya region of the Yucatán.

**Kaqchikel** – Maya ethnic group and the name of one of the Mayan languages of Guatemala.

**Katun** – A katun is a unit of time in the Maya Long Count calendar equal to 7,200 days, or approximately 20 years.

**Katun-ending Period** – The end of the katun was marked by numerous ceremonies and at some of the ancient Maya cities, particularly Tikal in Guatemala, the Maya built large twin pyramid complexes to commemorate katun-ending periods.

**K’in** – Maya word for Sun, day, and time.

**K’awil** – An important deity of the ancient Maya.



**K'iche'** – The largest Maya ethnic group and also the name of one of the Mayan languages of Guatemala.

**K'iche' Mayan** – The language of the K'iche' people in Guatemala.

**Komon Tohil** – Community-based organization of Day Keepers in Zunil, Quetzaltenango, Guatemala.

**Kukulkán** – The feathered serpent of Maya mythology.

**Limestone/Lime** – Limestone, or lime, is a general term for calcium-containing inorganic materials. The Maya of the Yucatán have burned naturally occurring limestone to make lime since ancient times. Lime is used to cook corn and to make stucco, a type of plaster used to cover the stone structures and interiors of ancient buildings.

**Lintel** – A lintel is a horizontal structural element between two vertical supports. It provides the stability necessary for opening holes in walls to form doors, windows or portals. The Maya typically carved stone lintels in their buildings.

**Long Count** – One of the calendars of the ancient Maya, spanning cycles of 5,215 years.

**Lowlands** – Geographical area spanning the Yucatan peninsula and eastern Guatemala that has been occupied by the Maya for thousands of years.

**Machete** – A machete is a large cutting tool similar to a short sword. About 2 feet in length, it has a single sharp edge and it is used to cut grass and other plants, and to clear a path in the jungle.

**Madrid Codex** – One of four accordion shaped Maya books that remain from the many thousands that were destroyed by the Spanish invaders and Catholic priests.

**Mam** – Maya ethnic group and one of the Mayan languages of Guatemala.

**Masa** – Ground corn dough.

**Maya-Toltec** – A style of architecture that reflects a mix of elements from the Toltec and Maya ethnic groups. The Toltec come from Northern Mexico near the town of Tula.

**Mesoamerica** – Mesoamerica is a geographical area defined by its ancient culture, spanning central México, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, parts of Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica.

**Metaphor** – An analogy that describes a subject in comparison with another, otherwise unrelated object.

**Metate** – A stone mortar with two elements, a rectangular base and a stone cylinder known as “mano,” which is pressed against the base to grind food, especially grains and seeds. Maya women in rural areas still use the *metate* for grinding corn.

**Milpa** – An ancient system of sustainable agriculture used throughout Mesoamerica that produces maize, beans, and squash, sometimes complemented with *chiles*. *Milpas* produce large yields of food crops without the use of artificial pesticides or fertilizers.

**Monolith/Monolithic** – A monument or sculpture made out of a single block of stone.

**Nadir** – In astronomy, the nadir is the point directly underneath an observer on the surface of the Earth. If we imagine a straight line passing through the center of the Earth and our location on its surface, the nadir is located on this line, directly underneath our feet.

**Nadir Passage of the Sun** – In tropical latitudes, the Sun, in its apparent motion caused by the rotation of the Earth, passes through a point directly underneath the observer twice a year; the same number of days before and after the winter solstice.



**Nahuatl** – The native language of the ancient Aztecs and modern Nahuas of México.

**Nawal** – Each day in the Maya Tzolk'in calendar is called a nawal. In the context of the Maya sacred calendar, a nawal is a guardian spirit, and an element or characteristic of a person that is a link with the sacred.

**Nixtamal** – The name given to the process of cooking corn with lime (calcium hydroxide). This method of cooking corn releases the amino acid niacin, which is essential to prevent the disease “pellagra.”

**Observation-based astronomy** – Geocentric astronomy, based on the observation of celestial bodies from the perspective of an observer on the surface of the Earth.

**Obsidian** – A type of volcanic igneous rock, very strong and very sharp. The Maya used obsidian to make tools and weapons, and was used for ornamentation.

**Olmec** – Pre-Hispanic culture that developed in the current Mexican states of Tabasco and Veracruz between 1400 and 400 BCE. Best known for its colossal head sculptures made of stone.

**Owner of the Milpa** – Spirit of the Earth, the Mesoamerican belief that all things have spirit, including the Earth. The “owner of the milpa,” called “alux” in Yucatán, is a representation of the concept of reciprocity held by the Maya people.

**Paris Codex** – One of four accordion shaped Maya books that survived destruction by the Spanish invaders and Catholic priests.

**Penis Perforator** – Razor-sharp pointed tool of obsidian, or the spine of a sting-ray, used to perforate the foreskin of a ruler's penis in an act of self-sacrifice and bloodletting during Maya rituals.

**Petén** – The largest, and most northern, department (state) of Guatemala. A geographic region that harbors many Maya archaeological sites, including Tikal.

**Pitaya** – The fruit of a cactus vine native to Mesoamerica that is red on the outside. Its white interior is sprinkled with black seeds.

**Plaza** – Square-shaped central space in a town or part of an architectural complex, and the gathering place of the community.

**Plateau** – A geological formation; an area of high land of relatively flat terrain.

**Popol Wuj/Popol Vuh** – The “community book” of the K'iche' Maya that recounts the creation story of the Maya people.

**Pottery Sherds** – In archaeology, a sherd is a historic or prehistoric fragment of pottery.

**Precession** – A wobble in the Earth's rotation axis caused by gravitational interactions with the Moon and Sun. The date of any annual alignment of the Sun with the stars (including the Galaxy) changes by one day every 72 years due to precession. The Earth goes through one complete cycle of precession every 25,772 years.

**Puuc** – Meaning “mountain” in Yucatec Mayan, Puuc is a region in the northwest of the Yucatán Peninsula. It is also a style of architecture characterized by skilled ornamentation.

**Q'anjob'al** – One of 31 Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala.

**Q'ukumatz** – The feather serpent of Maya mythology.

**Sac Be'** – Meaning “white road” in Yucatec Mayan, a straight raised pre-Hispanic causeway or road.



**Sac Ha'** – An offering of corn that is used during Maya ceremonies to petition for rain in the Yucatán peninsula.

**Sacred Cenote** – The largest natural sinkhole at the Maya city of Chichén Itzá where the ancient Maya made offerings and sacrifices.

**Savanna** – A grassland ecosystem with an open canopy of trees and a layer of grasses.

**Scarlet Macaw** – A large and colorful parrot, native to the humid, evergreen forests in the tropics of the Americas.

**Sinkhole** – Natural underground water hole.

**Sisal** – Native plant of the Yucatán, México, with fibers that are used to make rope, cord, and tapestries.

**Skyworld** – The thirteen levels of the Maya upper world and the realm of the Maya deities.

**Solar Maximum** – The period of greatest solar activity in the eleven year cycle of the Sun. During solar maximum, the Sun's surface has the largest number of dark sunspots.

**Solar Year** – A solar, or tropical year, is the length of time that the Sun takes to return to the same position in the cycle of seasons, as seen from Earth. For example, the time from vernal equinox to vernal equinox, or from summer solstice to summer solstice, defines the solar year. The mean solar year is 365.242 days.

**Solstice** – The winter solstice is when we experience the longest night and the shortest day of the year, occurring annually on December 21<sup>st</sup> in the Northern hemisphere. The summer solstice is when we have the longest day and shortest night of the year, occurring on June 21<sup>st</sup> in the annually Northern hemisphere.

**Sots'leb** – The name of the city of Zinacantan, Chiapas, México, in the Tzotzil Mayan language.

**Spider Monkey** – An endangered monkey native to the Americas that inhabits tropical forests from southern México to Brazil.

**Spondylus Shells** – Also known as thorny oysters or spiny oysters, these colorful shells were used by the ancient Maya for ornamentation.

**Squall** – A sudden, sharp increase in wind speed which is usually associated with active weather.

**Stalactites/Stalagmites** – Natural formation in caves that result from the continuous deposit of minerals transported by water seeping into the cave, especially calcium bicarbonate. The same drop of water falling from the tip of a stalactite deposits more calcite on the ground, forming a rounded or conical stalagmite. Eventually the two come together to form a column inside the cave.

**Stela/Stelae** – A monument shaped like a column, usually monolithic, inscribed with a commemorative, funerary, or ceremonial function.

**Stingray Spine** – A type of fish related to sharks. The ancient Maya used the spine of stingrays to perforate parts of their bodies in acts of bloodletting and self-sacrifice.

**Story of Creation** – A symbolic narrative of how the world came to be and how humans first appeared on Earth.

**Stucco** – A substance made of an aggregate, a binder, and water. This material is applied wet and hardens to a very dense solid. The smooth surface serves as a protective cover that is often painted or sculpted.

**Sunspot** – Dark spots that appear on the surface of the Sun within an eleven year cycle. They are caused by intense magnetic activity.



**Syncretism** – The integration of different, and at times contradictory, belief systems.

**Tectonic Activity** – Natural forces that cause the deformation of the Earth's crust.

**Tamal/Tamales** – Ancestral dish of Mesoamerica, of indigenous origin, generally prepared with cornmeal cooked by steam, wrapped in corn husks or banana leaf, and filled with meat, vegetables, or fruits.

**Tepew** – One of the Maya deities in the Popol Vuh, meaning “sovereign” or “power.”

**Tortilla** – A flat bread in the shape of a circle made of corn meal that has been cooked with quicklime.

**Tripe** – Edible internal organs of farm animals, including the stomach and the intestines.

**Troje** – Storage bin for agricultural products.

**Tropical Savannah** – Areas with scattered trees that are dominated by woody and grassy shrubs.

**Tun** – A cycle of 360 days in the Long Count Maya calendar.

**Turtle Maya Constellation** – The constellation of Orion in Greek mythology.

**Tzab** – Meaning “rattle of the snake” in Yucatec Mayan, this is what the contemporary Maya of Yucatán call the Pleiades in the Greek constellation of Taurus.

**Tzolk'in** – The Maya 260 day sacred calendar, called Chol Q'ij by the K'iché people of Guatemala.

**Tzompantli** – A temple with many skulls carved in stone at the ancient Maya city of Chichén Itzá.

**Tzotzil** – One of the many Mayan languages spoken in southern México in the state of Chiapas.

**Tz'utujil** – Ethnic group and Mayan language in the area surrounding Lake Atitlán in Guatemala.

**Uinal** – A month of twenty days in the Haab Maya calendar.

**Umbilicus** – The cord that joins an unborn child to the mother.

**Underworld** – Also known as Xibalbá, it is the subterranean world of nine levels where the Maya ancestors and “death lord” deities dwell.

**UNESCO World Heritage Site** – Ancestral site that has been designated by UNESCO as a special legacy for humanity because of its cultural significance and its beauty.

**Upper-world** – The realm of the sky with thirteen levels where the Maya deities dwell.

**Vernacular** – Native, in reference to language, home, and other traditions.

**Vigesimal** – Base twenty, in contrast with “decimal” which has the number ten as its base.

**Virgen de Guadalupe** – Our Lady of Guadalupe is one of the representations of the Virgin Mary of the Catholic Church, whose principal place of worship is at the Basilica of Guadalupe in northern Mexico City.

**Volcanic tuff** – A type of rock consisting of consolidated volcanic ash ejected from vents during a volcanic eruption.

**Wajxaqib' B'atz'** – A ceremony held every 260 days by the K'iche' people of Guatemala to celebrate a New Year in the Chol Q'ij Maya sacred calendar.

**Wajikol** – Meaning “bread of the milpa” in Yucatec Mayan, it is a ceremony held in connection with the harvest.



**Warp** – In weaving, the warp is the set of lengthwise yarns that are held in tension on a frame or loom.

**Wayeb** – Five days of purification at the end of the 18 months of twenty days of the Maya Haab calendar.

**Weft** – In weaving, the weft is the yarn which is drawn through the warp yarns to create cloth.

**World Tree or Tree of Life** – Also called “axis mundi,” is a symbol present in many cultures, which expresses the connection between the Earth and the sky.

**Xpiyacoc** – “First Grandmother,” one of the deities of the Popol Vuh, the Maya creation story.

**Xmucane** – “First Grandfather,” one of the deities of the Popol Vuh, the Maya creation story.

**Yucatec** – A person from the Yucatán.

**Yucatec Mayan** – One of several Mayan languages, spoken in the Yucatán peninsula and parts of Chiapas and Guatemala.

**Zenith** – In astronomy, the point in the sky directly overhead from the perspective of an observer on the surface of the Earth.

**Zenith Passage of the Sun** – In tropical latitudes, the Sun, in its apparent motion caused by the rotation of the Earth, passes through a point directly above the observer twice a year, the same number of days before and after the summer solstice.

**Zenith Tube** – Vertical tunnel with an underground observation chamber that allows an observer to measure the exact moment of the zenith passage of the Sun, when the rays of the overhead Sun fall through the center of the tunnel. This instantaneous event only happens during the zenith passage of the Sun when the Sun is directly overhead at midday.