

Art, Architecture, and Culture of the Maya World

with Dr. Khristin Montes

December 12–20, 2026 | January 2–10, 2027 | May 8–16, 2027



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From: \$7,495 per person



Art, Architecture, and Culture of the Maya World

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Step into the heart of the Maya world with Dr. Khristin Montes, a distinguished art historian with a background in anthropology and archaeology whose research focuses on the sacred art and architecture of this iconic civilization. In this immersive journey, you'll travel to the vibrant Yucatán Peninsula, where the echoes of the past still resonate through towering pyramids, great ballcourts, and sacred cenotes. Professor Montes guides you through the hidden histories and breathtaking beauty of Maya architecture and artistry, revealing how their enduring legacies continue to shape the lives of the Maya people today.

As you walk in the footsteps of the Maya, you'll engage with artisans, scholars, and spiritual leaders who embody centuries of tradition and resilience. Discover the richness of Maya religious practices, music, cuisine, and storytelling, and witness rituals that have been preserved for over 500 years. From viewing ancient temples to navigating ceremonial walkways, each moment offers a deeper understanding of a culture that thrives in both memory and modernity. This is more than a tour; it's a transformative experience that invites you to see, feel, and connect with the living Maya world.

Your Journey Expert

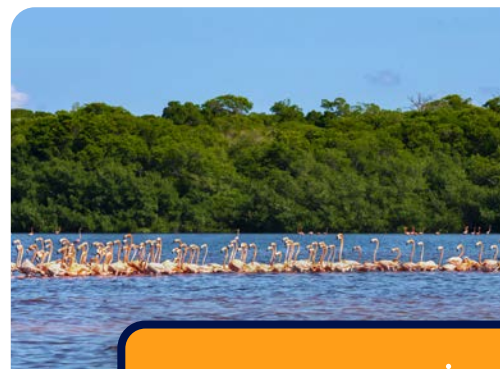


Dr. Khristin Montes is an Assistant Professor of Art History at Regis University. She has expertise in and a passion for teaching and preserving the art and culture of the Maya. Professor Montes has authored or coauthored several articles and delivered numerous talks based on her research into Maya art, history, and culture—past and present. She received her PhD from the University of Illinois at Chicago, with her dissertation research focusing on pre-Columbian art of the Maya. Prior to teaching at Regis University, she was the Project Facilitator for the Cultural Heritage, Ecology, and Conservation of Yucatec Cenotes Project—a cultural and environmental sustainability and educational project that took place in nine Maya communities between 2018 and 2020. The “Cenotes Project” was jointly

organized through InHerit (Indigenous Heritage Passed to Present) at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill and the Universidad de Oriente in Valladolid, Yucatán, Mexico, and sponsored by the National Geographic Society. Professor Montes has completed work on her first Great Course, *Creation Stories of the Americas*, which is due to release December 2025.

Highlights

- With your guide, Professor Montes, visit the workshops and galleries of local artisans to learn from Maya artists and scholars how ancient traditions have survived for centuries.
- Trace the influence of the Maya with visits to some of the most iconic sites, including Chichén Itzá, and lesser-known ruins, such as Mayapan, the focus of Dr. Montes’ doctoral research.
- Discover what makes Maya art so iconic as you observe the masterful mix of color—using natural dyes—and the exquisite attention to detail in their works.
- Gather for traditional Maya and Mexican cuisine, including rich hot chocolate, hot tortillas, fresh avocados, and spicy salsas in fine restaurants, markets, and homes.



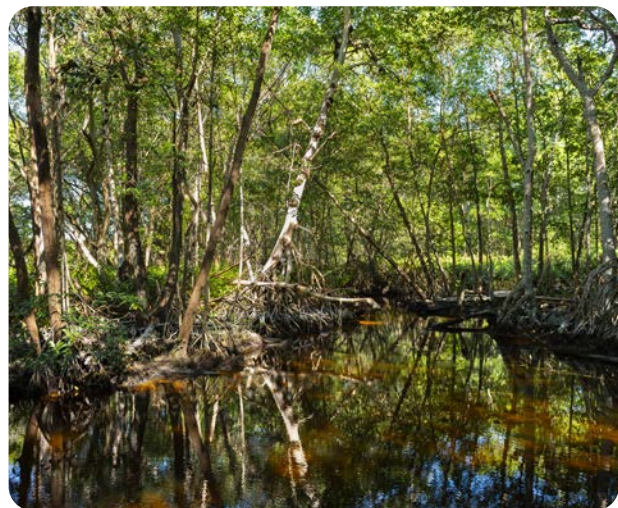
Questions? Call 1-855-476-5080

Discover More

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with Dr. Khristin Montes

Itinerary



Day 1: ¡Bienvenidos a Mexico!

Arrive this afternoon in Mérida, the capital of the State of Yucatán, and gather for a welcome lecture with Professor Montes about sacred Maya landscapes, followed by dinner at the award-winning Rosas y Xocolate, offering modern twists on Mexican classics in a Maya-inspired mansion.

Included Meals: Dinner, Reception

Accommodations: Villa Mercedes Curio

Day 2: Museum and Murals in Mérida

Start the day with a guided visit of the Great Museum of the Maya World, a world-class collection of Maya art and artifacts in a modern building designed to resemble the sacred ceiba tree. Professor Montes will share insights about how this design sets the stage for your study of sacred landscapes. Continue to Mérida's historic city center to view the bustling zócalo or plaza, stately cathedral, and colonial buildings. Then, trace the history of the Maya along the walls of the elegant Palace of the Governors, which houses the executive government offices for the region. After lunch as a group, you will have time to explore the city on your own. Tonight, experience the warmth and hospitality of dinner in a family home.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodations: Villa Mercedes Curio

Day 3: Engraving History

Depart after breakfast for the fishing village of Celestún, home to secluded beaches and the Celestún Biosphere Reserve. Enjoy a boat ride on a salt-water lagoon that is home to flocks of pink flamingos* and explore the mangrove forest that provides critical habitat for hundreds of species of birds, fish, and alligators. Those who choose to can enjoy a swim in the open water. After lunch, continue toward Uxmal. En route, you will meet briefly with an artist to learn about the art of Maya carving, including the use of "stelae"—large stone slabs covered with carvings and inscriptions, intricate lintels spanning doorways, and elaborate altars. This afternoon, try your hand at writing your name in hieroglyphs and learn from Professor Montes about efforts to keep Maya languages alive, before dinner on your own.



**Note that while flamingos are present year-round, concentrations are highest from November through April.*

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Hacienda Uxmal Plantation

Day 4: People Preserved through Pottery and Ruins

Step out of your hotel and back in time as you spend the morning in the ancient Maya city of Uxmal, a World Heritage city recognized as one of the most important archaeological sites in Maya culture and a model of urban planning. Abandoned by its inhabitants more than 1,000 years ago, Uxmal once served as a critical political and administrative center with as many as 20,000 inhabitants. Professor Montes will reveal how the complex ceremonial structures reflect the social and economic structure of late Maya society, a keen industry of astronomy, and a profound religious connection. Later, visit with world-class artisan Patricia Martin and observe her flawless technique as she captures Maya history in exquisite pottery reproductions. Return to Uxmal this afternoon to learn about the significance of chocolate to the Maya, take a walk through the botanical gardens where cacao is cultivated, and get hands-on experience crafting the perfect hot chocolate. Then, enjoy an evening on your own.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Hacienda Uxmal Plantation

Day 5: Enduring Traditions and Indigenous Futures

Begin your day with a home visit to learn how sisal (a natural fiber used for rope and twine) is processed and used. Later, the strength and resolve of the Maya people are put into context with a visit to Mani, where 16th-century missionaries destroyed hundreds of books and statues to eradicate Maya traditions. Savor culinary traditions with a group lunch at *Tutul-Xiu* before continuing to Mayapan, the last Maya capital to exist in Yucatán before the arrival of the Spanish. An expert on this region and one of only a few art historians to have worked at Mayapan, Professor Montes will share thoughts about the alternative path the Maya may have taken if the Spanish had not arrived in Mexico. You will learn about the history of representational government at Mayapan and see evidence



of the elaborate social hierarchy in the settlement. Arrive this afternoon at Chichén Itzá, another ancient Maya city, and the center of the feathered serpent cult. This evening, enjoy dinner as a group in the hotel and reflect on how Maya culture survives today.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodations: Hotel Mundo Maya Chichén Itzá

Day 6: Morning at Chichén Itzá



Start the day with a visit to the brilliant ruins of Chichén Itzá, the dazzling ancient city that once dominated the Yucatán Peninsula. Walk amidst Chichén Itzá's great pyramids and temples, and through the city's Great Ballcourt, the representation of the underworld itself and the largest ballcourt in the Americas. Afterward, spend time continuing to explore the grounds on your own. This afternoon, witness a fascinating demonstration of the ancient Maya ball game, Pok-Ta-Pok. Return to Chichén Itzá this evening for a spectacular light and sound show and dinner on your own.

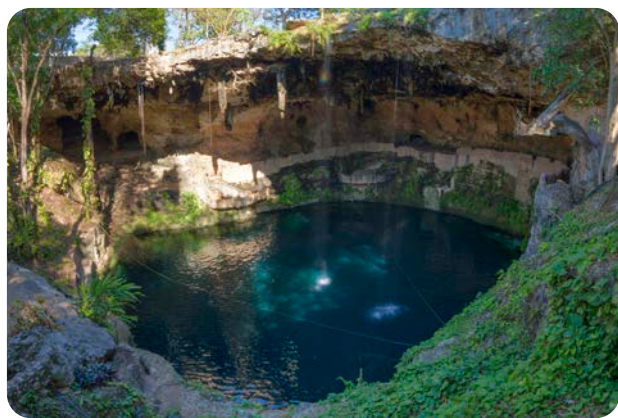
Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Hotel Mundo Maya Chichén Itzá

Day 7: A Visit to Valladolid



This morning, visit Valladolid, named one of Mexico's "magic towns" because of its special significance to the country's rich heritage. Enjoy a brief tour of Valladolid's vibrant markets, its colorful streets, and colonial buildings. After, depart for Cenote Hubiku, sheltered by a dome of stalactites. The cenote is believed to be an entry to the underworld, where Maya gods would visit. Learn about the ancient offerings and rituals performed in cenotes, the artifacts that have been found in them, and take a dip in its crystal blue waters. Continue to Tahcabo this afternoon, whose name loosely translates in Yucatán Maya to "the place we harvest honey." Tour the town with



a local archaeologist and educator, Dr. Iván Batún Alpuche, who will bring you to Tahcabo's local museum and its colonial churches, along with a heritage walk. After, return to the hotel with time to explore the grounds and enjoy dinner on your own.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Hotel Mundo Maya Chichén Itzá

Day 8: The Sun Shines on Izamal

Depart Chichén Itzá this morning for the colorful and charming Yellow City of Izamal, painted yellow in honor of the Maya sun god. Tour the city's rich history, which includes pre-Columbian, colonial, and modern threads. View the 10-story pyramid in the city center and walk through the Convent of St. Anthony of Padua, constructed in 1561 atop a destroyed Maya temple. The Convent is one of the oldest Catholic monasteries in the Americas and its vast outdoor atrium—designed as a Christian teaching tool for the Maya—is the second largest in the world after the Vatican. Return to Mérida this afternoon where you will have time to explore the markets on your own before joining together for a final dinner and reception.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner, Reception

Accommodations: Villa Mercedes Curio

Day 9: Adiós

Depart after breakfast for individual flights home.

Included Meal: Breakfast



Accommodations



Villa Mercedes Curio | Mérida, Mexico

Villa Mercedes Curio is located a short walk from the historic Paseo de Montejo and the elegant Palace of the Governors. The hotel features colonial architecture and offers amenities such as all-day dining at two on-site restaurants, a lobby bar, full-service spa, fitness center, garden, and an outdoor pool. Beautifully landscaped hotel grounds provide a serene environment. Rooms are decorated in a classic style with modern conveniences. **(3 nights)**



Hacienda Uxmal Plantation | Uxmal, Mexico

The Hacienda Uxmal Plantation is located a short walk from the Uxmal Pyramids and Temples. Comfortable rooms feature a blend of traditional Maya and Spanish décor with a terrace overlooking two outdoor pools and tropical gardens. Rooms include air conditioning and en suite bathrooms with hand-tiled ceramic and marble accents and complimentary toiletries. The expansive property is a working plantation, with miles of fruit trees, making the property the world's first hotel hacienda. **(2 Nights)**



Hotel Mundo Maya | Chichén Itzá, Mexico

Hotel Mundo Maya Chichén Itzá is a 5-star retreat nestled in the lush Yucatán jungle, just minutes from Chichén Itzá. Designed with a blend of modern elegance and subtle Mayan architectural influences, the hotel offers a peaceful escape with top-tier amenities. Guests can unwind in two outdoor pools, rejuvenate at the full-service spa, or stay active in the state-of-the-art fitness center. Rooms are spacious and stylish, featuring balconies, air conditioning, flat-screen TVs, and thoughtful touches like ceiling fans and laptop workspaces. **(3 Nights)**

Pricing:

Departure	Double Occupancy	Single Occupancy	Deposit	
December 12–20, 2026	\$7,495	\$8,690	\$500	BOOK NOW
January 2–10, 2027	\$7,495	\$8,690	\$500	BOOK NOW
May 8–16, 2027	\$7,495	\$8,690	\$500	BOOK NOW

What's Included:

- All accommodations for the duration of the tour
- Meals, as noted in the itinerary
- All sightseeing and visits as noted in each itinerary
- Expertise of The Great Courses expert, travel director, and local guides throughout the tour
- All gratuities for on-tour guides, drivers, hotel and restaurant staff as part of the group program
- All on-tour transportation, unless otherwise noted
- Quietvox listening devices to facilitate audibility and social distancing on tour
- The assistance of an ATA professional travel team to assist with pre-trip questions, travel arrangements, including flights, extra hotel nights, and other services
- Comprehensive pre-departure mailings and materials, with information about the destination and what to expect on tour, including a suggested reading list
- Emergency evacuation insurance