

# Chichén itzá in mexico



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

**Introduction**

The sacred Mayan city of Chichén Itzá is located in the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico, about 50 miles inland from the Caribbean Coastline and about 100 miles south of Cancun, Mexico. Even though there are other ancient ruins in Mexico, Chichén Itzá is the second most visited site in this country, predominantly due to the structures like the Great Ballcourt, El Castillo and El Caracol. These phenomenal structures demonstrate the tremendous intelligence of the Mayans as well as how their lifestyle was affected greatly by astronomical events. The Mayans built seven ballcourts in Chichén Itzá for playing the Mesoamerican ball game. The most notable is the Great Ballcourt which is the largest in the Mayan world, with the dimensions of about 503 feet in length, 97.5 feet in width and each side wall was almost 30 feet in height. The way that they designed this ballcourt was so acoustically sound, that a person standing at one end can hear a whisper from a person standing at the other end about 443 feet away. The game itself was played with two teams and each player had the opportunity to hit the ball with their hips, wrists and/or elbows in order to put the ball through a vertical stone ring on either side of the court to score points. The team with the most points at the end of the game would be announced the winner. While the Mayans enjoyed playing the ball game, there were some dire consequences. At the end of each game, it is believed that the captain of the winning team would offer himself to be decapitated to the captain of the losing team. It seems a little strange that the winner would be the one to be sacrificed, but the Mayans considered this to be a great honor.

## Summary

The most well known structure at Chichén Itzá is the temple of Kukulcan, which is also called El Castillo. The pyramid is made out of limestone blocks and towers 75 feet above the ground with a base of about 181 feet on each of its four sides. There are nine platforms on each side of the pyramid and four stairways which lead to the Upper Temple. It is thought that the Upper Temple was used to conduct the most important ceremonies by the Mayan rulers. The construction of El Castillo demonstrates the Mayan's knowledge and use of astronomy. It is believed that the Mayans used various shadows and designs formed by the sun shining on the Pyramid to signal the beginning and ending of the harvest season. During the spring and fall equinox around 3pm, the sun would cast an amazing shadow on the North stairway. When the sun's rays would hit the Northwest corner of the pyramid it would cause seven triangles to form a shadow of a serpent's body that slowly moved downward until it joined up with a large serpent's head carved of stone at the bottom of the stairway. The Mayans also designed El Castillo as a physical calendar. Each stairway consists of 91 steps at a 45 degree angle on each of the four sides of the temple, which equals 364 and when you count the top platform, it is believed to represent 365 days in a year. In addition to the serpent's head at the base of the north stairway, there are serpent heads at the bottom of each of the other three stairways as well. It is truly amazing how much the Mayans knew and how accurately they built El Castillo to monitor their astronomical events. Another beautiful structure at Chichén Itzá with a lot of significance is El Caracol, sometimes referred to as the Observatory. El Caracol is a dome that was erected on top of a large platform so that the Mayans could observe the motions of Venus as well as

the equinoxes and solstices through its many windows. This information directed the Mayan way of life.

### **Conclusion**

The Mayans strategically placed the windows in the dome so that they could follow the motions of Venus. The Mayan leaders would use the changing positions of Venus to make their decisions on whether or not to engage in battle since it is believed that Venus was a war god. Venus' positions would repeat exactly every 8 years, and this would have been very beneficial to the Mayans since they used natural cycles to keep track of time. When Venus is at its most northern extreme position, it lines up with the Grand Stairway in front of El Caracol. Furthermore, the northeast and the southwest corners of the platform line up with the summer and winter solstice. This intentional set-up further aided the Mayans in keeping track of time over the extended periods of the cycle of Venus. Chichén Itzá is one of the New 7 Wonders of the World that would be an enjoyable experience. Even though there are other ancient ruins in Mexico, Chichén Itzá is the second most visited site in this country, predominantly due to the structures like the Great Ballcourt, El Castillo and El Caracol. A visit to Chichén Itzá will give you a better understanding of the Mayan rituals through their ball games. Furthermore you will be amazed at how the structures of El Castillo and El Caracol aided the Mayans in keeping track of time by using astronomical events. Chichén Itzá is undoubtedly one of the most astonishing places to visit in Mexico.