

The ruins of tulum

[Science](#), [Archaeology](#)



Perched on the edge of a cliff, alongside the Caribbean Sea, stands the ancient Mayan ruins of Tulum. Can you imagine a more picturesque place to build a city? We went to visit this stunning archaeological site last week.

Here's what we know:

Tulum was the only Mayan city built on the coast. It was protected by steep sea cliffs on one side, and walls on the other three. Mayans rarely built walls around their cities. I wonder what made Tulum so special? One theory is that it was used to house people of importance, while the peasants lived on the outside. Although experts are not exactly sure, they estimate between 1,000 and 1,600 Mayans once lived here in Tulum.

Visit as early as you can. The Tulum ruins are the third most visited site in Mexico and the most visited site in Quintana Roo. This makes it BUSY! The site is open from 8am to 5pm, everyday. By going earlier in the day, you can avoid some of the crowds. Things started to get really crazy by 10am. 11am is when all the tour buses arrive so avoid this time at all costs! The price to enter is 70 pesos - approximately \$3.70 USD. If you bring a camera, there will be an extra charge of 45 pesos.

It sure does get hot out there. We arrived at 8.30am and it was already stinking hot. It's easy for pale skin folk like us to turn a nice shade of tomato under the Mexican sun. There are areas of shade, but make sure you bring a hat and some sunscreen. Some drinking water is a bonus too. Bring your swimsuit so you can cool off in the ocean once you're done.

The main structure, El Castillo, was once used as a lighthouse. There are two small windows at the top of the castle. These windows helped sailors

navigate through the reef at dusk. If the sailor could see light through both of the windows, he knew he was on the right course.

You don't have to join a tour group to visit the Ruins of Tulum. You can pick up a guidebook at the entrance. That way you can explore the site at your own pace, without the hassle of a large group around you. The tour guides are really knowledgeable though so it just depends on what experience you're after.

Although the buildings are now grey, they used to be painted colours like red and blue. In fact, some of the buildings are painted on the inside as well. To preserve the paintings inside the Temple of the Frescoes, visitors are no longer allowed in.

There are iguanas everywhere! I had never seen one before. Now I'm not one for lizards, but these guys are cool! I wonder why there are so many of them? With views of the Caribbean all day long, they're definitely smart real estate investors.

A taxi from downtown Tulum will set you back around 100-120 pesos. Make sure you ask the taxi driver how much it will cost before you get in. They don't have meters in the cabs and it could get quite awkward at the end if you can't agree on a price.

Tulum was one of the most important ports on the East coast. Goods like turquoise, jade, and cacao beans were once traded here. Tulum was a hub for international trade and distributed goods all over the Yucatan.

It's believed that the people of Tulum were killed off by the Spanish when they introduced diseases into the area. The city however remained inhabited for 70 more years, until it was eventually abandoned.

Did you know the Mayans predicted the end of the world for 21st December 2012? Well... that's not exactly right. That's what I used to think BUT...the Mayan calendar does not predict the end of the world. It was however the end of a calendar cycle. It was more like a rebirth and a promise of positive things to come, like spiritual enlightenment.

The Mayans were quite clever when it came to predicting weather and natural disasters. One legend claims that seashells were strategically placed along the shores of Tulum. When a hurricane was nearing, the shells would let out a sound, warning the people of the approaching storm.

We really enjoyed exploring the ruins at Tulum. The only thing I'd change if I were to visit again, was the timing. Lighting is particularly harsh during the day so it didn't make for the nicest photos. If you want to get some nice shots of the structures, I would recommend you visit outside of normal hours. I noticed a sign on the way in that mentioned a charge of 240 pesos for a sunrise or sunset visit. It's a significant hike in price but it would be a pretty epic spot to watch the sunrise. The site was formerly known as Zama, meaning the City of Dawn, or "place where morning is born" so it seems quite fitting to me!