**Chichen Itza**

Chichén Itzá, one of the best-​known archaeological sites of the [Maya civilization](https://www.thoughtco.com/beginners-guide-to-the-maya-civilization-171598), has a split personality. The site is located in the northern Yucatan peninsula of Mexico, about 90 miles from the coast. The south half of the site, called Old Chichén, was constructed beginning around the year 700, by Maya emigres from the [Puuc](https://www.thoughtco.com/pyramid-of-the-magician-mexico-169623) region of southern Yucatan. The Itzá built temples and palaces at Chichén Itzá including the Red House (Casa Colorada) and the Nunnery (Casa de las Monjas). The [Toltec](https://www.thoughtco.com/toltecs-semi-mythical-legend-of-aztecs-173018) component of Chichén Itzá arrived from [Tula](https://www.thoughtco.com/tula-de-hidalgo-mexico-toltec-city-173031) and their influence can be seen in the the Osario (the High Priest's Grave), and the Eagle and Jaguar Platforms. Most interestingly, a cosmopolitan blending of the two created the Observatory (the Caracol) and the Temple of the Warriors.

Photographers for this project include [Jim Gateley](https://www.flickr.com/photos/jimg944/), [Ben Smith](https://www.flickr.com/photos/dysanovic/76417497/), [Dolan Halbrook](https://www.flickr.com/photos/reneeanddolan/), [Oscar Anton](https://www.flickr.com/photos/oshkar/), and [Leonardo Palotta](https://www.flickr.com/photos/groundzero/136111022/)

This little building is an exemplary form of a Puuc (pronounced "pook") house. Puuc is the name of the hill country in the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico, and their homeland included the big centers of [Uxmal](https://www.thoughtco.com/maya-archaeological-ruins-in-the-yucatan-4088396), Kabah, Labna, and Sayil.

The Puuc style of architecture consisted of veneer stones cemented in place over a rubble core, stone roofs with corbeled vaulting and intricately detailed facades in geometric and mosaic stone veneers. The smaller structures have plain plastered lower elements combined with an intricate roof comb—that's the free-standing tiara on the top of the building, seen here with a lattice crust mosaic. The roof design in this structure has two Chac masks looking out. Chac is the name of the [Maya](https://www.thoughtco.com/ancient-maya-mayans-most-accepted-term-171569) Rain God, one of the dedicatory gods of Chichén Itzá.

Totally Toltec Architectural Styles

Beginning about 950, a new style of architecture crept into the buildings at Chichén Itzá, no doubt along with the Toltec people and culture. The word "Toltec" can have a lot of different meanings, but in this context it refers to people from Tula in what is now Hidalgo state, Mexico, who began to expand their dynastic control into distant regions of Mesoamerica from the fall of Teotihuacan to the 12th century. While the exact relationship between the Itzás and the Toltecs from Tula is complex, it is certain that major changes in architecture and iconography took place at Chichén Itzá as a result of an influx of Toltec people. The result was probably a ruling class made up of Yucatec Maya, Toltecs, and Itzás; it is possible that some of the Maya were also at Tula.

Toltec style includes the presence of the feathered or plumed serpent (called Kukulcan or Quetzalcoatl), chacmools, the Tzompantli skull rack, and Toltec warriors. They are probably the impetus for the increase of emphasis on death culture at Chichén Itzá and elsewhere, including the frequency of human sacrifice and warfare. Architecturally, their elements are colonnades and columned halls with wall benches and pyramids built of stacked platforms of decreasing size in the "tablud and tablero" style, which developed at Teotihuacan. Tablud and tablero refers to the angled stair-step profile of the stacked platform pyramid, or ziggurat.

El Castillo is also an astronomical observatory. On the summer solstice, the stair step profile lights up, and the combination of light and shadow makes it appear as if a giant snake is slithering down the steps of the pyramid.

# Interesting Facts About Chichen Itza

1. Chichen Itza is classified as one of the [New Seven Wonders of the World](https://world.new7wonders.com/) and in 1988 was enlisted as a [UNESCO](http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/483) World Heritage Site.

2. The term Chichen Itza means ‘the mouth at the well of Itza’. It is believed Itza means ‘water magicians’, deriving from the Mayan Itz for ‘magic’ and á for ‘water’.

3. El Castillo (the Temple of Kukulkan) is the famous pyramid which dominates the site of Chichen Itza and it actually sits on another much older temple.

4. Believed by archaeologists to have been a powerful economic city around 600 AD, the fall of Chichen Itza is thought to have been approximately 1000 AD.

5. The design and layout of Chichen Itza was clearly well planned and builders constructed temples and pyramids in sets of clusters.

6. The four most well-known clusters are the Great North Platform, the Ossario Group, the Central Group and the Old Chichen, which is not open to the public. The Great North Platform is home to the most visited sites of Chichen Itza, including the Kukulkan Pyramid, the Great Ball Court and the Temple of the Jaguars.

7. During the Spring (20th of March) and Autumn Equinox (22nd September), the sun’s rays create a shadow across the Kukulkan Pyramid that gives the appearance of a serpent slithering down the staircase.

8. Located on the north side of the Kukulkan Pyramid is a platform dedicated to the planet Venus. The Mayans were devoted astronomers and the movements of Venus held special meaning to them, with it influencing the architecture of the ancient Mayan city [Uxmal](http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/791).

9. Although the Kukulkan Pyramid is the most famous and most visited, there are numerous others in Chichen Itza. The Osario is very similar but smaller in size and at the centre is an opening to a natural cave.

10. Many of the sites in Chichen Itza are known for their unusual sounds. If you clap once from one end of the Ball Court, it produces nine echoes in the middle of the court. Additionally, a clap in front of the Kukulkan Pyramid creates an echo resembling the serpent’s chirp.

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| [Temple of Kukulcán (El Castillo)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Castillo,_Chichen_Itza) dominates the center of the archeological site | |
| [Chichen Itza is located in Mesoamerica](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Mesoamerica_topographic_map-blank.svg)  Chichen Itza  Location within [Mesoamerica](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesoamerica) | |
| **Location** | [Yucatán](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yucat%C3%A1n_(state)), [Mexico](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexico) |
| **Region** | [Yucatán](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yucat%C3%A1n_(state)) |
| **Coordinates** | [20°40′59″N 88°34′7″W](https://geohack.toolforge.org/geohack.php?pagename=Chichen_Itza&params=20_40_59_N_88_34_7_W_region:MX_type:landmark)[Coordinates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geographic_coordinate_system): [20°40′59″N 88°34′7″W](https://geohack.toolforge.org/geohack.php?pagename=Chichen_Itza&params=20_40_59_N_88_34_7_W_region:MX_type:landmark) |
| **History** | |
| **Periods** | Late Classic to Early Postclassic |
| **Cultures** | [Maya civilization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maya_civilization) |
|  | |
| [**UNESCO World Heritage Site**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Heritage_Site) | |
| **Official name** | Pre-Hispanic City of Chichen-Itza |
| **Type** | Cultural |
| **Criteria** | i, ii, iii |
| **Designated** | 1988 (12th [session](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Heritage_Committee)) |
| **Reference no.** | [483](https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/483) |
| **State Party** | [Mexico](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexico) |
| **Region** | [Latin America and the Caribbean](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_World_Heritage_Sites_in_the_Americas) |