

Maya welcome new Era

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End of cycle is Not end of world!

Ceremonial fires burned and conches sounded off as dawn broke over the steps of the main pyramid at the Mayan ruins of Chichen Itza Friday, making what many believe is the conclusion of a vast, 5,125-year cycle in the Mayan calendar.



Some have interpreted the prophetic moment as the end of the world. The hundreds gathered in the ancient Mayan city, however, said they believed it marked the birth of a new and better age.

Genaro Hernandez stood with his arms outstretched to the morning light, all clad in white, facing the pyramids' grey stone, to welcome the new era.

"This world is being reborn as a better world," said Hernandez, a 55-year old accountant who wore an expression of bliss.

No one was quite sure at what time the Mayas' 13th Baktun would officially end on this Dec. 21. Some think it already ended at midnight. Others looked to Friday's dawn here in the Maya heartland. Some had later times in mind. One thing became clear to many on the site by Friday morning: The world had not ended.

Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History even suggested that historical calculations to synchronize the Mayan and Western calendars might be off a few days. It said the Mayan Long Count calendar cycle might not really end until Sunday.

Whatever the details, the chance to mark epochal change seemed to be the main concern among celebrants drawn to the Yucatan peninsula.

Hundreds of people were scattered around the vast central plaza of Chichen Itza, some kneeling in attitudes of prayer, some seated with arms outstretched in positions of meditation, all facing El Castillo, the massive main pyramid.

Ivan Gutierrez, a 37-year-old artist who lives in the nearby village, stood before the pyramid and blew a low, sonorous blast on a conch horn. "It has already arrived, we are already in it," he said of the new era. "We are in a frequency of love, we are in a new vibration."

But it was unclear how long the love would last: A security guard quickly came over and asked him

to stop blowing his conch shell, enforcing the ruin site's ban on holding ceremonies without previous permits.

What nobody was calling the moment was the end of the world, as some people in recent years have interpreted the meaning of the end of the 13th Baktun — despite the insistence of archeologists and the Maya themselves it meant no such thing.

"We'll still have to pay taxes next year," said Gabriel Romero, a Los Angeles-based spiritualist who uses crystal skulls in his ceremonies.

Similar ceremonies greeted the dawn in neighboring Guatemala, where Mayan spiritual leaders burned offerings and families danced to celebrate the new era. Guatemalan President Otto Perez Molina and Costa Rican President Laura Chinchilla attended an official ceremony in the department of Peten, along with thousands of celebrants and artists.

If the chanting and dancing of a crystal skull ceremony held Thursday in Mexico weren't enough to end fears of an apocalypse, scientists chimed in, too.

Bill Leith, the U.S. Geological Survey's senior science adviser for earthquake and geologic hazards, said that by late Thursday, absolutely nothing out of the ordinary had been detected in seismic activities, solar flares, volcanos or the Earth's geomagnetic field.

"It's a fairly unremarkable day on planet Earth today, and in the last few days," Leith said. "There are no major eruptions going on."

There had been about 120 small earthquakes and a moderate temblor in Japan, he said. "That's very much a normal day."

Still, there were some who wouldn't truly feel safe until the sun sets Friday over the pyramids in Yucatan peninsula, the heartland of the Maya.

Mexico's best-known seer, Antonio Vazquez Alba, known as "El Brujo Mayor," said he had received emails containing rumors that a mass suicide might be planned in Argentina.

End-of-the-world paranoia, in fact, has spread around the world.

Dozens of schools in Michigan canceled classes for thousands of students this week amid rumors of violence tied to the prophetic date. In France, people expecting doomsday were looking expectantly to a mountain in the Pyrenees where they believe a hidden spaceship was waiting to spirit them away. And in China, government authorities were cracking down on a fringe Christian group spreading rumors about the world's end, while preaching that Jesus had reappeared as a woman in central China.

Vazquez said he was sure that human nature represented the only threat Friday. "Nature isn't going to do us any harm, but we can do damage to ourselves," he said.

Authorities worried about overcrowding and possible stampedes during celebrations Friday at Mayan ruin sites like Chichen Itza and Uxmal, both about 1 1/2 hours from Merida, the Yucatan state capital. Special police and guard details were assigned to the pyramids.

As Friday's dawn began sweeping around the globe, there was no sign of an apocalypse.

Indeed, the social network Imgur posted photos of clocks turning midnight in the Asia-Pacific region with messages such as: "The world has not ended. Sincerely, New Zealand."

Average residents of the Yucatan, where the Mayas invented the 394-year calendar cycles known as baktuns, the 13th of which ends Friday, were pretty upbeat about the day.

Yucatan Gov. Rolando Zapata said he felt growing good vibes.

"We believe that the beginning of a new baktun means the beginning of a new era, and we're receiving it with great optimism," Zapata said.

Even before the baktun's end, hundreds of spiritualists from Asian, North American, South American and European shamanistic traditions mingled amiably with the Mexican hosts at a convention center in Merida on Thursday.

Dozens of booths offered people the chance to have their auras photographed with "Chi" light, get a shamanic cleansing or buy sandals, herbs and whole-grain baked goods.

"This is the beginning of a change in priorities and perceptions. We are all one," said Esther Romo, a Mexico City businesswoman who works in art promotion and galleries. "No limits, no boundaries, no nationalities, just fusion."

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<http://tinyurl.com/cke5ksx>

Jungle Drum Prose/Poetry. <http://jungledrum.lingama.net/news/story-306.html>