

temple is the name of the Mayan snake deity, perched the giant snake head at the base of the Temple. Nearby are other imposing structures, reflecting not only the fascination of the Maya with celestial calculations but also their earnestness in pleasing the gods. There is the Temple of the Jaguar, the Temple of the Warriors, the Temple of the Thousand Columns, the Observatory, and more. It is no wonder that Chichen Itza is one of the most popular attractions not only in the Yucatan but in all of Mexico.

4:00 pm came and passed, and still the heavy clouds seemed to be deliberately hiding the sun from us. Every time there was a gasp as the lining of the clouds grew brighter, indicating a possible burst of light, there was another cloud quickly rushing over to add another layer to hide the sun. We wandered the grounds while watching the sky for some breakthrough. The guards were closing off all the temple areas in deference to the usual 4:30 pm closing of the site, and concentrating everyone in the square before the great pyramid, which would stay open today until 6:00 pm.

The vendors were having a field day as people bought their own version of sacred relics as keepsakes of the special pilgrimage on this unique day. Every vendor was offering discounts, sort of. When a friend bought a red, wooden skeleton (one of the Day of the Dead decorations) for 100 pesos (about \$10.00 US), I stood ready to purchase one afterward but my special price was 500 pesos. When I reminded the cheery vendor of my friend's "special price", he relented and offered me the piece for 200 pesos. We had a very friendly chat for several minutes, and finally I was allowed the same pricing. Everywhere, the vendors were personable and chatty. One man called out as I walked by his deserted stall, "please come over to look so I can rip you off". He was laughing, I was laughing and we had a nice talk for a few minutes.

5:00 pm and the crowds started to head back to the parking lot. Their Indiana Jones moment had not arrived. The sun stayed behind the clouds; the illuminated snake did not make its way from the top of the pyramid to the giant snake head, the Kukulikan, at the base. There was a momentary panic as the sun actually started to emerge, but then climbed back behind yet another cloud. Even the sun had a sense of humour today.

But you know, I did not hear one word of complaint or disappointment from anyone in the crowd or in our small group of nine Canadians. Sharing in the celebration of the autumnal equinox was the important experience for all of us and having a chance to witness the mystical structures at Chichen Itza was reward enough.

With the end of the great cycle of the Mayan Calendar occurring on December 21st, 2012, the crowds will, no doubt, gather at Chichen Itza once again to participate in the monumental event. If it does not actually change the world, it will, as it always does, change the perception of the visitors about the history, traditions, mysticism, and beliefs of the Maya and Mexico.

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Steve Gillick is a writer for BrooWaha. For more information, visit the writer's [website](#).

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



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