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36 Yucatán, Mexico

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Chichen Itza.

Israel Lea/Associated Press

nscriptions in the ancient Mayan calendar pointed to Dec. 21, 2012, as an ending. While a few alarmists read this as a sign of the apocalypse, many scholars interpreted it as symbolizing a new era. In strongholds of Mayan culture like the Yucatán Peninsula, home to Chichen Itza, Uxmal and other archaeological sites, the second view is the one with traction: officials there have planned a series of celebrations through March that include concerts, dance rituals, literary festivals and talks by renowned astronomers. The cultural immersion is spilling over onto the area's resorts. One of them, [Hotel Esencia](#), a seaside lodging with 29 thatched palapas and an organic spa, is offering a three-day cleansing ritual called Kukulkan, where trained healers concoct personalized herbal baths. A quieter look at Mayan heritage is on hand at the new Museo Maya in Cancún, which has more than 300 relics and 10,000-year-old human remains from its permanent collection on display. — Paola Singer



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