YOUR ARCHAEOLOGICAL ZONE MINI GUIDE

Ichkabal: A Mayan city in the jungle

Explore the ancient Mayan city that once controlled the region more than 2,300 years ago. Walk through its central area, where pyramids up to 40 meters high and ceremonial plazas reflect its cultural importance. Admire the Petén-style architecture and discover how its inhabitants lived in the middle of the jungle. It's a visit that enables you to get closer to the past and understand its legacy.





Structure 1: Main architectural complex

The largest complex on the site lies on a square base with 230 m sides. Its upper temple rises to a height of 35 m. Currently, only some segments of the base walls are visible as their main facades remain hidden under dense vegetation not yet cleared by archaeologists.

Structure 2: The five brothers

This elongated platform (200 m × 10 m) houses five temples, of which only the second has been explored. This building resembles a Group E building and served as an astronomical marker establishing a link between the earth and the stars.



Structure 4: The great triadic acropolis

This acropolis (150 m square base and 42 m high) houses three temples at first floor level. At the top, the main temple retains its upper enclosure, which has a staircase flanked by 3 m-high stucco mascaron ornaments bearing traces of paint, which are covered up for their protection. After you've climbed 136 steps, the upper fourth level affords you a view of the jungle and the full extent of Ichkabal in its original state.



Main Square: Ceremonial and urban center

This five-hectare square was the center of Ichkabal. To the west is the imposing Structure 2; to the east, buildings 4-7; to the north, complexes 10, 11, and 12; and to the south, the Crocodile Pool. It was a public space where political, commercial, and ceremonial activities were carried out in the open air.



The Crocodile Pool: Ancestral engineering

The Maya built this artificial reservoir (a pool 100 m long and 5 m deep) next to the main square to supply the city with water. Today, it has become an ecosystem inhabited by crocodiles, herons, fish, crustaceans, and turtles: a space where Mayan hydraulic ingenuity coexists with current biodiversity.

Structure 6: Similar to a triadic complex

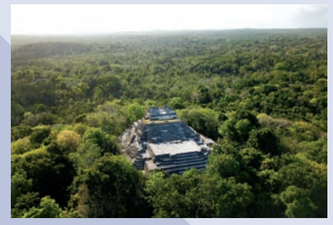
Although its layout —a central building with two lateral structures—is reminiscent of a triadic complex, its smaller size excludes it from this category. Its staircase was originally flanked by stucco mascarons, which have since been lost. A fragmented, eroded stele was found during the archaeological dig. At the top, there must have been an enclosure, which is now almost completely gone.





Structure 7 and its front altar

This Petén-style building is remarkable for its rectangular altar, which is accessed by steps to the north and south. During the excavation, an offering was found containing objects from other regions (shells from the Pacific and Guatemalan jade): evidence of Ichkabal's trade links with other Mayan centers.



Triadic complexes in Ichkabal

These architectural complexes, consisting of three buildings (one central and two lateral) on an elevated platform, are noteworthy for their symmetry and alignment towards a courtyard. Structures 4 and 5 exemplify this design, which may symbolize the three levels of the cosmos in the Mayan worldview: heaven, earth, and the underworld.

Structure 5: A triadic acropolis

This acropolis (200 m × 150 m × 35 m high) is representative of Mayan architecture in Ichkabal. Its first level features two palaces around a square. After climbing 71 steps, you reach the upper enclosure, where you can see the stacked staircases that reveal its different stages of construction. Preserved Petén-style stucco mascaron ornaments flank the main staircase: one is covered for its protection and the other still has its supporting stones intact.



DID YOU KNOW...?

Ichkabal's inhabitants migrated 1,500 years ago and even took parts of their buildings with them! The reasons for this abandonment and dismantling remain an archaeological mystery although they are linked to political or environmental changes that occurred in the Mayan area.



ICHKABAL

ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER MAYAN CITIES



Vessel with pseudo-glyph
Structure 5 at the Maya Museum in Cancún



- **1000 B.C.** — Aguada Fénix, Tabasco
- **700 B.C.** — Izamal, Yucatán
- **550 B.C.** — Ichkabal, Quintana Roo
- **300 B.C.** — Oxtankah, Quintana Roo
- **250-200 A.D.** — Calakmul, Campeche
- **300 A.D.** — Teotihuacan, State of Mexico
- **900 A.D.** — Chichén Itzá, Yucatán
- **1250 A.D.** — Mayapán, Yucatán
- **1521 A.D.** — The coming of the Spaniards



AMONG GIANTS: HEIGHT THAT SPEAKS OF POWER

Ichkabal's main buildings rise to a height of 42 m, which surpasses the Castle of Kukulkán in Chichén Itzá (30 m). Although they are not a big as Nohoch Mul in Cobá (42 m) or Structure II in Calakmul (55 m), their size reflects the political and religious importance of the site.

ARCHITECTURAL FOOTPRINT: BASED ON THE PETÉN STYLE

The buildings at Ichkabal are in the Petén style, which is characteristic of the Maya area between the Preclassic and Classic periods (550 B.C.–1200 A.D.). This architectural form of expression is recognized for its:

- Recessed corners (angular recesses) and sloping walls.
- Stucco coating (a mixture of lime, sand, and mineral pigments), which was polished and painted in bright colors.
- Triadic acropolises: three temples on a platform (associated with the people's worldview).
- Type E complexes aligned with astronomical events.
- Huge mascarons flanking staircases.
- Apron moldings (horizontal cornices).

The squares where the people gathered were the political and religious heart of the city.



Recommended visitor routes
The site has a short route of 1.5 km and a longer route of 2 km. If you also visit the upper temples in Structures 4 and 5, you can walk around the entire site in approximately 90 to 120 minutes.

Address
Carretera El Suspiro-Ichkabal km 21, Ejido Bacalar, Bacalar, Quintana Roo

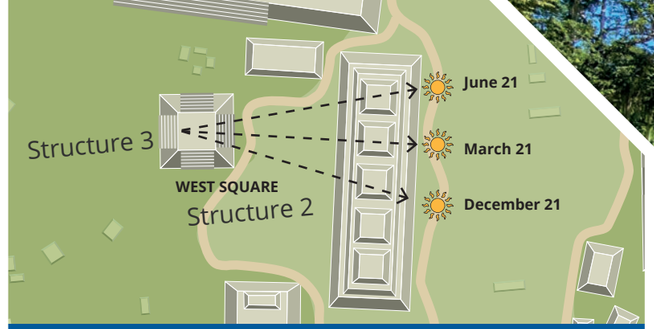
Services
Parking is managed by Ejido Bacalar. The zone possesses a service unit with a reception area, restrooms, lounge, and drinking fountains.

Opening hours
Monday to Sunday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Doors close at 4:00 p.m.

www.inah.gob.mx/zonas/ichkabal
ichkabal@inah.gob.mx
Ichkabal Zona Arqueológica
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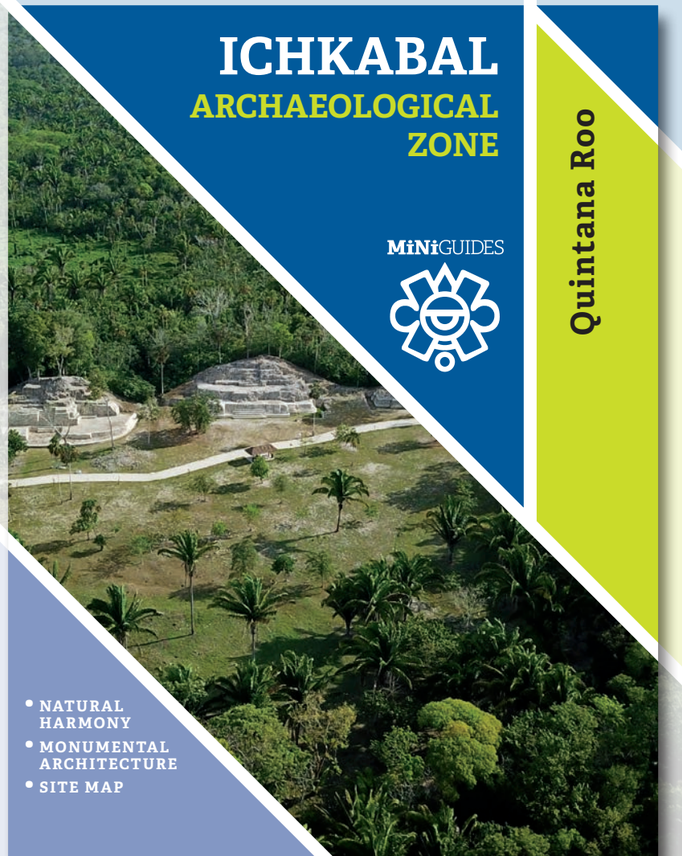
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GROUP E: ASTRONOMICAL OBSERVATORY

This astronomical complex, which consists of an elongated platform with three aligned structures and a pyramid to the west, functioned as a solar observatory. At dawn, the sun aligns with the buildings during equinoxes and solstices, marking ritual cycles. The West Square, which is home to this group, was a sacred space where architecture and heaven connected.



ICHKABAL
ARCHAEOLOGICAL ZONE

MiNiGUIDES

Quintana Roo

- NATURAL HARMONY
- MONUMENTAL ARCHITECTURE
- SITE MAP





ICHKABAL: A NAME THAT SHEDS LIGHT ON ITS SURROUNDINGS

Ichkabal ("between lowlands" in Mayan) owes its name to its location between two floodplains. The ancient Maya transformed these wetlands into farmland that sustained the city. Today, the jungle retains its biodiversity: monkeys, birds, and other animals inhabit the ruins, which is indicative of the relationship between nature and culture.

A WINDOW TO MAYAN SPLENDOR

Discovered in 1995 by archaeologist Enrique Nalda and his team, the Ichkabal archaeological site bears witness to Mayan power in southern Quintana Roo. After three decades of research and conservation, this site, which was opened to the public in 2025, invites you to explore its ceremonial center, where monumental structures rise above a terrain of over 60 km². Inhabited from the Middle Preclassic period (550–300 B.C.) to the Late Classic period (800–1200 A.D.), Ichkabal was a key political and economic center that communicated with cities like Dzibanché by means of the Mayan causeway network (sacbeoob). Archaeological evidence suggests that decisions were made here that shaped the region's future.