

# AMAYAN EXPERIENCE

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Sometimes we find something that changes us so profoundly that we don't even know we could have looked for it earlier.



## A personal encounter in Chichen Itza great news for those who seek

By Michael Maurus

As with so many good things in life, they come to us when we least expect them or when we are not looking for them.

The same can be said about my involvement with the Hacienda Chichen and the Maya Foundation In Laakeech.

As a commercial photographer I traveled around the world, met interesting people, had a successful studio in Cancun, Mexico, took responsibility for a wife, kid, employees and a dog. Everything looked just fine on the outside, yet I was restless and constantly looking for something. For many years I thought I am searching for the perfect light, the perfect setting and the perfect model for that perfect photograph that will get me into

the history books of photography.

So on my pursuit of that perfect photograph I hired more assistants, got more equipment and turned into a photo producing machine racing from one photo shooting to the other. The art directors and clients were happy with the results and for many years i steadily grew a nice business yet the perfect photo still eluded me.

Then came the swine flu followed by the finical crisis and my business, which was heavily relying on advertising photography went down. My wife divorced me and my grown up daughter went to live in Germany.

All I had left was a huge pile of equipment, my dog and the feeling that something really good might come out of all of this.

This is when my friends Belisa Barbachano and Bruce Gordon came into the picture. They are a happily married couple and the owners of the lovely boutique hotel Hacienda Chichen in Chichen Itza as well as the founders of the Maya Foundation In Laakeech.

I met Bruce a few years earlier in Cancun through friends and we stayed in contact and became friends as well.

When they learned that I sort of hit a rough spot, their generous nature came true.

# Maya Foundation In Laakeech welcomes volunteers

Belisa and Bruce invited me to stay at their Hacienda and do some volunteer work for the "Maya Foundation In Laakeech". Intriguing as it was, I wasn't to sure about the invitation and me fitting in there.

All my adult life I have been a city boy, living a fast paced life. Accustomed to glitz and glamour and the amenities a modern life brings. I had a hard time picturing myself in the middle of nowhere in the Yucatan jungle, hundreds of miles away from the next Starbucks.

Besides that, in the past I always felt very uneasy, anxious and in general uncomfortable when I encountered anything Maya. When I saw Mayan people in the city I was strangely drawn to them and wanted to photograph them yet something was telling me not to. Mostly I just looked at them and they looked at me and their smiles left me wondering what they could possibly know I don't.

Having lived in Mexico for the past twenty years I of course have visited some the famous Maya sites such as Chichen Itza, Tulum and Uxmal and whenever I set foot on some of these sites, those strange feelings grew even stronger.

I remember one encounter at Chichen Itza very distinctively. It was many years ago when visitors were still allowed to climb up the Kukulkan pyramid and to go inside to see the Jaguar Throne of Chak Mool.

**My first thought was "Where on Gods green earth is Laakeech and do they have a Starbucks there?". Only later would I find out that "In Laakeech" does not refer to a place but comes from the Mayan language and means " I recognize in you my other self".**

All day long during this visit I had the same old feelings of uneasiness as I always had. But as always I just ignored them and of course did not tell anybody about it. When my friends suggested that we go inside the pyramid to see the throne of Chak Mool I agreed and followed along.

As we climbed up the tight staircase inside the pyramid and as we came closer to the temple, my feeling of uneasiness grew stronger and stronger. As we finally stood in front of the temple I stared at it for awhile and that strange feeling of something pulling me got so strong that i had to turn around and leave in a hurry. When i was finally outside again, looking back at the Kukulkan pyramid I wondered what this was all about and why I got so spooked.

I thought it might have been the steep and narrow stairway but from my time as cave diver I knew that i am not claustrophobic as I have been in much narrower spaces underwater. Nor am I spooked easily. I walked around the Bronx and Harlem in the middle of the night.

**Ongoing Effort**

There is still a great social need to support the health and education of Maya children.

**Belisa Barbachano**



I jumped out of perfectly fine airplanes and was strapped to the outside of a helicopter to get the perfect angle for a photograph. But I never felt anything close to what I felt when I stood in front of Chac Mool's temple inside the Kukulkan pyramid.

This was the last time I had anything to do with anything Maya and I never went back to any Maya sites nor did I interact with any Maya people.

This was until the invitation came from Belisa and Bruce to stay with them and to possibly getting involved with the foundation.

The foundation is seated in the village of Xcalacoop, which is about 6 km from the ruins of Chichen Itza. Some of the goals are to bring opportunities and support to rural Mayan communities through education, community health care and the preservation of Mayan traditions. Another central focus of the foundation is to educate the rural community about sustainable agriculture and combine this with their ancient wisdom of the land.

The main focus however is on the well being of the youngest. The foundation with Belisa, Bruce and their two adult children Izy and Ruben together with volunteers from all over the world are actively involved on a daily basis with the school and the children's day care center in Xcalacoop. Volunteers mostly teach english and in return they receive generous smiles and big hugs from the children.



It is the Maya of today and their way of living that captivates me and through that I stay involved with the Maya Foundation In Laakeech.

I have meanwhile made my permanent home in Chichen Itza to live amongst the Maya and whenever I have to leave here for a photo shooting, I can't wait to get back.

**Michael Maurus**

As for me. I didn't jump in right away upon my arrival here. It grew on me. The bungalow, which is provided for me by the foundation is on the grounds of Chichen Itza. The Kukulkan pyramid is about a two minute stroll away and I can see the observatory from my backyard. At first I had these same old feelings about everything Maya but over time this changed dramatically. It is the shy, almost reserved but friendly nature of the Maya people that got me out of my shell first. After having had their superior knowledge about astronomy almost entirely destroyed and being exploited

for hundreds of years, I can feel a renewal of pride in them. It is not a pride that is boisterous but a pride that transmits gratitude and humility. I also met and got to know one of the Shamans here and had the honor of participating in some of the ceremonies he holds. These are not fake tourist attractions as you might see in some of the theme parks close to Cancun or on a indian reservation in the US. These are real ceremonies, rooted in ancient wisdom and believes, kept alive today and guarded by shamans. By having the opportunity of talking to these healers and learning more about the meanings of these ceremonies, I am starting to understand and to feel the power of this blessed ground.



**December 21, 2012 is not the end of the world.**  
It will be the beginning of a new cycle and a shift in consciousness will occur.

## Mayan Prophecy 2012

For the Maya it is not the doomsday scenario as some Hollywood film makers and snake oil sales people try to make us believe.

For the wise man here it is simply the end of a cycle with a new one to start. They believe that there will be a shift in consciousness and that the time in which we are right now is the time for cleansing.

In many ways this shift has already started around the world. Nations rise

against oppression in the Middle East, sustainable living has become more prominent then ever and governments are starting to abandon atomic energy.

As one of the shamans put it so adequately:

“While people who don't know are waiting for the end, we are waiting for the beginning”

## Sharing the Experience with the world

With the help of the Maya Foundation In Laakeech, Belisa Barbachano, Bruce Gordon and the Shamans of this region, I am currently working on a photo series to portrait the Maya of today and to document the lessons they have for us.

This series is set to go on tour in 2012 in form of exhibitions and multimedia shows.



It is true, we come here with the best of intentions to share our knowledge with the Maya people.

We teach them english, basic computer skills and show them how they can better their lives.

In almost all cases this has a positive effect on them, but in all reality it is us who walk away with so much more then we could ever give.

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