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## Introduction: Tourism in the Lands of the Maya

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# **Tourism in the Lands of the Maya**

## **Introduction**

**Cristina Oehmichen, UNAM**

This issue proposes to discuss the relationship of Maya peoples and communities with tourism: from those aspects that have to do with migration from small rural communities to large tourist destinations, to those that refer to the use of Maya cultural heritage for the purpose of attracting tourists. For this issue, we start by recognizing that we are currently experiencing a process of global touristification that penetrates even the most remote corners of the planet, generating changes in the use of territory and natural resources, in employment, in the forms of social organization, in the processes of identity and cultural change, as well as in the relationship of communities with cultural heritage, among other things.

The processes of planetary touristification are nourished by culture, both in its material form as found in archaeological zones, historical monuments, and landscapes of singular beauty and exceptionality, as well as immaterial, expressed in the ethnic and cultural diversity of the communities of the sites visited. Tourism development in the Mayan lands had a great impulse in the 1970s, when the city of Cancun was built as a planned center. This was followed by other sites of tourist attraction, as would be the case of the Riviera Maya, whose growth has been incessant since the 1990s. Other regions of the Mayan lands have not escaped touristification. This is the case of tourism expansion in the states of Yucatan, Campeche, Quintana Roo and Chiapas, in Mexico, as well as in various regions of Guatemala, where tourism has been developing at an accelerated pace since the end of the war. Several places in Belize and even Honduras are also undergoing processes of touristification that tend to modify living conditions, productive activities, the environment, and social and labor relations in the territories where they are established.

The issue opens with José Luis Escalona Victoria's article "Journey through the Ruins of an Ancient Civilization in Yucatán. Alfred Tozzer and Chichén, 1902". This article refers to the conditions of Tozzer's trip to the region of Chichen, when he was a student of anthropology and only 24 years old. Based on archival work, José Luis Escalona shows the conditions of the trip undertaken by Tozzer, the fascination he had for the archaeological remains and other material objects, such as codices, colonial documents and even the language of the inhabitants. After a long journey by steamboat and after entering Mexico through the port of Progreso, Tozzer arrived at the Chichén hacienda, which at that time was owned by Edward H. Thompson, to carry out a research stay and analyze the archaeological remains, where the building known as "El Castillo" is located, in what is now known as Chichén Itzá.

The following article brings us to the XXI Century and modern technology. In the article "Rituality and new technologies among the Maya: the hetzmek in migration, work and tourism", Cristina Oehmichen and Concepción Escalona analyze the importance for Maya communities of the use of new information and communication technologies (ICT) and the imaginaries associated

with them. To show this, they analyze the importance that these technologies have acquired in one of the most widespread rituals: the *hetzmek*, considered one of the most important rites of the life cycle that have persisted over time among the peninsular Maya. Three articles in this issue allude to the most important tourism project developed during the administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador: the Train Maya, launched in 2019.

The first is a contribution by Melissa Elbez entitled "A rebellious territory according to the tourism scenario. Negotiating national loss and indigenism in Quintana Roo". The author argues that the history of the Mexican state of Quintana Roo teaches us that tourism and migration can strengthen nationalisms. She turns to the memory of the Caste War that contemporary communities keep alive, which had been hidden from the gaze of tourists. The work investigates the ways in which the Maya negotiate their identity as indigenous people of the nation, without losing sight of their sense of territorial sovereignty, just when the development of the Maya Train is being discussed.

The following article is entitled "Las vías de la mayanización: Turismo, Tren Maya y representaciones de la mayanidad en la Península de Yucatán" by Marco Almeida Poot, Samuel Jouault and Yassir Rodríguez Martínez. The authors analyze how diverse social actors, self-identified or not as Maya, activate varied social representations of Mayanity in the face of the development of the Tren Maya project. This project, the authors argue, offers a conceptual route to talk about the multiple representations of the Maya and Mayanity. In the article they present three examples that make visible the types of representations, as well as the concrete strategies of the Mayan people in the face of the development of the Mayan Train.

To conclude this section, the article "Brave Storytelling: Diasporic Indigenous Students, Vulnerability, and the Arts" by Luis Javier Pentón is presented. This essay analyzes how secondary education for migrant students in the United States can benefit from the use of poetry and drawing in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classrooms. The difficulties faced by migrant children from highland Maya communities are often not fully understood by educators. However, as demonstrated in this study, the use of poetry and drawing can enable students to express themselves freely through these arts, facilitate communication between students and teachers, and achieve better learning outcomes.

The next section of this issue is composed of poetic and literary contributions by Ismael Briceno Mukul, Donny Limber de Atocha Brito May and Daniel Caño, who are Yucatecan and Guatemalan poets whose poetry has been translated and published in Maya, Spanish and English. We also present a book review by Sergio Vives Scheel on the book of poems "Sentado en la orilla de río Yichk'u" (Sitting on the banks of the Yichk'u River).

We close this issue with the "Comments" section, which includes a text by Ivet Reyes Maturano, who presents the article "Discursive analysis of the Mayan Train: territorial fragmentation of a developmentalist promise". In this work the author warns that the Yucatan Peninsula is going through a profound transformation derived from the implementation of large-scale infrastructure projects, among which is the Mayan Train. In this paper the author asks how the discursive dimension of this project affects territorial reconfiguration.