

2012: How the Ancient Maya Saw It

John Major Jenkins, author of *The 2012 Story* (2009), *Maya Cosmogenesis 2012* (1998)

Call-out box for the *Lonely Planet Belize Guide* (2011)

December 21, 2012 is a great period-ending in the Maya Long Count calendar, written 13.0.0.0.0. This is the end of a 13-B'aktun period, some 5,125 years. There is now evidence for how the ancient Maya thought about this date, and it has nothing to do with the apocalyptic scenarios spun out by Hollywood and believed to be true by survivalists and doomsday writers.

Many scholars believe that the Long Count calendar originated in the pre-Classical Period in the region of southern Mexico and Guatemala. This region was dominated by early cities such as Tak'alik Ab'aj and Izapa. The astronomical orientations at sites such as these suggest that a solstice-oriented cosmology was developed when the first Long Count dates appear, in the 1st-century BC. This is significant because December 21, 2012, falls on a solstice, the day of the sun's yearly turnabout. It is unlikely that such a placement is coincidental.

At Quiriguá in Guatemala, dated monuments describe creation events that happened at the end of the previous 13-B'aktun period, back in 3114 BC. Periods of 13 B'aktuns were clearly important and they belonged to a Creation Mythology that utilized the astronomy of the three 'hearthstone' stars in the constellation of Orion. Arranged like the triangular stones used in Maya hearths, Orion's stars of Alnitak, Saiph and Rigel also were symbolized in monumental constructions at some Maya sites. At Caracol in Belize, for example, Structure A-2 in Plaza A on the west side of the site consists of three pyramids arranged in the form of the three hearthstone stars. If you climb this structure, you will occupy one of the Creation Places of Maya mythology, one associated with 3114 BC. But there is another one associated with 2012.

The date of the end of the current 13-B'aktun period, in 2012, is found on Monument 6 from the site of Tortuguero in Mexico. Carved in 669 AD, it describes the life of a Maya king named Bahlam Ajaw (Lord Jaguar). He referenced the 2012 date because he had a special relationship with it, and he could thus amplify his status as king by emphasizing this connection in his royal inscriptions. The special connection he had with 2012 involves the position of the sun on his birthday in 612 AD. On his birthday the sun was aligned with the great Crossroads in the sky, a 'sacred tree' formed by the Milky Way road and the ecliptic road (the path of the sun, moon and planets). On the December solstice in 2012 the sun will occupy this same Crossroads position in the sky. Like the hearthstones in Orion, the center of this Crossroads symbolizes a cosmic center, a Creation Place. Lord Jaguar, king of Tortuguero, was born at this alignment, and the world was thought to be reborn at the future alignment, on the solstice of 13.0.0.0.0.

We can thus understand that December 21, 2012, was intended by the ancient Maya to target an astronomical alignment which, to them, meant transformation and world renewal. So why is there so much misinformation about 2012 in the media and the marketplace? The answer involves conflicting ideas about time. In the Maya worldview, time moves in cycles and the end of a cycle brings renewal. There are spiritual teachings in the Maya Creation Myth that describe the process. In the Western Judeo-Christian time concept, time is linear. Creation is followed by history and then an apocalyptic final end. Doomsday is not something inherent in the ancient Maya's understanding of 2012, it is something projected into it by our own culture's bias toward violence and a final destruction.

– Published as a call-out box in the *Lonely Planet Belize Guide* 2011

Additional resources dedicated to reconstructing what the ancient Maya thought about 2012:

The Center for 2012 Studies: <http://thecenterfor2012studies.com>

Maya cosmology and calendrics: <http://Alignment2012.com>

Misconceptions about 2012 addressed here: <http://Update2012.com>