

Heritage and Ethnoecology in the Maya World
May 29-June 23, 2012
Cultural Immersion/Study Abroad Course
AANT 340

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Course Description

Heritage and Ethno-ecology in the Maya World is a 4-week, 3 unit course held in Yucatan, Mexico. The course is centered in the Maya village of Ek’Balam, and includes excursions around the state. Students gain a holistic understanding of life in a modern Maya community through exposure to some of the most pressing issues currently faced by Mayas in the region; how to participate (or not) in tourism development through the presentation of heritage and biodiversity conservation.

Lectures on local history, gender relations, ecology, and economics begin as soon as students arrive. Students learn and apply the primary method of systematic observation and recording of one’s surroundings in journals and field notes. The secondary method taught is the collection and visual documentation of ethno-ecological data in the forests surrounding Ek’Balam. This teaches students a valuable field methodology and gives them an opportunity to collaborate with an ongoing research project in the village. Graded assignments include weekly submission of field notes, an archive of ethno-ecological data, and a final reflective paper submitted at the end of the course.

A ANT 340 Topics in Ethnology (3)

Survey of the cultures of one of the major regions of the world. May be repeated for credit when topic differs. Consult class schedule for specific topic. Prerequisite(s): A ANT 108.

Program structure

Week 1-2 – Students participate in daily seminars from 10:00am until 1:00pm, Monday through Friday. Seminars are held in the multipurpose room of the village’s community-based tourism project.

Week 3 – Excursions

Week 4 – Ethno-ecological data collection.

Grading

Evaluation of student success is based on 1) the quality of the manner in which the student works through the processes and dynamics of fieldwork, including proactive participation in all components, 2)

the submission of a final reflective paper (5-7 pages), and 3) the archiving, storage, and organization of research materials according to criteria and formats provided, including field notes and photos.

Credits and Contact Hours

40 instructional contact hours in seminars (Ek'Balam)

15 instructional contact hours in archaeological tours

5 instructional contact hours in guest lectures

Excursions

History

Yucatan boasts a dynamic and unique history that is still very much alive in oral story-telling traditions, food ways, and architecture of both rural, indigenous villages and the state capital of Merida. Merida is a beautiful, bustling cosmopolitan city. The excursion to Merida serves to teach students about the regional history of Yucatan. As part of the trip, we will attend a lecture at the Universidad Autonoma de Yucatan about Merida's history and the economic connections to the region both historically (through the trade of henequen) and presently (through the tourism industry). The Merida excursion includes a Balet Folklorico performance at UADY and a trip to the downtown market where students see the final destination of hammocks purchased in Ek'Balam wholesale by vendors.

Heritage

One of the many advantages of studying heritage in Yucatan is the existence of numerous archaeological zones and impressive monumental architecture. The class includes tours of three archaeological sites; Mayapan, Ek'Balam, and Yaxuna. The history of these sites since their initial excavations has varied, and a comparison of archaeological investigations at the three provides insight into the ways that a community can engage with archaeology and heritage. Early research under the direction of the Carnegie Institute of Washington is dated back to 1938, though excavations began at Mayapan in earnest between 1949 and 1954. Residents of Telchaquillo and Tecoh have been working with archaeologists in the excavation, restoration, and conservation of this site for more than four generations. Major work at Yaxuna and Ek'Balam did not begin until the late 1980s. Also, since these sites are significantly smaller in size than Mayapan, the number of locals working on the excavations was much lower.

Ethno-ecology

The community-based model of development and conservation initiatives is used with increasing frequency around the world, and Ek'Balam is no exception. Through an immersive experience, students learn about the projects that are ongoing and the way ecological resources are targeted as both a means toward development and an attraction for tourists. The first section of this unit is a day in the fields with two men who are still actively farming their land, followed by another day accompanying a man who has designated most of his land to conservation initiatives. The second is an excursion to Rio Lagartos Biosphere Reserve. There we will embark on a boat tour of the reserve with a member of the fishing and tourism cooperative. This experience gives students an understanding of the strategies for economic and ecological benefit that have been successful in some parts of the region.

Program Schedule

May 29 – Travel to Yucatan
May 30 – Begin formal instruction, Ek'Balam
June 6-8 – Merida
June 9-11 – Telchaquillo (Mayapan)

June 12-13 – Yaxuna
June 13-18 – Data collection, Ek'Balam
June 19 – Rio Lagartos
June 20-22 – Complete instruction in Ek'Balam
June 23 – Depart

Budget

Per student¹

Room and board in Ek'Balam (18 days): \$140.00USD
Hammock: \$50.00USD
Entrance Fees: \$40.00USD
Lodging (Merida, Mayapan, Piste, and San Felipe): \$120.00USD
Meals: \$110.00USD
Transportation: \$150.00USD
TOTAL: \$590.00

Administrative fees

Flight: \$600.00USD
Room and board in Ek'Balam (18 days): \$140.00USD
Entrance Fees: \$40.00USD
Lodging (Merida, Mayapan, Piste, and San Felipe): \$120.00USD
Meals: \$110.00USD
Printing and materials: \$100.00
TOTAL: \$1110.00

TOTAL PER STUDENT: \$664.00

Lodging

The majority of the course is based in Ek'Balam, a small village in the Mexican state of Yucatan. There are two options for housing, which will be decided by the level of Spanish competency of the group of students.

1. Students stay in a house in the village owned by a resident. The house is complete with a modern kitchen, electricity, and indoor plumbing. The house has two large main rooms, and students will be separated into a men's room and a women's room for sleeping. Each student will eat meals with a family in the village.
2. Each student will be placed in a home for the duration of their stay in Ek'Balam. They will sleep and eat with this family.

Families are carefully selected based on the instructor's seven years of experience in the community of Ek'Balam. Participants are required to purchase a hammock for sleeping in homestays; a special hammock shopping trip is organized on the first day of the program.

¹ Based on enrollment of 15.