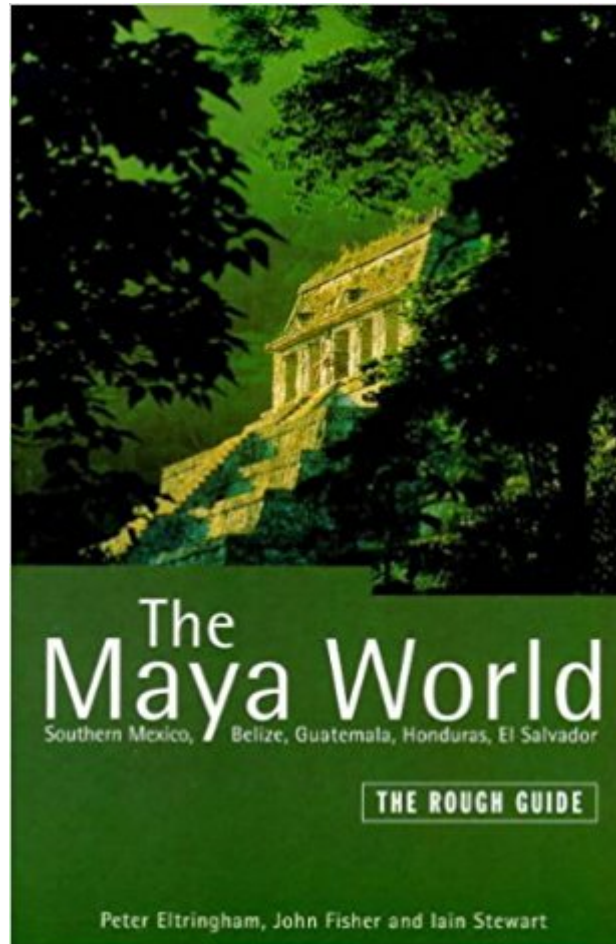




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The Rough Guide To The Maya World



Synopsis

This unique explorer's guide takes you to the ancient heart of Mayan culture, from remote ruins to pyramid temples. Incisive historical and cultural essays illuminate lost civilizations and their modern descendants, while pithy reviews seek out the best places to eat, drink, and stay in southern Mexico and the Yucatan Peninsula, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I spent a month in Central America, circling from Belize through Northern Guatemala into Chiapas back into South-Central Guatemala into Honduras back up to East Guatemala and into Belize again. Normally, I always travel with Lonely Planet guidebooks. However, I got this book instead of the one by Lonely Planet covering the same basic area because I had read negative reviews of the LP version here on . I won't make that mistake again -- the Rough Guide to the Maya World is a disappointment. The Good: The strongest point was the the cultural background, though counterintuitively, it is relegated to the back of the book as kind of an afterthought. Based on my past experiences with LP, I still believe that Lonely Planet is more comprehensive, though, so this is faint praise for the Rough Guide. The Bad: Maybe this happens with all guidebooks to volatile regions, but much of the info was woefully out of date. At least one of the five or so restaurants listed in every city I visited had gone out of business. Prices, especially for expeditions from Flores, had very nearly doubled in some cases. On a related note, and much less forgivable, some places were in different locations than they were marked on the maps. In some cases, the text gave the

right address, but the map was mismarked. In other cases, text was scattered across the maps in a way that you couldn't figure out which building it was referring to. LP crushes the Rough Guide both in the quality and quantity of maps -- several times I wandered into town with no map, something that LP will never do to you. Some info which would have been interesting to know and very easy to list (population, for example, or detailed info about the climate and temperature, or info about local artwork and craftwork, or even descriptions of what the particular crafts and food that made a town famous) were absent. Listed durations for Guatemalan buses were laughable. Take whatever the Rough Guide says a trip will last and add about 33%. Maybe even 50%. If they say that a trip will last five hours or more, expect it to take a full day. Belize and Mexico were generally more accurate. The physical book itself was not very durable, and after taking generally good care of it for 3 weeks, pages started to fall out even though I had not bent the book or otherwise harshly handled it. This made me really appreciate LP's durable spines. One very irritating trend in the book is that borders often have different and conflicting information listed for them, depending on which country chapter you are reading -- for example, the Guatemala chapter will describe the border as staffed by very corrupt officials and with 3 connecting buses every day into Mexico, while the Mexico chapter won't mention the border guards and will list 5 connecting buses into Mexico. It's as if the writers for each country never compared their notes, or went at different times, or the editors never proofread everything to have it all add up. In short, the border info is pretty sloppy. Worst of all, border taxes (legitimate ones for boat and air departures rather than the shakedowns the books describes and which seldom actually happen) were out of date -- you have to pay a big chunk of change to leave Guatemala by plane or boat, for example, and Belize always gouges you for leaving, though not the same price for each means of transport. Check with online bulletin boards for up to date info. Conclusion: Like I said, the Rough Guide disappointed me. While probably only about 15% was wrong, I ended up spending considerable time and money because of those shortcomings. Even though the LP guide for the same area has been trashed by users, I would still advise getting that book, if only for the benefit of having a complete set of maps at your disposal. Also, in my experience, LP books are more coherent and readable. Sight unseen, I say go with LP instead.

It was time for our annual trip to foreign fields, so Imogen and I visited Merida in the Yucatan Peninsula in September 2000. We took two guidebooks with us -- the Rough Guide to the Mayan World and a slightly out of date Lonely Planet Guide to Mexico. Our intention was to visit several Mayan sites on the vacation, so we chose the Rough Guide expecting the coverage of the Mayan sites to be good. As it turned out, we found the Rough Guide to be particularly disappointing in the

coverage of the Mayan sites, particularly when compared with the Lonely Planet guide. The Rough Guide reads as if it has been cobbled together from the different Rough Guides for the different countries that make up the Mayan region. We did not think there had been sufficient effort to build a focus on the Mayan world. While out in Mexico, we went on two highly enjoyable trips to the two major Mayan sites in the state of Yucatan -- Chichen Itza and Uxmal. There are maps of both of these sites in both guidebooks, but the description and explanation in the text of the Lonely Planet guide surpasses that of the Rough Guide. However, where we felt the Rough Guide really disappointed was in the coverage of minor sites. We journeyed to Uxmal via the Ruta Puuc. This is a roundabout route that takes in four minor sites before reaching the grand finale of Uxmal. The Lonely Planet guide had at least a couple of paragraphs on each of these minor sites and occasionally a map. The Rough Guide had almost nothing for some of the sites. When we were traveling to the sites on a very smooth road, it amused us to read the description of the barely paved road we were actually using according to the Rough Guide. I suppose the Rough Guide made us feel like we were undertaking a far more difficult and romantic adventure. On a brighter note, the Rough Guide did a better job of describing the town of Merida. We found Merida's bus service particularly confusing since there are at least five bus terminals that are well used. The Rough Guide gave a slightly clearer account of which terminals to use. One small point is to ignore all of the prices in either of the books. This accuracy is not the fault of either of the books but just the nature of the Mexican currency. Both books make it clear that the prices will be inaccurate, however it is still worth repeating. Just by way of an example, the Rough Guide quotes the entry price for Uxmal as 4 US dollars. We actually handed over 80 pesos each, or closer to 9 US dollars. This magnitude of difference was not uncommon. I suspect the Rough Guide was written when the Mexican peso had just dropped to a low against the dollar and prices in Mexico had not adjusted. Viva Mexico! But take the Lonely Planet Guide!

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