

DEVELOPING CULTURAL TOURISM IN IZAPA

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes a development program to increase tourism to the archaeological site of Izapa in the Tuxtla Chico municipality, which lies along the Southern border of Mexico in the state Chiapas. This proposal is based on a **cultural tourism** development model based on two principles. The first is that the local community is assisted in maximising economic gains through local economic development. The second involves campaigns to ensure that the local community be aware of the cultural and historical context of their location. Section A of this article explains how this model can be applied to Izapa, section B provides an explanation on the cultural importance of Izapa and its relevance to the 2012 Maya calendar end-date, and section C provides suggestions for a cultural tourism program and is based on field work conducted on-site for nine days in March 2011.

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SECTION A: CULTURAL TOURISM FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT:

This article proposes the concept of *cultural tourism* as a means of developing and promoting the Izapa archaeological site as a tourist attraction, simultaneously stimulating local economic development and cultural development in the Tuxtla Chico municipality (in the southwest corner of the State of Chiapas, Mexico). This article proposes a model using cultural tourism that seeks to achieve the optimal conditions for growth – both local economic growth and cultural growth. The former is achieved through creating the conditions in order to expand tourism in the region. This paper argues that Izapa presents an importance that needs to be promoted widely. This importance is based on the fact that Izapa has been considered the place of origin of the Mayan calendar – and even of timekeeping in the whole Mesoamerican region! This article proposes cultural tourism as a model through which to develop the tourism product that can be offered in Izapa, seeking to ensure that local cultural and economic actors are able to take advantage of the introduction of such tourism value chains, including through facilitating entrepreneurship. Cultural growth has an additional aim which is to enhance the understanding of ancient indigenous cultures, which is proposed in this document in the form of a campaign for 2012. The campaign will focus on the local populace and increasing their understanding of the Maya calendars, including an understanding of the significance of the 2012 end-date, with the aim of stimulating contemporary culture and attracting increased numbers of visitors.

The term cultural tourism is to be used as a title for the development project document. This term is a positive term that presupposes a beneficial outcome in terms of economic growth and ‘cultural strengthening’. Economic development tourism is used as the motor for local economic growth as this is where the financial earnings derive from and where ‘culture’ becomes the product that is being used to entice tourism to the Soconusco region. An essential dimension to this project is that cultural tourism encourages local growth, which is accomplished through ensuring that the earnings made benefit local economic enterprises and not national or international businesses. In addition to the promotion of culture, measures must be taken to ensure that the local population has an understanding of the cultural heritage that is being promoted: the concept of cultural tourism considers that a participatory approach involving the local community is necessary in order to strengthen culture. This will create a ‘lived’ culture and it is envisioned that *this* will serve as the greatest attraction for tourists.

The Mexican state of Chiapas, located in the Southwest of Mexico, has a strong tradition of receiving predominantly European tourists, as well as some American tourists, and the two predominant attractions in Chiapas are the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas and the Mayan Ruins in Palenque. Non-Spanish speaking visitors’ trajectories commonly avoid Tuxtla Gutiérrez (the capital of the state) and arrive directly in San Cristobal, travel North to Palenque, and continue their trajectory into the Yucatán Peninsula. This trajectory neglects the South-western coastal region of the Soconusco. Therefore, this development proposal will contribute to the creation of new tourist routes in Chiapas¹ by strengthening a principal attraction of the region which is the Izapa archaeological site. The second part of this article discusses the importance of Izapa while the third section provides suggestions for creating cultural tourism in Tuxtla Chico.

¹ Specifically related to the Senda Real tourism route of the “Chiapas 2015” development program of the Secretaría de Turismo of the State of Chiapas

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE 2012 MAYA CALENDAR END-DATE:

The importance of Izapa is related to its location that indicates its probability as the origin of the calendar in Mesoamerica; it is considered the place in which the sacred *tzolk'in* calendar of 260 days was developed (V.Malmström 1978; 1997). Linguistic evidence suggests that this calendar is the oldest of the Mesoamerican calendars (Edmonson 1988:169) and the *tzolk'in* is still used by the descendants of the Maya in the Guatemalan highlands² (Tedlock 1982). Izapa is also inextricably tied to the modern interest in the 2012 end-date through the works of John Major Jenkins (1989; 2009) whose interpretation of the importance of 2012 is based on his research conducted in Izapa: he describes the ball court at site F as the “ground zero of the 2012 prophecy” (Jenkins 2009:98) and whose work was recognized in June 2009 through his being awarded the key to Tuxtla Chico.

The importance of 2012 for tourism in Mexico is that it is the year in which the Maya Long Count completes a cycle, on the *tzolk'in* date 4 Ahau, which is commonly understood to fall on the winter solstice, 21st of December 2012. An increased interest in Maya culture and in the Maya calendar is anticipated for the year 2012 and this article proposes ways in which to develop conditions so that Izapa and the Tuxtla Chico municipality can successfully compete as a tourist site for people interested in Maya culture. This involves promoting Izapa in 2012 as the place of origin of the Maya calendar.

This article suggests ways of developing the archaeological site of Izapa as well as the Tuxtla Chico municipality in the aim of best responding to the interest in ancient Maya culture that is likely to be expressed in the year 2012. This includes firstly promoting the site as the location of the origin of the Maya calendar but equally to ensure that there is local knowledge of what is being promoted. This need for local knowledge is the cornerstone to the concept of cultural tourism. In this case it is an understanding by the local community of the three different calendrical systems used by the Maya, including the long count which concludes its cycle in December 2012. The material used for community awareness can later be adapted for tourist information displays.

This development paper proposes enhancing the cultural heritage of the region by creating a product that will take advantage of national and international interest in indigenous culture related to the Maya calendar end-date of December 2012 and attract tourism flows into the region. The aim is to develop the Izapan archaeological site in order to promote it as *the* tourist site to go to for those interested in the Maya calendar. At the same time in order to preserve and develop culture it is recommended that the local community become involved with the system of timekeeping among the ancient Maya. In the case of Tuxtla Chico there is the advantage that it is characterized by having many schools; there are educational institutions for all levels of the educational system until matriculation. The mathematical structure behind the Maya way of counting time makes it ideal for its inclusion in the mathematics curricula. It is recommended that the year 2012 be used as an opportunity for a campaign, spearheaded by the Consejo

² Another theory is that the 260-day period came from the length of human pregnancy; this is close to the average number of days between the first missed menstrual period and birth and this is the version reported by anthropologist Barbara Tedlock in research conducted in Momostenango, Guatemala (1982:93) Under this hypothesis the calendar was developed by midwives to predict the expected birth dates of babies and, due to its divinatory nature of the calendar, also their destinies.

Estatal para la Cultura y las Artes (CONECULTA), to strengthen people's knowledge of Mesoamerican calendrical systems. Exhibitions could be held in the 'Casa de la Cultura' of Tuxtla Chico.

USING TOURISM AS A MOTOR FOR LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

The cultural tourism model that is being proposed in this article seeks to develop culture that will act as a product that will attract international clients in the form of tourism. It equally considers that it is necessary to help create and capacitate local enterprises in order for them to benefit from the increased economic activities made possible by the creation of a tourism market. Finally, the concept of cultural tourism looks to have the full involvement of the local communities as this is what is being offered to the tourists (and measures are recommended for re-creating culture that has been lost by these communities).

The particularities of each location influence the development of culture due to the fact that their latitudinal positioning fixes them into a particular environment. The resources that are permitted by the environment in turn influence the development of the culture. A major civilization advance is brought about by the development of agriculture, which signals the move away from hunter-gatherer societies towards sedentary societies and the staple crop of Mesoamerica that was developed through years of patient hybridization is maize. In addition, the indigenous populations of each region in Mexico had a number of different resources at their disposal, depending on their latitude and/or altitude. The Soconusco region of Chiapas has always been a wealthy region due to various conditions: plentiful rain, warm temperatures and volcanic soil make it a very fertile region. Along the mountain slopes of this region is where 19th century immigrants established coffee plantations, while in the coastal region much fruit is grown, including 'ataulfo' type mangoes which are exported. The historic wealth of the region, which permitted the flourishing of the pre-classic Izapan civilization, derives from the cocoa (from which chocolate is made) and which is indigenous to the region. Currently the cocoa tree is unfortunately suffering from a plague and this has caused smallholders to switch production to rambutan fruit. These resources are celebrated in the 'rambutan and cocoa festival' of the municipality of Tuxtla Chico.³

CURRENT TOURISM FLOWS INTO THE REGION

Tourism flows in the Tuxtla Chico region are in their infancy and date from the opening of Puerto Chiapas on the pacific coast to international cruise ships in 2006. Tour operators bring cruise ship visitors to Izapa and also to Tuxtla Chico to see presentations on the preparation of 'chocolate' (in Spanish this term has always referred to a hot beverage and there is no production of local chocolate sweets, which may disappoint visitors). As a result it may be better to emphasize *cocoa* (cacao) rather than *chocolate*. Local artisan producers of chocolate seek to sell their produce to tourists by offering their presentations and discussions with service providers in Tuxtla Chico revealed that national tourists were more likely to purchase than American tourists, who are eager to sample but less interested in purchasing the product.

³ This festival, we were told, occurs in June or July. Unfortunately it does not have a fixed date. It is dependant on the time of harvest, making it difficult to promote to tourists.

International tourists tend to be American nationals over the age of 60. These clients have specific requirements that tour operators must contend with, notably limited mobility as these guests are not prepared to walk anywhere and must be delivered to the monuments of the Izapa archaeological site. It must be noted that there are three main sites in Izapa that are open to the public: groups A, B and F. Group F is situated next to the highway and is the only site that involves restored ruins – images of the ruins of Izapa are invariably from this group. Groups A and B are approximately 2 km away from group F and reaching them involves a walk down a dirt path and traversing private property. Groups A and B have derived their fame from the stelae (carved images on stones), of which stela 5 has particular importance to the Mormon religious community, that are to be found on these sites. Unfortunately the restricted mobility of many guests limits their ability to visit any site other than group F, and visits to the other two groups are often not included. Site F is usually the only site presented before the tour continues to Tuxtla Chico and to the cocoa presentations that are held there. The requirements of international tourism also lead to the creation of sanitary facilities in site F which are maintained and paid for by the tour operations; the two important companies are Crucerotours and Caribe Tours, both operating from the nearby city of Tapachula.

The demonstrations of the cultivation and preparation of cocoa held in Tuxtla Chico are the primary attraction point that is currently being promoted. To this end a public space designed to attract tourism, called the 'Parque del Chocolate', has been approved and the first stage is under construction. This has the potential to greatly benefit tourism in the region if an appropriate path is constructed between this park and the entrance to the group F site in Izapa. However Section C, which is based on the results of the field study conducted, finds that there are significant bottlenecks to the establishment of the proposed pathway between the park and site F. This study also cautions that the second stage of the plan for the chocolate park has significant flaws which need to be considered carefully to avoid wasteful expenditure.

In addition to infrastructure development that has been already approved, Izapa benefits from a second advantage and that is that it presents an obstacle, as the Zone is crossed by a major cross border transit, which is the Tapachula-Talisman highway, and the site has prevented the expansion of the highway (INAH Chiapas 2007). This prevents ideal conditions in which to launch the development plan suggested in section C of this article, which aims to increase the attractiveness of Tuxtla Chico as a tourist destination. In this manner it will become an important feature of an alternative tourism corridor promoted by the Tourism Secretariat of Chiapas under the "Chiapas 2015" plan, called Senda Real, which is currently being designed with the assistance of the International Tourism Organisation.

IZAPA AND THE SOUTHERN FRONTIER

Overland tourism flows of international guests in Chiapas tend to go to San Cristóbal de las Casas, from there to Palenque and then continue onward into the Yucatán peninsula, or to end their Mexico travels in Palenque and return directly to Mexico City. It is expected that the development of Izapa as a cultural attraction will help popularize an additional tourism 'corridor' or 'route' in Chiapas. This route follows the Pacific coast of Chiapas and continues to the border region with Guatemala of Tuxtla Chico. The River Suchiate, which forms the frontier with Guatemala, is located a few kilometres from Tuxtla Chico; Izapa is 10 km away from the Talisman bridge, one of the border crossings with Guatemala.

This article further argues that the migratory element needs to be considered for any accurate diagnosis of local economic development and furthermore the culture and cultural differences on both sides of the border need to be taken into account. It is necessary to remove barriers to development which have been caused by burdensome migratory regulations. The removal of such barriers will hopefully help to stimulate the cross-border movement of tourists, and thus encourage visitors who visit Izapa to continue their journey into Guatemala. The Lonely Planet Mexico tour guide traditionally has Izapa as the last item in the Chiapas entry, and comments in its 2005 edition (847-848): 'If this site was in a more visited part of Mexico it would have a constant stream of visitors'. This proposal seeks to develop Izapa, the heartland of Maya country, as an essential transit point for tourists who are interested in visiting Maya sites, Lago Atitlán or Antigua Guatemala in Guatemala, or inversely for tourism from Guatemala to enter Mexico.

This proposal aims to strengthen the ability of Tuxtla Chico and the Soconusco region to enter tourism value chains which would be created by developing and promoting the Izapa archaeological site as the place of origin of shared Mesoamerican culture (described in Section B), which would attract tourists from neighbouring Guatemala as well. This cultural tourism proposal further recommends facilitating cross-border transits between Chiapas and Guatemala in the aim of removing barriers to the movement of people, trade and the flow of culture, thus facilitating tourism. The above is achieved by ensuring that the movement of people, as well as goods and services, is not encumbered or dissuaded by the regulatory burden caused by the migration processes and also allowing tourism service providers from Guatemala and Belize to operate in the Soconusco which would hopefully assist in the growth of the Guatemalan tourism industry as well. It is recommended that the border does not dissuade the movement of people, goods and services in order to stimulate local economic development. In this respect visa requirements for Central American nationals may be considered an unduly administrative burden. It is hoped that such measures to promote free movement within a limited geographic area will facilitate tourism in the region and thus attract national and international investors.

Simplified border crossing mechanisms could be promoted by both government and by tourism companies in Chiapas and Guatemala alongside concrete activities to enhance cross-border transportation for tourists between these two countries. Such an initiative would take advantage of the existence of a cabinet-level position in the Government of Chiapas which deals with development along the southern frontier (Secretaría Para el Desarrollo de la Frontera Sur) and enjoys a diplomatic relationship with the government of Guatemala.

Migration through Mexico's southern borders features the steady inflow of Central American migrant workers who use Chiapas as their entry point into Mexico, which serves as a transit country before arrival at the country of destination which is the United States of America. There is even a denominated 'Ruta del Migrante'. Mexican and Central American criminal gangs exploit the situation and commit human rights abuses towards these migrants, while on the other hand the Catholic Church is very proactive in providing shelter to our neighbouring citizens. The current government, under Jaime Sabines Guerrero, has undertaken a commitment towards human-rights based migration management and has orientated the security regime in Mexico to police the border focusing on defending the human rights of migrants. This included educating the police force on the concept of Basic Human Rights and that migrants have these! This incorporation of the universal human rights regime, which applies to all people regardless of immigration status, is a recent achievement which saw the rights of migrants enshrined in the

Constitution of the State of Chiapas. A denominated 'Beta unit' has been set up along the frontier to provide assistance to migrants and to combat the criminal gangs that seek to exploit them. This is a long way from the citizen militias that patrol the borders of certain southern states of the United States of America.

On the other hand cross border migration along the Soconusco is also characterized by large foreign-owned retail outlets such as Walmart and Home Depot in Tapachula which are predominantly patronized by Guatemalan day visitors as product prices are cheaper in Mexico than in their own country. Interestingly it seems that Izapa may have a special resonance to Guatemalan visitors due to the Izapan stelae many of which have been interpreted as depicting early representations of scenes from the hero twin mythology encased in the K'iche book of the Popoh Vul, a document which is essential to modern Mayan-inspired spirituality and which is well known in Guatemala. This information suggests that cross border migrants are an important client group which would be attracted to the Izapa tourism cluster and thus the Izapa archaeological site can be promoted as part of their day-visits. Thus one can recommend advertising Izapa in places such as the Walmart and other shopping destinations of Guatemalans.

DEVELOPING REGIONAL CULTURE

This development plan seeks to position Izapa as a knowledge centre for understanding the Maya calendar. However a field study conducted during one week in March 2011 revealed that there was no community-level knowledge of the importance of Izapa, that there was limited knowledge of the importance of Izapa by tour operators, and that there was no local knowledge of the Maya religious calendar of 260 days in Southwestern Chiapas. On the other hand the the required cultural knowledge does exist in neighbouring Guatemala (see Molesky-Poz 2006). This cultural knowledge is evident in the existence of Guatemalan "day-keepers", or *Ajq'ij* in K'iche, who perform spiritual practices, that involve each day in the *tzolk'in* calendar which is considered sacred. Their cosmology is also heavily influenced by the Popol Vuh, where the duty of humans is to give thanks for Creation. In Guatemala it is common practice to perform ceremonies and offerings at altars or natural locations, such as waterfalls or volcanoes, where thanks is given to God. The spiritual path of these people is something which is sought by overseas travellers. In Mexico the resurgence of Maya culture has predominantly taken place in the Yucatán, around the tourism attractions there. In that region the Maya culture has become commercialized under the guise of 'spiritual tourism' and its leadership is provided by a shaman called Humbatz Mem.

During the field visit it was also found that there is an Izapa foundation called 'Izapa Cosmos S.A', whose president is Sñr Rodolfo Juan Flores, who has worked alongside an American foundation called "The Mayan Conservancy" to organize two cultural events at the Izapa archaeological site at group F. In the first event, held during the summer solstice week in 2010, 13 Maya daykeepers from Guatemala carried out a fire-ceremony outside Izapa's group F. The next event, held a few months later in December 2010, saw a new-fire ceremony held inside group F. This was presided over by Tat Rigoberto Izap, a Maya spiritual guide from the nearby Guatemalan city of Momostenango. The fact that daykeepers were brought to Izapa from Guatemala further demonstrates the lack of a living culture based on indigenous, spiritual practices in Southern Mexico and that this lack is caused by a loss in the local knowledge-base. On the other hand indigenous culture has enjoyed a renaissance in the Guatemalan highland in

the early 21st century. It is recommended that in order to facilitate cultural flows within the region there be a removal of barriers to entry between Guatemala and Chiapas by removing Visa requirements which proved a difficulty for the Izapa Cosmos association who mentioned barriers caused by Visa requirements when they brought in spiritual guides to conduct ceremonies in Izapa in July and December 2010.

In Guatemala there are no restrictions on carrying out spiritual ceremonies at monuments of ancient cities, notably conducting prayers and burning incense, but this is greatly restricted by the regulations of the Mexican Federal Agency in charge of Historical Monuments, the Instituto Nacional de Antropología y Historia – INAH, who impose rigid restrictions on the carrying out of religious ceremonies. Permission can be applied for and stipulations would have to be met; Izapa cosmos was unsuccessful with their request in June 2010 but were successful for their December 3rd 2010 event which saw a new-fire ceremony conducted in Izapa by a spiritual leader from Guatemala. Such events are necessary in order to promote Izapa as a place of ‘living culture’, and it is this that is assumed will attract foreign guests.

The Izapa tourism development project seeks to foment cultural growth through increasing the local exposure to traditional and ancient knowledge and belief systems. It was found that while the inhabitants of Tuxtla Chico and the region in general consider themselves descendants of the Maya they recognize that they have not preserved any of their indigenous traditions or practices. It was also found that local people, and most notably the female members of the artisan’s cooperative of Tuxtla Chico, *Kawart*, were very eager to learn about all things Maya; one of the principles of the organization is to rescue the knowledge of their forefathers in terms of language, clothing, textiles etc. It is assumed that these members would be eager participants for a cultural tourism development program, including a program to re-acquaint the local community with the Maya calendars and informing the local population of the importance of Izapa as the cradle of Mesoamerican civilization.

Improving the local knowledge will provide a much greater experience for visitors to Tuxtla Chico who have also come to learn about these things. This means that material which is used in a campaign launched in 2012 to educate the local population can remain and be on display to inform national and foreign visitors.

The indigenous population around Izapa is predominantly Mam (a particular Maya linguistic group) that is a minority found in both Chiapas and Guatemala. During the field research it was found that there is little sense of ethnic identification and it was said that such identification was more a thing of the past, pointing to a need for anthropological research in order to compile and preserve what *is* known. Hence a development program should include initiatives to involve the rural, indigenous communities in order to gather information and strengthen the Mam knowledge on ancient time-keeping and belief systems which would enable comparisons between the highland Maya cultures of Chiapas and the Yucatecan Maya culture as well as offering the opportunity to compare these to the Mam and K’iche Maya cultures in Guatemala. Importantly the findings would have to be shared with the local communities and it is recommended that a focal group be created with the members of the artisan cooperative of Tuxtla Chico, which would enable anthropological research on cultural change. This is discussed further in Section C.

SECTION B: THE IMPORTANCE OF IZAPA

Izapa was an important urban settlement inhabited since 1,500 B.C. and whose wealth derived from its production and trade of the indigenous cocoa crop. Izapa had its highest influence during the pre-classic era as a ceremonial centre which demonstrates the historical importance of this site: it flourished at the same time as the Olmec culture, which has been identified by Mexican anthropologists as the mother culture of the Americas. Izapa is therefore older than the classic-era sites of Palenque (Chiapas) and Tikal (Guatemala), which in turn are older than the Maya sites in the Yucatán peninsula, which are post-classic period cities.

The most important characteristic of Izapa, which makes it unique to other Maya cities, is the fact that there are numerous images carved in stone, called stelae, which were located around open plazas. Ironically many visitors to Izapa miss these iconic stelae as they only visit the restored Site F, which features very few stelae, and do not go to sites A and B, where there are many. Izapa has an enormous corpus of more than 250 stone monuments, including 88 stelae and 89 altars. These particular monuments have been categorized as 'Izapan style' and differ considerably from the Olmec sculptural style, with its emphasis of portraits of rulers, and later Maya artistic styles. The Izapan stelae are highly narrative and many have been interpreted as representing scenes from creation myths

Izapa has caught the attention of the Mormons since 1951 due to the interpretation by M. Wells Jakeman of the 255 cm high 15 ton Izapa stela 5 which he related to the Book of Mormon (Jakeman 1953). Stela 5 is perhaps the most complex stela to have been found in Mesoamerica, with the original field reports indicating that the scene contains "at least 12 human figures, a dozen animals, over 25 botanical and inanimate objects, and 9 stylized deity masks" (Norman 1973). The stone is dated to the pre-classic phase, between 50 BC and 300 AD and a copy is on display in the central park in front of the municipality of Tuxtla Chico. Many Mormons view this stela as a representation of the dream of Lehi and use it as evidence in defence of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.⁴ This stela has encouraged the Mormon community to become involved in the archaeological activity in Izapa: the original studies were funded by the Mormon New World Archaeological Foundation who first conducted field excavations at this site during the 1961-1965 seasons and whose research continued into the early 1980s. These studies were published by the Brigham Young University in Utah, USA. No further excavations have been conducted since.

The narrative qualities of the Izapan monuments and their arrangements around plazas have led to suggestions that they were organized along a formal, circular route (Lowe 1982:31; Laughton 1997, Rice 2007) along which torch-lit ceremonies were conducted; priests would pause in front of stelae to narrate creation myths that provided the foundation of their worldview. Rice (2007:112) proposes a counter-clockwise route starting at Group G, noting that Lowe's 1982 study remarked upon a stone-paved ramp "suggesting an entry into the site via the eastern side of group G". She considers the processions would have continued northward to Group B, then west to Group D, South to Group A, and then east to finish back in Group G

⁴ For example see [La Estela Nº 5 de Izapa – Mexico” en Evidencias del Libro de Mormón: Evidencias, arqueología, veracidad y estudios acerca del Libro de Mormón. 21 agosto 2010](#)

(2007:113). Garth Norman's original research on Izapan sculpture, which he completed in 1973, has been used in a pamphlet printed in December 2010 by the organization 'Izapa Cosmos A.C' and which proposes a route to view the stelae in Plazas A and B, beginning and ending with stela 5 in Plaza A.

Academics including Lowe (1982), Laughton (1997) and Guernsey (2006) have remarked that the characters and scenes which appear in Izapa's stelae are related to the creation stories as portrayed in the Popol Vuh. A clear case supporting this argument is the image in stela 25 representing a bird that has torn off a person's arm; this can be recognized as an episode from the Popol Vuh in which One Hunahpu's arm is torn off by Seven Macaw – a bird deity. The Mexican agency in charge of Archaeology, INAH, has hailed the importance of the connection between Izapa and the Popol Vuh, remarking that “at this site you can recognize elements that permit you to infer, if not the origins, at least one of the earliest manifestations of one of the cosmogonic [sic.] and creation myths that gave unity and cultural identity to the peoples of southern Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras” (INAH 2007:2). However, because the Popol Vuh does not carry cultural significance in Mexico, as opposed to the situation in Guatemala, this aspect of the Izapan stelae is not well-known and has not been promoted. This is a very important aspect of Izapa's importance and it is necessary for much greater effort to be made in promoting this outstanding feature of the Izapan archaeological site. Efforts should be made by tourism agencies to attract tourists from Guatemala, who are more aware of the Popol Vuh and its characters, and are likely to have a greater interest in the Izapan stelae that represent scenes from this body of mythology than Mexicans. In Mexico it is recommended that the stories of Maya creation myths be circulated widely so that the population is more aware of its heritage and be better able to understand the significance of the Izapan stelae.

THE MAYA CALENDAR

Prudence M. Rice writes in her book 'Maya Calendar Origins' (2007:30 citing Edmonson 1988) that “one of the most distinctive features of Mesoamerican civilization is their extraordinarily complex and precise calendrical systems. Mesoamerican peoples from Mexico through Honduras, comprising nearly one hundred ethnolinguistic groups, developed at least sixty variant calendars that were based on a shared structure and had a single origin”. Of these calendars the 260-day calendar based on sequences of 20 days is considered the oldest (Rice 2007:33) and was used throughout Mesoamerica. The 260-day calendar was called among the Nawaatl speakers in the Valley of Mexico the *tonalpohualli* (count of days). The Maya version has been preserved by different linguistic groups, but is most commonly referred to using the Yucatec Maya name⁵ *tzolk'in* (which equally means the count of days). Notwithstanding there are different names given to the days by different linguistic groups and academics have sought to study commonalities and differences among the words to further our understanding of the historical progression of the Maya culture. For example Edmonson's pioneering 1988 study compares the name of days and of months in Yucatecan, Classic Maya, Ch'ol, Tzetal and K'iche languages and finds linguistic evidence that shows that the 20 day names of the 260 day calendar are older than the names of the months of the 365 day civic calendar.

⁵ Different ethnicities use different words for each of the days. The Yucatecan Maya names are most commonly used because the earliest records come from this region and were compiled in the 16th century by Fray Diego de Landa.

The 260 day calendar is often called the 'sacred calendar' because each day had complex positive and negative auguries. The Tzolk'in combines twenty day names with thirteen numbers to produce 260 unique days. Every day is given a name in sequence from a list of 20 day names and a 'month' number from 1 up to 13 is allocated.

The sacred calendar runs simultaneously with a 365 day civic calendar, called the 'haab' eighteen months of twenty days each plus a period of five days ("nameless days") at the end of the year known as Wayeb' (or Uayeb). This approximated the solar year and it is important to note that it is this calendar which is found on t-shirts for sale to tourists as the 'Mayan Calendar'. The cultural development program which is proposed in section C seeks to ensure that those who are interested are able to learn about, and follow, this calendar.

Throughout pre-Hispanic Mexico the two calendars operated simultaneously, like two cogs, one with 260 days and the other of 365 days. The whole cycle would repeat itself every 52 Haab years exactly, a period that is known as a Calendar Round. Any particular date would not repeat itself until 18,980 days had elapsed, approximately 52 solar years. With life expectancy at the time the cycle would repeat roughly once each lifetime. A third calendar provided a more refined method of dating which was needed in order to record historical events and this was provided by the Long Count. This counts the amount of days which have elapsed since the Moment of Creation in August 3114 BC. This date was 4 Ahaw (Tzolk'in count) 8 Kumk'u (Haab count).

The December 2012 end date corresponds to this third calendar which, unlike the previous two used throughout Mesoamerica, was particular to the Maya culture. The Long Count represented a count of days since the moment of creation which has been pinpointed to the 11th or the 13th of August 3114 B.C, with preference given to the 11th. This count was used to legitimize rulership: nobility would proclaim their ancestry going back to this creation moment. This long count will complete its 13th Baktun, (a Baktun period is of 144,000 days), in December 2012 and this is regularly viewed as representing the completion of an era or "world age" that lasted 1,872,000 days 5,125.36 years (Jenkins 2007:42). We must also emphasize that the Maya had a different concept of time to our linear Western concept based on an eschatological mindset rooted in Christianity – which is why the 2012 end-date resonates strongly in the Western mind. It is also worth bearing in mind that the Maya had greater cycles than the baktun including piktuns, kalabtunes and alautuns. As Sitler (2007:94) remarks: "even this so-called great cycle in the Long Count merely represents a minor component in far larger Maya chronological periods that theoretically extended backwards and forwards in time in a system of exponentially increasing temporal cycles without beginning or end point. The date is hardly, as some mistakenly claim, the "end" of the Maya calendar".

IZAPA: THE CREATORS OF THE CALENDAR SYSTEM

Prudence M. Rice (2007:33) remarks that "[i]t has long been argued that the 260 day calendar developed from observation of the solar zenith in Southern Mesoamerica". The solar zenith refers to the time when the sun is directly overhead at noon and casts a minimal or no shadow. In the tropical latitudes of Mesoamerica there are two zeniths, one in early May and one in early August but the precise dates vary with latitude. Only in the latitude on which Izapa and Copan are built (14°.8) does a precise 260 day timeframe between the late summer zenith and spring zenith occur, namely on the 13th of August and the 30th of April. Based on this Dr Vincent Malmström proposed Izapa as the origins of the Mesoamerican calendar in an article published

by *Science* in 1973 in which he describes the zenith sun positions as “the critical fixed points of the *tzolk’in*” (1973:939)⁶. He considered this occurrence further justification for the fact that the summer zenith date correlates to the starting date of the Maya Long Count, the 13th August 3114 BC (using the GMT 584,285 correlation).

It is important to emphasize that based on Malmström’s argument Izapa is the site of origin of not only the Maya calendar but of timekeeping in Mesoamerica! He considers that Izapa was the only major ceremonial centre in Mesoamerica in 1300 BC (Malmström 1997:43), and that the city’s importance was a result of the calendars having originated there. He considers that “through most of its early history it probably functioned more as a religious retreat and pilgrimage site than as a center of population and trade” (*ibid*). It is recommended that his argument be used to promote Izapa as the birthplace of the Maya calendar – although the emphasis would have to be on the 13th of August, rather than the more commonly accepted 11th August, start date of the calendar. Evidence for the accuracy of the first date for the start of the calendar is based on this date being the day of the solar zenith in Izapa. This start date further implies that the completion of the 13th Baktun cycle, the Maya calendar end-date, would have to be on the 23rd of December 2012 in Izapa (this is discussed further in section C).

The location of Izapa is what provides it with the characteristics worthy of being the home of the calendar. V. Garth Norman⁷ and Malmström find that the layout of Izapa is oriented such that the summer solstice (21st of June) is marked by the Tajumulco volcano to the northeast. On that morning the sun appears to be rising out of the mouth of the highest volcano in all of Central America. As Malmström writes, “this ‘celestial spectacular’...could not have gone unappreciated by even the most simple of peasant farmers” (1997:42). His hypothesis is that “it was on this site -- from where the 260-day sacred almanac and the 365-day secular calendar could both be calibrated – that the priest decreed the building of the first great ceremonial center in all of Mesoamerica, a place whose name has come down to us as Izapa” (1997:42-43). Malmström (1997:36) furthermore finds, using the original Goodman-Martínez-Thompson (GMT) value of 584,285, that the beginning day of the 260-day sacred almanac, 1 Imix, coincided with August 13th in the year 1359 BC and this suggests a likely date for the creation of the calendar by the Izapans - an extraordinary civilization-creating event which according to Malmström occurred exactly 3,370 years ago!

⁶ Malmström had additionally considered that the site of origin of the calendar would need to be in existence as early as 400 B.C, which excludes the site of Copan, and that it was situated in a lowland tropical niche. This is based on the works of German naturalist, Hans Gadow who in the early 1900s postulated the 260 day calendar to have been the product of a lowland tropical setting. This is because its days were named for such animals as alligators, monkeys, and iguanas, which do not live in highland environments. These three conditions all point to Izapa. While it has been argued that earlier evidence for the use of the 260 day calendar is found in neighbouring Oaxaca Malmström postulates that culture drift occurred from Chiapas to the Olmec metropolitan culture region (Bernal, 1969) in Veracruz, and not the other way around.

⁷ Norman is currently the man with the most field research in Izapa (cf Garth W. Lowe 1982), who was the first to compile Izapan sculpture (1973, 1976). His 1980 master’s thesis was entitled *Astronomical Orientations of Izapa’s Structures*. Through his friendship with Rodolfo Juan he is a founding member of the Izapa Cosmos A.C. association.

Malmström further defends his hypothesis on Izapa's importance through his research that finds that the structures of the city of Teotihuacan were oriented to the setting sun on August 13, a date which points to Izapan origins. He concludes: "That could only mean that the city's founders - although they were over 1000 km from Izapa - had already been engulfed by a wave of calendrical diffusion" (1997: 8). This highlights that the monuments hidden under Group A and B in Izapa are potentially older than the city of Teotihuacan, the lost city of the gods that was an ancient city when the Mexicas arrived in the valley of Mexico.

Malmström finds at least 13 ceremonial sites that have an August 13th orientation in Mesoamerica⁸. He finds that the principle of orientation to the August 13th sunset was probably first utilized about 800 B.C. and continued well into Classic times, "the extent of its geographic diffusion is a good approximation of the limits of the Mesoamerican cultural realm as it existed at the peak of Teotihuacán's influence" (Malmström, 1997:109). He further writes that "it is probably safe to say that during the entire Classic Period not a single major Maya ceremonial center was erected without preserving in at least one of its key structures an alignment either to a solstice or to the sunset on August 13" (1997:108) and remarks that the astronomical observatory 'El Caracol' at Chichén Itzá has aligned its front door and its principal window, located above it, to look out at the western horizon toward the sunset position on August 13th.

The importance of determining the start date of the Long Count is that this determines the completion date. However there is a division between those who adhere to the 11th of August and those who consider the 13th of August to be the correct date. This, in turn, causes a conflict regarding the end date which falls either on the 21st of December or the 23rd of December 2012. There are also those who consider it significant that the 21st is the day of the winter solstice and others who dismiss this as a mere coincidence. A contributor to the Wikipedia article on the well written article [The 2012 phenomenon](#) which notes that "most Mayanist scholars, such as Mark Van Stone and Anthony Aveni, adhere to the 'GMT (Goodman-Martinez-Thompson) correlation' with the Long Count, which places the start date at 11 August 3114 BC and the end date of b'ak'tun 13 at December 21, 2012. This date is also the overwhelming preference of those who believe in 2012 eschatology, arguably, Van Stone (2008) suggests that because the end date falls on a solstice, it is astrologically significant. Some Mayanist scholars, such as Michael D. Coe, Linda Schele and Marc Zender, adhere to the "Lounsbury/GMT+2" correlation, which sets the start date at 13 August and the end date at December 23. Which of these is the precise correlation has yet to be conclusively settled

This proposal encourages Izapa to be promoted under the 23rd of December end-date because it follows on from the argument that Izapa is the homeland of the calendar because of the zenith crossing of the Sun on August 13th at that latitude. December 21st occurs if the start date is on the 11th of August (GMT correlation) and this removes Izapa's claim to be the place of origin of the Maya calendar.

⁸ Malmström's finding is illustrated in his 1997 book in Figure 41 on p.109.

IZAPA AND THE DECEMBER 2012 END-DATE

Izapa has become recognized in the popular literature on the December 2012 end-date through the hypothesis of one person, namely John Major Jenkins. Jenkins is noteworthy in being the only independent researcher published by New Age publications who advocates understanding the 2012 calendar end-date in the context of the archaeological and anthropological remains of ancient settlements in Mesoamerica. Jenkins (2007:39) writes that “[t]he approach I advocate for understanding 2012 and the Mayan calendar is self-evident but rarely practiced: let’s base our understanding on the authentic Mayan documents that relate to the 2012 calendar and the World Age doctrine that is so intimately related to 2012. These documents are the Mayan Creation Myth (the Popol Vuh), the ball-game mystery play that is central to the creation Myth, and the carved monuments from the main ceremonial site of the early Mayan culture that invented the 2012 calendar – a site called Izapa”. He considers the Izapa ball-court monument at site F, which is clearly aligned to the winter solstice (21st December) sunrise, as “ground zero of the 2012 prophecy” (2009:98).

While Jenkins’ has been derided in articles by academics including Malmström and Aveni, I note that they are responding to the hypothesis postulated by Jenkins, indeed his research has set the agenda which academics are responding to.⁹ Jenkin’s theory, which originated in a 1996 monograph entitled *Izapa Cosmos* and published as *Maya Cosmogogenesis: the true meaning of the Maya calendar end-date* in 1998 is that the three main monument groups at Izapa, A,B and F, represent the three cosmic centres: polar, zenith and galactic, and that the alignment of the ballcourt in Group F demonstrate ancient knowledge of the precession of the equinoxes, in which the horizon on the morning of the winter solstice is set to align with the centre of the Milky Way Galaxy in the era around 2012 (between 1980 and 2016 – the Galaxy is a large place after all). He considers that ancient sky-watchers viewed a heavenly cross formed by the intersection of the Milk Way and the ecliptic (the band of zodiac constellations), and calculated that “in the years around 2012 the December solstice sun will align with the centre of the cross that targets the galactic centre” (Jenkins 2007:46). He claims that it is this event that the 13 Baktun time-period was predicting: during the 1st century BC Izapan astronomers would have viewed this dark rift – 30° away from sunrise – and, with knowledge of precession, they would have been able to calibrate their calendar for the time-period in which these would align, which is the present-day. Jenkins’ theory considers that ancient Mesoamerican sky-watchers had knowledge of the precession of the equinoxes (c.f. *Hamlet’s Mill* 1961). While not all academics recognize that the ancient Maya had such knowledge the archaeological work of Marion Popenoe Hatch (1973) whose studies on the sites of La Venta (circa. 1200 BC) and Tak’alik Ab’aj (circa. 200 BC) finds that temples and stone sighting devices were aligned with certain stars and adjusted, through time, to account for precession. This seems to provide significant evidence in favour of their having such knowledge.

Jenkins is regularly quoted in articles on the 2012 end-date saying that “Maya material says nothing about apocalypse, cycle endings are about transformation and renewal” (2009:84). He has developed a cosmology based on the “hero twins” mythology of the Popol Vuh and which

⁹ Malmström’s paper is entitled [The Astronomical Insignificance of Maya Date 13.0.0.0](#) While Aveni’s response can be read in the article [Apocalypse Soon?](#) in *Archaeology Magazine* Volume 62 Number 6, November-December 2009

centers on the conflict between Seven Macaw and One Hunahpu. He considers Seven Macaw to represent the bird deity found in Izapan stelae and to represent the “big dipper” constellation and the “polar centre”. He finds the representation of the father of the Hero Twins, the “rightful ruler” One Hunahpu, in the bearded deity represented in the Izapan Stelae 11 and 67 and claims he represents the “galactic centre” that will emerge from the “dark rift” at the centre of the Galaxy on the solstice sunrise on December 21st 2012. He believes that this “dark rift” represents the road to Xibalba, the underworld of the Popol Vuh to which the Hero Twins must journey to rescue their father, and that this “dark rift” is represented in Izapa’s stelae by the alligator - (on Stelae 25) or frog- (Stelae 11) mouth (2007: 53-55). His interpretation, based on the Popol Vuh is that the usurper Seven Macaw, who represents the ego, must fall before One Hunahpu - who represents the divine self can be reborn (2007:58). Jenkins also comments on Stela 60, on the sunrise spot of the ball court, which seems to represent a victorious ballplayer standing above a fallen bird – a direct representation of the legend of the hero twins, written down as the Popol Vuh many centuries later.

Another specialist on Izapa, Timothy Laughton professor of art history at the University of Essex, wrote his 1997 PhD on Izapa’s stelae which he dated to the early decades of the 2nd century BC, and suggested that many of the scenes depicted were versions of narratives described in the much later K’iche Maya text, the Popol Vuh, which was written down in the 16th century AD. Our understanding of the stelae is now strong, and a summary of them is provided in the ‘Izapa’ section of Rice’s 2007 book *Maya Calendar Origins* (pp.109-129). It is necessary for tour guide trainers to be provided with this information in order to successfully train knowledgeable guides who would be able to inform tourists and also school children. It is recommended that a program invest in the reproduction of the stelae which should be presented as the works of art which they are, and which could be displayed in the museum of the ‘Parque del Chocolate’.

While Jenkin’s rightly decries the lack of emphasis on anthropological research with relation to 2012 it should be highlighted that an important reason for this state of affairs is that there is not much ancient culture that has been preserved, which would have allowed researchers to develop greater understanding of alternative cultural approaches to considering time (this points to the need to ‘recreate’ culture which this article proposes in the following section). One of the most important perspectives on the 2012 movement is put forward by Robert Stiller, whose article “The 2012 Phenomenon” appeared in the academic journal *Nova Religio* in 2006. He finds that the 2012 Maya calendar end-date has been expropriated by the New Age movement and self-proclaimed Maya spiritual leaders. He remarks that knowledge of the Maya Long Count from which the 2012 date emerges fell into disuse well before Spanish conquistadors arrived in the sixteenth century and that his “careful investigations of the major trends within the 2012 phenomenon reveals few substantive connections to the Maya world. Even the authentic links that do exist between Maya culture and 2012 ideology can get lost in a confusing patchwork of poorly documented competing New Age theories that are sometimes based on inaccurate facts and misinterpretations of Maya traditions” (2007:94).

The 2012 end-date of the Maya long count calendar caught the attention of the general public especially since 2006 and was commonly understood under Christian eschatological tradition of “end-of-days”; this is reflected in the November 2009 film entitled “2012” which showed an apocalyptic event portrayed in stunning computer-generated images. The 2012 “meme” has mainly been appropriated by the “New Age” spiritual movements which easily incorporated the

concept of 2012 into the move from the 'Age of Pisces' into the 'Age of Aquarius' (this move is based on the precession of the equinoxes and describes changing astronomical alignment of the vernal point on the spring equinox). However, it is noteworthy how little of the material on 2012 makes any reference to the ancient cultures that created the cyclical time-count. In this regard John Major Jenkins stands out like a voice in the wilderness. He comments that "the market forces that impel the 2012 discussion were destined to eventually detach it from its roots in Maya tradition" (2009: 89) and describes Daniel Pinchbeck's 2006 bestseller as having "adopted 2012 as a general icon to springboard the 'development of spirituality' with a sense of urgency". This neatly summarizes the new age movement's appropriation of 2012.

In archaeology when questioned on the 2012 end-date it is pointed out that the only reference made to the 2012 end-date is on Tortuguero's monument 6 in the State of Tabasco and that there is a noteworthy lack of references to 2012 in the epigraphy of the classic period (Van Stone 2008). With regard to the New Age appropriation of the Maya calendar we should also mention the "Dreamspell" (or "13-moon") calendar which was often passed off as the Maya 260 day *tzolk'in* calendar in New Age circles. This is actually the invention of Dr José Argüelles, a man whose successful 1987 New Age book entitled "The Mayan Factor: Path beyond Technology" brought the Maya calendar to international attention. Argüelles built on the work of Tony Shearer, who advocated that modern "seekers" could follow the 260 day sacred calendar as a spiritual system. John Major Jenkins' involvement within the New Age movement allowed him to actively campaign against the Dreamspell being labelled 'the Maya calendar', pointing out that the correlation used in the Dreamspell system is not aligned with the traditional, [*tzolk'in*] day-count in the highlands of Guatemala (Jenkins 2009:46-49). He should be applauded for this.

SECTION C: PREPARING IZAPA FOR 2012 – DEVELOPING TUXTLA CHICO AS A TOURISM DESTINATION

The cultural tourism model that this article proposes involves a cultural awareness program that would be launched in Tuxtla Chico in 2012 in order for residents and visitors to become knowledgeable about Izapa's role in Mesoamerican culture, and to gain an understanding of the calendars. The availability of such knowledge will attract foreign and national visitors and hence create cultural tourism. This section also reviews current tourism infrastructure developments that are underway in the municipality of Tuxtla Chico and highlights hindrances and opportunities which were identified during the field week of March 2010. Finally, this section discusses the land ownership situation in the archaeological site and makes recommendations for involving this particular community in tourism development.

A desired outcome that is conceptualized in the cultural tourism model involves recreating local culture by carrying out a campaign in 2012 in order to increase the local awareness and understanding of shared culture (considering that the 260 and 365 day calendars are featured throughout Mesoamerica). Such awareness-raising is also an integral feature of the cultural tourism model, which requires the involvement of the local community. In Tuxtla Chico both local and state government must be involved in launching the required information campaigns in order for people to understand the importance of Izapa as a probable place of origin of the ancient Calendar Round. Activities should aim to develop an understanding of the three main calendars, the 260 and 365 day Mesoamerican calendars and the Maya Long Count. Such

knowledge will greatly contribute to preparing service providers to be able to adequately receive national, neighbouring and international visitors to Tuxtla Chico and to respond to their queries. The material created during this campaign can be preserved and used as tourism information displays for future tourist flows to the region.

The campaign will require activities (to discover the artefacts of our common Mesoamerican culture) that will involve local people, starting in the municipality of Tuxtla Chico. These activities would aim to inform local communities and especially school children about their pre-Hispanic roots, thus creating a sense of pride in their indigenous heritage. The above would be a desirable outcome of activities pertaining to celebrating Mayan culture in 2012.

In addition, measures must be taken to create adequate conditions to attract tourism into Tuxtla Chico as there are currently few marketable attractions. The town also provides poor opportunities for accommodation. On arrival we were told by the tourism department of the municipality that there were no hotels which, while it did not turn out to be true, points to the fact that the town is not currently organized to receive tourists, although private investment in accommodation has recent begun.

There is a plan to build a new park, which is discussed in detail below and which will greatly improve the situation. However, in the current park (in front of the municipal offices) there was only one small café that does not open. In town only one restaurant was identified, which is not open in the evenings. It was also not possible to get a cup of hot chocolate upon demand; one is required to visit the small-scale producers at their homes, a situation that is not clearly evident to current visitors. This problem suggests an urgent need to provide tourism training and assistance in the designing of products for sale that cater to the tastes of visitors, including the availability of cold beverages based on cocoa and on coffee, as one must not forget that the town is situated near one of the major organic coffee growing regions in the world. Nevertheless, field research found that people do not drink coffee in Tuxtla Chico. This is a result of hot drinks being disfavoured in the hot and humid conditions of the lowlands. With regards to chocolate it is necessary to make foreign visitors understand that the term “chocolate”, in Spanish, pertains to a beverage made from roasted cocoa, nuts and cinnamon, and not “chocolate” as in a bar of chocolate (which is not produced in Tuxtla Chico). Chocolate has been consumed as a beverage since pre-classic Maya times and was mixed with chilli; thus it is not a sweet drink. It was also reserved for the elite classes. There are additional traditional beverages that deserve to be promoted to tourists. One is a cold drink made by soaking the cocoa seeds in water, the other Pozol is a Zoque beverage, and hence not from that Southern part of the state, but is nevertheless a delicious drink from Chiapas. Both of these products should be readily available for the tourists.

Finally, the development of Izapa should be used as a means of promoting cross-border tourism; this takes advantage of the proximity of the Guatemalan border and the shared Mayan heritage. This development of Izapa aims to include attracting visitors from Guatemala, who should be directly targeted to visit Izapa, as well as encourage national and international visitors to continue their trip into Guatemala. It is hoped that the historical importance of Izapa, as the birthplace of two key features of the Mayan civilization, will make it a starting point for tourists who do a tour of the main Mayan cities in the neighbouring countries. This highlights the shared cultural space that existed before colonization and that today is formed by the independent

countries of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico. This shared heritage is recognized through the establishment of the 'Mundo Maya' tourism association.

This proposal recommends that all potential barriers to tourism that may exist when tourists and service providers cross international borders should be removed, notably between Guatemala and the Chiapas frontier in Mexico, in the aim of developing tourism linkages between the two countries. This demand is justified through the shared history of the Mayan region. There is a need for further studies to be done on this topic in order to determine potential hindrances to the free movement of goods and services and to develop further recommendations for stakeholders in order to strengthen the tourism industry in Chiapas and Guatemala.

CREATING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE OF MAYA CULTURE

At the onset it is important to create local knowledge of the Maya calendar; this is necessary in order for the people of the Tuxtla Chico municipality to understand why the site of Izapa is being promoted nationally and internationally and which will furthermore stimulate pride in their ancestral heritage. This stimulation subsequently ensures that there is local knowledge of the importance of Izapa for enquiring visitors and allows for local individuals to become tour guides if they so wish which is currently not an option for the Tuxtla Chico population.

In Mexico the National Council for Culture and Art (CONACULTA) is the ideal institution through which to carry out exhibitions on the Mesoamerican calendars. It is recommended that displays be prepared on the topics of the three main calendars used in Mesoamerica (260 day, 365 day and the Long Count) and of the probable origins of the calendar in Izapa. This project could be mounted in the 'Casa de la Cultura' of the municipality of Tuxtla Chico as well as in other cities of Chiapas. The idea is that these exhibitions should be visited through school excursions. The provided material will subsequently be permanently housed in the Museum that has been planned for the "Parque del Chocolate" (discussed below). It is also recommended that an educational campaign be launched in the various schools of Tuxtla Chico in conjunction with the Ministry of Education in order for the Maya calendar to be included in the mathematics curricula for 2012.

In addition to the scientific nature of calculating time there should also be activities to promote the esoteric side of the calendar, and specifically the 260-day calendar. Our field research found that there was no local knowledge of the 260 day calendar round and that there was a veritable thirst for knowledge of all things Mayan and ancestral. It is recommended that workshops be held for people interested in learning of the 260 day calendar and how to count the days. Knowledge of the *tzolk'in* calendar involves knowing the positive and negative auguries associated with each day, and the workshops could include Guatemalan Mam daykeepers to share their knowledge of thanksgiving rituals associated with each day. This is knowledge which we fear has become extinct in the Soconusco and which should be re-introduced. Focal groups could be created and monitored, as this has tremendous potential for anthropological research. The people who would participate in the workshops include the women artisans of Tuxtla Chico (*Kawart* cooperative) and it is assumed that this will serve to develop the arts and crafts produced locally. In turn the increased tourism that will result from promoting Izapa as the origin of the Maya calendar will result in an increased number of interested customers to sell these products to. Workshops could be established by promoting the site as the place to go to learn about the calendar. Such educational activities can also be provided for by private

associations and indeed we found that Izapa Cosmos has taken advantage of the property situation by buying property, described during our interview with Mr Juan as “lo más simple”. Izapa Cosmos wish to put up a shelter and a blackboard and provide a space in which people can come and learn about their culture and further seeks to attract school children, artisans and painters. Similarly, if cheap accommodation, around the range of 50 to 70 pesos a night, were available it would greatly increase the opportunity for visitors to attend this ‘school’ too.

This article serves to propose to the government of the State of Chiapas that year 2012 be used as an opportunity for a campaign, spearheaded by CONECULTA, to strengthen people’s knowledge of Mesoamerican calendrical systems. Exhibitions could be held in the ‘Casa de la Cultura’ networks throughout Chiapas.

The development of cultural tourism to Izapa must also include Izapa’s relationship with the Popol Vuh which is considered the sacred book of the K’iche Maya in Guatemala. It has been argued that Izapa may perhaps involve the earliest representations of that mythology carved in the stelae which must equally be promoted through information campaigns and be included as part of cultural events for 2012. It is hoped that emphasising this relationship will help bring a better understanding of the shared cultural heritage of the modern Nations of Mesoamerica, and specifically the relationship that Chiapas has with Guatemala, which historically it was once a part of. Alongside this promotion there should also be investments in the visual reproduction of the stelae as well as detailed information about their interpretations. The visitor must be able to find the required information on both the Maya calendar and of the Popol Vuh to better be able to appreciate the significance of Izapa.

TUXTLA CHICO’S “PARQUE DEL CHOCOLATE” AND WALKWAY TO GROUP F

Our investigations in the municipality of Tuxtla Chico found that in March 2010 the construction of the first phase of the ‘Parque del Chocolate’ (chocolate park) was underway. This is a tourism-oriented infrastructure that is described as a ‘Unidad de Servicios’ for Izapa’s group F. Current construction involves: i) parking space, including for large tour buses, which resolves a pressing need; ii) a park with a raised observatory (mirador) from which visitors can view the Volcano Tacaná to the north; iii) retail space for 7 shops, discussed below; and iv) an ‘access and reception area’. This is the entrance to the second stage of development of the ‘Parque del Chocolate’, discussed below, and which is envisaged to include a pathway which leads to Izapa’s Group F. In addition, a museum is planned that should be dedicated to Izapa but which is also envisaged to house presentations on the cultivation and preparation of chocolate.

This ‘Parque del Chocolate’ has a tremendous tourism potential. It is a great piece of luck that the infrastructure requirements for the development of tourism to Izapa have been designed and approved and the first stage of construction was underway in March 2010. This provides the necessary services for Izapa as it includes parking, a welcome centre and stores in which local producers can display their wares. While this is named the ‘Parque del Chocolate’ it is termed on the architectural plans of the local Ministry of Public Works as ‘unidad de servicios para la zona arqueologica Sitio F’. We can flag that this can result in confusion with regards to the purpose of the Museum, Izapa or Chocolate, although the link is that Izapa’s wealth was based on cacao (money grew on trees!) and the cocoa production is a likely reason for the remarkable continuity in the settlement of the city. INAH (2007:8) notes that “Around the first centuries A.D., Izapa began to lose the supremacy that had turned it into a regional capital, but its

occupation continued until A.D. 1200. This makes Izapa unique in the Mesoamerican world—a site that was inhabited for almost three millennia.”

The museum would need to serve various functions. It has been promised to the local producers of ‘chocolate’ that they would be able to make their demonstrations of the cocoa plant and production in there. The museum must however be focused on Izapa. It is recommended that a campaign be launched to sensitize the local population on Maya calendrics in 2012, and the material that is produced through this program would be permanently housed in the museum in order for it to be continually used as tourist information material and displays.

V. Garth Norman considers that Izapa was the ideal site for observing the cycles of the solar system, notably the cycle of venus. Izapa was chosen because of the imposing landmarks offered by the volcanoes Tacaná (to the north) and Tajomulco (to the east). In this regard the viewpoint (mirador) that is being built is especially relevant! The walkway to Site F and viewpoint structure should be made an integral part of the museum by providing information plaques on the orientation of the volcanoes – with details explaining when and where events occur.

Furthermore, it will be necessary to ensure the maximization of local economic involvement in the development of the park, which effectively means disfavouring Tapachula-based businesses and favouring economic enterprises in the Tuxtla Chico municipality. It is suggested that the management of the planting and maintenance of the flora be given to exotic flower producers, and that the Park also be recognized as a place in which to purchase exotic flowers directly from producers.

Of the seven booths that are to be constructed the Mayor of the previous administration, Osvaldo Gacía Solís, promised five booths to be divided out between the members of the cooperative *Kawart*, which is the group of artisans and chocolate producers of Tuxtla Chico. This promise occurred in a meeting on the 18th December 2010. The cooperative is a wide umbrella which includes 9 founding members and a number of invited members, who remain autonomous businesses. One such member cautioned that this division of retail space has the potential to be divisive and emphasized the need for transparency to avoid such an outcome.

The striking thing about the architectural plans that we were shown¹⁰ is that the path that links this structure into site F is conspicuously missing! We were unable to meet with the director of public works and what we heard was that the path had not been planned because permission had not been granted to build it due to the fact that the private property involved had not been bought yet.

There are also plans for a second stage of the development of the ‘Parque del Chocolate’ and these envisages the construct an artificial lake with a large restaurant and eight cabins. It is hoped that the budget for this has not yet been approved. This is because the desired infrastructure is highly optimistic and does not seem to have a great deal of consideration for current realities and realistic aspirations. The restaurant, as conceptualized, is too large – it resembles the restaurant at the National Museum of Anthropology and History in Mexico City! This is almost guaranteed to be a ‘white elephant’ that will stand empty. It is advisable that the

¹⁰ *Planta de conjunto general*. Esquema arquitectónico EC 2-01

space should be used to encourage small scale businesses to cater to the more limited tourist demand, while available financing should go to ensuring adequate amenities for businesses and their clients. It is important to note that the predominant clientele is likely be made up of schoolchildren who attend the nearby schools.

With regards to the cabins one should note that these would only create competition for the people who have recently invested in creating accommodation in Tuxtla Chico. This includes the cabins on the route to Talisman and the development at Rancho el Paraiso in 'sección La Toma.' As designed the management and operations of the restaurant and cabins would invariably be an enterprise based in Tapachula, thus squeezing out smaller-scale service providers from Tuxtla Chico. This is an outcome that a cultural tourism development project would seek to avoid.

An important feature in the design of this park is the pathway that is supposed to meander down to enter group F. Indeed, the 'Parque del Chocolate' plans are sub-titled 'Unidad de Servicios para la zona arqueologica de Izapa grupo' and it seems that the construction received funding from the State of Chiapas in the understanding that it would connect to group F. However construction of the path itself has not commenced. The previous mayor of the municipality did negotiate with the family of three brothers and one cousin who hold the title deeds to the land that this path would traverse and topographic measurements were made by the office of Public Works, however these negotiations have not been concluded and in March 2010 had not be re-started by the current municipal government. In addition, the path would end inside group F, which involves a different landowner and whose son has remarked that no-one has asked permission to build on his property. Furthermore INAH has informed us that in order to build anything on site F it is necessary for a study to be undertaken on the land that is intended for the path and they have not received any requests for such a study, nor have they been informed on the course that this path would take. INAH, furthermore, has the authority to block construction meaning that there are serious bottlenecks to the construction of the path between the park and the ruins of Izapa, a path which is essential to the development of the tourism product offered in Tuxtla Chico. The lack of connectivity between sites is a severe handicap which will prevent the 'Parque del Chocolate' from serving its designated role as a service unit for site F and which would resolve the current limitations of group F, notably parking and amenities. Efforts must be made to ensure that this path be operational by mid-2012.

One positive discovery during the field research involves the fact that the proposed path between the park and group F is intended to measure 10 meters wide: this would be a very positive thing as it would enable two-way traffic by the 'tricicleros' (who offer public transport on their modified bicycles) in addition to a standard pedestrian path. The 'tricicleros' are one of the features of the town and would enable the tour guides to respond to the needs of cruise ship visitors who have limited mobility. The 'triciclero' industry is regulated through worker's cooperatives and these should be assisted to provide appropriate services to the tourists that come to Izapa.

LOCAL OWNERSHIP OF IZAPA

The archaeological site of Izapa is distinct in that it is on privately-owned land. The last INAH research conducted on the legal situation (2007:4) found that "of the 200 hectares that the core area of the site probably covered, today the Zone of Archaeological Monuments of Izapa extends only for some 127 hectares that are protected by a presidential decree published on two

occasions in the official newsletter of the Federation on January 9 and December 26, 2002.” Their study found that “the central part of the site is divided in 98 lots distributed amongst 60 private owners and communal lands that are used to grow cacao, fruits, maize, and for some animal husbandry” (*ibid*). Anecdotal evidence in the municipality suggests that in the few years since the INAH research was conducted greater division of lots has occurred as children have left the main family home to set up their own families.

A particular feature of the Izapa archaeological site is that while there is a site that has been declared an archaeological zone, which impedes road paving and any other form of development which could destroy relics, this zone has not been bought from the original land owners and therefore there are title deeds held by the families residing on that land. This provides Izapa with a very distinct situation and this development proposal seeks to maximize the benefits while minimising the conflicts presented in this particular case for tourism development in the Tuxtla Chico municipality. For example one thing INAH would be very keen on is land-evictions inside the polygon of the protected archaeological site, which would be sanctioned by the state under the principle of ‘expropiación agrícola’ (agricultural expropriation). Instead this development proposal argues for the organization of the residents into some form of structure to assist them in benefiting directly from any tourism development.

Our field research has found that there was an agreement (*convenio*) signed between INAH and the owners of the land of the three main monument groups, A, B and F. This provides an agreement where the owner will preserve the monument and allow access for visitors. The agreement has further created a caretaker position called ‘custodian’. The covenant was signed by the great grandfather of the current caretaker of site F, Don Francisco. In all three sites there is a designated custodian who is an INAH employee. In economic terms it means that each landowner receives at least one, paid full-time job. The owner of site B however is looking to sell the land for a high price (and one should note that Pyramid 30 and the plaza in site B would be outstanding if they were to be restored). In Group A there are many households belonging to the same family that hold the title to the land. Family members have set up one good, and expensive, *artesanía* store that specializes in Izapan items which are created there, as well as one small kiosk which sells refreshments. This family has no interest in selling the land.

It was also discovered from the manager at the Tapachula Museum, which houses some important stelae, that the covenant included an agreement that landowners allow archaeological research to be done on the ruins in return for 20 local people being contracted to do the manual labour on the dig site. We were also told that currently the situation in the site is harmonious, as opposed to before where owners were very possessive of their land. Now the unionized workers have a greater sense of camaraderie and the custodians of the three groups view the ruins as their source of employment.

Regarding the restored site of Group F INAH has previously sought to buy this land, however a quarrel has arisen between the children of the original title holder regarding which of them is the legal inheritor of the land, thus preventing them from acquiring the property deeds. In site F there is also a small kiosk, but this is of poor quality, displaying simple, mass-produced wares placed on a table. This kiosk is also badly stocked as there are no unique Izapan items on display, even though there is an artisan in group A that produces such items. Many tourists only visit site F and if this were to display images of the stelae present in sites A and B, it is likely that

tourists would be encouraged to go visit these other sites. INAH also has restrictions on commercial activities within protected areas.

In Mexico INAH regulations prohibit private commerce on their sites (although a visitor to Palenque may not realize this). When international tourists began arriving in Izapa in 2006, following the opening of Puerto Chiapas, local chocolate producers found that they were prevented from displaying their produce in Site F. The concept of cultural tourism considers that it is necessary that the local populace has direct access to the tourism market in order for multiplier effects to occur in the local economy and thus stimulate local economic development. In Izapa a loophole is provided for by the fact that there are private homes located directly on each of the three groups and in two of these wares are already being sold. Indeed INAH's representative in Chiapas confirmed that the retail in sites F and A is tolerated because it is on private property.

During our field visit it was recommended to the owners of both stores, in group F and in group A, that they work together so that the one in the principal stand displays and sells the wares produced by the artisan in group A. The store in group F requires infrastructure investment. This would serve as a visible example of economic development by the residents of the polygon that a development program should seek to form into a cooperative.

CREATING A PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY FROM GROUP F TO GROUPS A AND B

In addition to the pathway (sender) between the 'Parque del Chocolate' and the entrance of Group F it would be greatly beneficial to develop a walkway between Group F and the plazas of Groups A and B which lie inside the polygon demarcated as the archaeological site of Izapa. There is an unpaved road that leads from the main road into the archaeological zone, it is a safe neighbourhood but we were told that foreign tourist find it uncomfortable to walk through there.

During our field visit in March 2010 we noted that there was no offer of cheap accommodation (around the range of 50 to 70 pesos a night) made available inside or very near to the archaeological zone, which, while probably not permitted by INAH regulations, also demonstrates the trickle of tourists that visit. Ideally it would be possible to raise a census of all the resident land-owners inside the polygon and to encourage them to come together. Indeed, this is an integral dimension to the cultural tourism development model proposed in section A. It would be necessary to provide them with business development advice in order for them to take advantage of cultural tourism flows. It is felt that the 'school' that could be developed on the site purchased by Rodolfo Juan on behalf of the Izapa Cosmos association may serve as an important magnet and the provision of budget-priced food and shelter, including backpackers and camping, will encourage a sudden increase in tourism flows. A program will need to be implemented in order for this to occur in time for the 2012 tourism season.

It has long been considered that Izapa would benefit from a pathway between Site F in the north and Sites A and B in the middle of the archaeological zone. During an interview with the INAH representative in Chiapas it was further explained that they have recommended that this path is to follow the course of the river Izapa, because 5 or 10 meters of land on each side of rivers in Mexico are public property and hence there will be no need to purchase or rent the land. However INAH does not have resources allocated for Izapa, which is considered a minor site in a

state that has over a thousand designated archaeological areas and so this development would have to be funded through other means.

Cultural tourism development is guided by the principle of participation in order to ensure community involvement and self-improvement. This requires a participatory approach that must invite the residents and owners of the Izapa archaeological site to become part of the development of this site. This inclusion involves informing them of the construction of pathways and involving them in the maintenance of such paths. There should additionally be workshops organized for residents in order for them to be prepared to receive increased tourism and to help them identify which services are in short supply or in high demand in order to take advantage of the business opportunities offered by the increased tourism which is likely in response to the international interest to 2012.

WHEN DOES THE WORLD END AGAIN?

The reader of this paper will be struck by the lack of agreement regarding the end-date of the Maya Long Count calendar. The reason for this is found in the history of our understanding of how the Maya date correlates to our western calendar. The response to the correlation question was first proposed by Joseph T. Goodman who in 1897 argued that there were 13 baktun cycles instead of 20, which was the academically preferred perception because it was the base number used in Maya (and Mesoamerican) calendrics. Goodman used as evidence the “creation date” of stela C at Quiriguá that inscribes the first day of the current era as a date that reads 13.0.0.0.0. and which also mentions the date 4 Ahau 8 Cumku. In 1905 in an article called “Maya dates” published in *American Anthropologist* (vol.7) Goodman places the date of creation of the Long Count on the 11th of August 3114 B.C. Goodman’s work was revised by the Mexican anthropologist Juan Martínez Hernández in 1926, who wrote two important papers that verified and expanded Goodman’s arguments. A year later J. Eric S Thompson joined the effort and, based on his examination of Maya eclipse tables, placed the correlation of 4 Ahau 8 Cumku on August 13, 3114 B.C. This resulted in what is now known as the original Goodman-Martínez-Thompson (GMT) correlation. However in 1935 Thompson revised his correlation by two days, the GMT-2 correlation, returning the date of creation to the 11th of August instead of the 13th. This is the more commonly accepted correlation. Jenkins (2009:34) considers as evidence to the validity of the GMT-2 correlation the fact that it is in accordance with the surviving day count preserved in highland Guatemala, where the winter solstice on the 21st of December 2012 coincides with the *tzolk’in* day 4 Ahau.¹¹ This is also the reason for Sitler’s (2007 fn2 p.428) espousal of the 21st December date in preference to the 23rd for the end of the cyclical round.

On the other hand Malmström, who highlights the zenith crossing in Izapa as the factor that lead to the creation of the calendar in that city, uses the original GMT correlation. This correlation places the end of the Baktun on the 23rd of December and, more importantly, the creation date on the 13th of August rather than the 11th. He considers the fact that the 13th of

¹¹ The most beautiful Tzolkin calendar calculator available on-line is at <http://www.maya-portal.net/tzolkin> Note that the deities represented are from the Aztec, not Mayan pantheon, however, as is emphasised in the well-written introduction of the mayan-calendar.org website, the same calendrical system was used throughout Mesoamerica.

August is the day of the zenith passage of the sun over Izapa to be astronomical evidence supporting this correlation. In his 1997 (81) book he remarks: "...some writers on the subject of the Mesoamerican calendar have taken me to task because my explanation of the 260-day almanac's origin is 2 days at variance with Thompson's revised formula. Had it ever occurred to them that Thompson might have been right the first time, perhaps they wouldn't persist in such specious arguments." He further defends the use of the original correlation by showing that Venus tables in the Dresden Codex of the Maya, which are acknowledged eclipse warning tables, are much more accurate when the original Thompson correlation value of 584,285 is used (Malmstöm 1997:103-104).

In terms of promoting Izapa for tourism purposes it is recommended that a promotional campaign be launched which is not limited to December 21st, but which runs from the 21st to the 23rd of December 2012. The focal points of these events can be based on the 'cosmic centres' referred to by Jenkins (mentioned in Section B); symbolically, Site F represents the galactic centre, Site A the polar centre and Site B the zenith centre. Thus, events can be held on all of the sites with a focal event on one site for one of these dates (i.e. 21 December event held on Site F, 22 December on Site A and 23 December on Site B). While the 21st of December would attract international tourism the date of the 23rd should be promoted locally and be a local event. These 'events' should include witnessing the dawn of a new era, whether the 6th Sun, the 14th Baktun or otherwise (while the significance of the Long Count end date is cause for debate there is agreement amongst academics that period endings were cause for celebration for the ancient Maya). An event focusing on the move into a new era should entail witnessing the sunrise over Izapa as the sunrise signified the completion of a day (*kin*) for the ancient Mayans. The most advantageous location for such an event would be the ball-court in site F due to its winter solstice orientation that ensures that the sun will rise directly in front. This emphasis on the dawn will require a pre-dawn opening of site on this day (21 December recommended). It will be necessary for Government actors to submit a request to INAH for permission to hold events at the archaeological site over the course of these three days. It will further be necessary to provide for appropriate infrastructure in order to accommodate a significant number of visitors while ensuring that no damage is done to the monuments (there is a large mound behind the ball-court in Site F for example which has not been restored and has a warning sign to prevent visitors from climbing onto the rocks) thus it is recommended that a palisade be raised to protect this mound while also offering seating to visitors who attend this event.

CONCLUSION

This article suggests that a government-lead program to develop *cultural tourism* be undertaken for the Izapa archaeological site and the Tuxtla Chico municipality in Chiapas. This original model, termed 'cultural tourism', is based on two principles. The first is that the local community is assisted in maximising economic gains through local economic development (requiring a program to provide capacitation and advice to the local community so that they are able to adequately offer goods and services to national and international tourists). The second involves campaigns to ensure local awareness of the cultural and historical context of the location.

Cultural tourism could be developed anywhere in the world in which there is an appropriate site that is considered culturally significant and which may not be locally recognized. This

occurs especially for archaeological sites where the information is the preserve of specialists, and often, as in the case of Mexico, of foreign specialists. This is why cultural tourism must include awareness-raising campaigns to inform the local populace about the importance of their location. In this case Izapa was chosen because of its historical importance with the origin of the Mesoamerican calendar, a fact which is not well recognized locally or nationally. It has been argued that there is tremendous scope for promoting such a historically important site and that this will further give the rationale behind government investments in the construction of tourism infrastructure in the municipality, which has already been approved in the form of the 'Parque del Chocolate'. It is unfortunate that other parts of the world in which cultural tourism programs would be apt would not have such beneficial conditions on offer!

FIN

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