

Sacred Spaces of the Maya

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Noted Maya and Latin American scholars, along with teachers from New Orleans area schools, will converge on the Tulane campus starting on Friday (Feb. 15) to learn about Mayan rituals and beliefs associated with caves and other geological formations in Central America.



The Naj Tunich cave in Guatemala, discovered in 1979, contains a large number of painted glyphic texts, providing insights into the sacred functions of the cave for the ancient Maya. (Photo from the Stone Center for Latin American Studies)

The fifth annual Tulane Maya Symposium and Workshop will take a multi-faceted look at this recently developed sub-discipline of Maya research. A related exhibit also is on view in the Latin American Library on the fourth floor of Howard-Tilton Memorial Library.

Lectures, workshops for teachers and a roundtable discussion are hosted by the [Stone Center for Latin American Studies](#) from Friday (Feb. 15) to Sunday (Feb. 17).

“As part of our funding from a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, we offer outreach programming for educators,” said Denise Woltering, program manager at the Stone Center. “We will distribute classroom lesson plans and introduce teachers to free online resources for educators through the Latin American Resource Center, the outreach department of the Stone Center.”



A young Maya man kneels before an altar area in Balankanché Cave in northern Yucatan. (Photo by Richard H. Stewart, National Geographic Society)

The [symposium](#) kicks off Friday morning in Jones Hall and the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library with workshops designed to meet the needs of K-12 educators. Afternoon sessions are set for the dramatic, Maya-themed “Jaguar Jungle” exhibit at Audubon Zoo.

The workshops introduce Maya culture to the educators, many of whom are from area high schools and teach art, Spanish, history, social studies and geography.

The keynote lecture of the symposium, on Friday at 7 p.m. in the Freeman Auditorium of the Woldenberg Art Center, is free and open to the public.

“The Hole Truth: Reflections on 50 Years of Maya Cave and Cenote Research” will be delivered by George E. Stuart, a veteran archeologist who has served as vice president for research and exploration and senior assistant editor for archeology, among other positions, at *National Geographic* magazine.

“Caves and cenotes served as important sacred spaces where the Maya could come in contact with their gods throughout the colonial period,” writes symposium participant John F. Chuchiak, associate professor of Latin American History at Missouri State University. “The modern Maya continue to go to caves to offer petitions to the gods, as well as their ancestors, who are believed to live there.”

Attendance at the other symposium lectures, the workshops and the roundtable discussion requires registration, and a fee is charged.