

Scary Mythological Creatures of Mayan Culture (And How to Outsmart Them)

The Mayan culture, which has survived to this day on the [Yucatán Peninsula](#) in Mexico, features many mythological creatures. Many of today's Mayans still believe in their existence—and that they continue to roam ancient forest paths, bringing mischief or harm to anyone who crosses them. But don't worry, I've got you covered! Fortunately, old Mayan legends offer advice on how to handle these encounters and come out unharmed. So get ready, and be well prepared for your next trip to Yucatán.

Handling Mythological Encounters in Yucatán

The first step to handling a dangerous situation is recognizing you're in one. Here are some of the better-known figures from Mayan mythology, along with advice on how to stay safe if you happen to cross their paths.

Che Uinic – The Giant with Twisted Feet

Our first legend tells of the giant **Che Uinic** (pronounced "TSHE-ooi-NEEK"), the Man of the Forest. This mythological creature is an extremely tall, intimidating figure who roams the forest in search of lost wanderers to devour. However, he lacks bones and joints and therefore can't lie down to sleep—otherwise, it would take him a great effort to get back up again. We'll see shortly how this comes in handy for us.

But first, you need to know how to avoid running into him. For this, you have to know that his feet are twisted so that his heels point forward and his toes point backward. So if you spot enormous footprints in the Yucatán forest, follow them—otherwise, you might end up walking straight into the giant himself. If you *do* come face-to-face with the giant, you should cut a green branch to hold in your hand and perform an extremely ridiculous dance. This will make Che Uinic laugh so hard that he'll lose his balance. Once he's on the ground, it'll take him quite some time to get back up—just enough time for you to escape!

Aluxes – Mischievous Gnomes

From big mythical creatures to small ones: The **Aluxes** (pronounced "a-LOO-shes") are gnome-like beings. They usually wear sandals and a hat, carry a shotgun, and are often accompanied by a small dog. If you hear gunshots and dogs barking in the forest, the Aluxes are out hunting. The animals they hunt are made of "thin air", as are the Aluxes and their dogs. It's best to avoid their paths.

Aluxes are similar to "little people" in other cultures (like the German *Heinzelmännchen*), but a little more cunning and mischievous. At night, they sneak into houses and turn everything upside down, keeping residents from sleeping. If an Alux runs his hand over someone's face, that person becomes sick with fever and diarrhea. That's why locals say it's best to leave them food or other offerings to appease them. Out of gratitude, they'll protect your home, your family, and your fields.

Xtabay – The Deadly Deceiver

If you meet **Xtabay** (pronounced "ISH-ta-buy") in the forest, don't try to charm her—unless you want to meet death. Also known as "The Deceiver", Xtabay is a beautiful woman who appears at night,

sitting on the edge of a well and combing her long hair. She's often found under a Ceiba tree, the sacred tree of the Maya.

Xtabay especially targets drunk men walking alone at night. They easily fall for her charm and follow her into the depths of the wilderness from which they never return—the few who do make it back die a few days later, delirious with fever. So be smart: Don't wander the forests drunk at night, and stay away from seductive women trying to lure you deeper into the dark.

The Ceiba Tree

The **Ceiba tree** is sacred in Mayan culture. Its branches symbolize the 13 levels of heaven, its trunk the earthly world, and its roots reach into the 9 underworlds of Mayan cosmogony.

Staying Safe in the Mythological Forests of Yucatán

The aforementioned mythological creatures are rarely found in cities—they prefer the forests and caves of Yucatán. They tend to travel at night along the wide white roads built by the ancient Maya, known as *sac-beob*. They're said to linger around major ancient ruins like the pyramids and temples of Chichén Itzá and Tulum.

So when visiting those places, be extra mindful of your surroundings, and remember the tips I mentioned before. And of course, if you don't believe in mythological beings still wandering our world, there's nothing to worry about. But if you *do*, and you find yourself in Yucatán on your next trip, you'll now know how to avoid—or escape—giants, keep peace with gnomes, and steer clear of beautiful deceivers.