

The British Museum and Google Arts and Culture bring ancient Maya heritage to life

Objects from the Museum's world-class collection available online alongside VR tours and experiences

Visit: g.co/BritishMuseumMaya

Today sees the launch of the British Museum's collaboration with Google Arts and Culture to digitise and share the ancient Maya collection of Alfred Maudslay, a 19th century explorer who brought the stories of the Maya to the world. This important collection is made up of photographs, casts and other scientific documents created during archaeological excavations and research at Maya sites in the late 1800s. Now available to view online for the first time, these objects are also part of new resources which bring to life ancient Maya culture using the latest technology.

Through a new dedicated page on [Google Arts and Culture](https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/), interactive content focused on Maya sites in Guatemala has been created, with a series of online exhibits introducing the project, its activities and the British Museum's Maya collections more broadly. Alongside these, new immersive Google Street View tours are available, transporting people from their own living rooms to Guatemala - using Google Cardboard - to visit Quiriguá and Tikal, UNESCO World Heritage sites and two of the ancient Maya's most recognisable cities. A special Google Expedition aimed at schools is also available through the Google Expedition app, taking children on a virtual reality journey from the British Museum to Quiriguá. Street View capture of the entire publicly accessible area of these sites is also launched today as part of the collaboration.

The objects that have been digitised were created and collected by Alfred Maudslay, a technological pioneer who used the captured image to engage the public in Maya cultural heritage. He travelled extensively in Central America in the 1880s and 90s, often becoming the first visitor to scientifically document now famous ancient Maya sites like Tikal and Quiriguá using up-to-date recording techniques. The collection consists of over 250 glass plate negatives from Guatemala, and in excess of 1000 pages of archives, including Maudslay's personal diaries. All have been newly digitised to exceptional standards. It is hoped that this could reveal never previously observed details.

Over a hundred casts have also been 3D scanned, allowing for monuments to be re-assembled in digital form. These will represent an outstanding resource for scholars who will be able to tilt, zoom and manipulate the lighting of these models in order to achieve the best conditions to read the hieroglyphic inscriptions. Many of these casts, in Maudslay's own words 'survive the originals', which have suffered from environmental and human-induced damage in the intervening century and a half. They are a 19th century time-capsule and are therefore an invaluable resource for learning about this important civilisation. Examples of the casts can be seen on display at the British Museum, with the remaining casts forming part of the study collection at Blythe House.

This repository of casts, photographs, diaries and drawings is of global significance for the study of the ancient Maya, a civilisation that emerged in a geographical area encompassing Guatemala, Southern Mexico, Honduras, Belize and El Salvador. Its apogee, known as the Classic Maya period, began in around 250AD and lasted until c. 900AD, and the culture's most iconic ruined cities, like Tikal and Palenque, date to this period. Thanks to this partnership and the new technologies it brings with it, more people than ever before will have the opportunity to engage with landscapes and monuments of this fascinating culture.

Hartwig Fischer, Director of the British Museum says: "The British Museum's collection spans the globe, and I am delighted that through our partnership with Google Arts and Culture, we can bring the story of the ancient Maya to more people than ever before. Not only is it now easier to enjoy these fascinating objects from our collection, they can be experienced in new and exciting ways."

Amit Sood, Director of Google Arts & Culture says: "We're excited to work with the British Museum in supporting archaeological research on the ancient Maya. Finding new ways to share academic research such as digital preservation and sharing lost stories online are critical to helping us connect the past to the present. We are delighted to have this unique look into Maya heritage on Google Arts & Culture."

John Glen MP, Minister of State for Arts, Heritage and Tourism says: "Our #CultureIsDigital project is all about promoting the use of technology to increase the accessibility of our world-class cultural organisations. This new collaboration between Google Arts and Culture and the British Museum is a great example of the tech and heritage sectors coming together to do exactly that."

Jago Cooper, Curator: Africa Oceania and the Americas at the British Museum says: "The Maudslay photographs and casts, transported back across the Atlantic, brought with them a new understanding of a society which had created some of the greatest cities in the world. They demonstrated how successful the ancient Maya had been by creating a unique approach to urbanism, food production, water management and governance. By collaborating with Google the British Museum is continuing Maudslay's legacy of technological innovation, digitising collections, making new discoveries and bringing exciting narratives to a global audience."

Notes to editors

Maya collections at the British Museum

The British Museum houses a world class collection of ancient Maya artefacts, a number of which are on display in Gallery 27: Mexico. In addition, extensive twentieth-century collecting has endowed the Museum with several thousand contemporary Maya objects including textiles, masks, basketry and ceramics. These collections join the 70,000 objects that comprise the British Museum's encyclopaedic Americas collection. The casts which are not on permanent display are currently stored in Blythe House.



Follow updates on the exhibition via Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Use #MayaHeritage #GoogleArts and @britishmuseum @googlearts. For more, follow the British Museum blog at blog.britishmuseum.org

Images for press can be found here: [Link](#)

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