

TRAVELOGUE

Mayan Reptiles

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All photographs by Michael or Robert Powell.

We had nearly made it to the top of the massive pyramid at Ek Balam (how the Mayans climbed these suckers is a mystery to me; they were short little guys and the steps were tall and steep). I happened to glance over to a small shelf adjacent to the reconstructed steps, only to see an iguana staring back at me. Iguanas (*Ctenosaura similis*) are common on and around the ruins, which provide ample retreats and basking sites while offering protection officially afforded the ruins, but obviously extending to their reptilian residents as well.

Having traveled with my father my entire life, I have learned to expect that some portion of any given trip will involve time spent with the local fauna. I therefore had no illusions going into our holiday trip to the Yucatán Peninsula. Truth be told, I didn't really mind. It would have been hard growing up with someone like my dad and not developing an appreciation for that sort of thing.

We encountered animals with some degree of regularity, although the weather wasn't necessarily ideal, particularly for herps — or the locals, who complained bitterly about the cold. We, in stark contrast, were glad to be wearing shorts and t-shirts, while news of snow and ice storms back home dominated the weather channel.

Our first animal encounter was a Collared Toucan (*Pteroglossus torquatus*) that welcomed us to México as we emerged from the airport. Unfortunately, this was the only toucan sighting of the trip. The next day, however, we found something more up our alley. While wandering around the Mayan ruins at Chichen Itzá and Ek Balam, we found the iguanas that

had taken up residence there. On one of the smaller structures at Chichen Itzá, we counted sixteen lizards while standing on one spot. Although the cool conditions were not what one could call prime iguana weather, we found more than enough to make a destination selected for its historical interest more than a little interesting from a biological perspective. In addition to encounters at the ruins, we regularly saw iguanas on the grounds of our resort, where several had taken up residence in rock piles at one



A juvenile *Ameiva undulata* takes advantage of refuges provided by the crumbling ruins and of the protection afforded this screened stand supporting an ancient Mayan tablet.



Near the top of the pyramid at Ek Balam, I glanced to the side and saw an iguana staring back.



Ctenosaurs (*Ctenosaura similis*) are abundant on the Mayan ruins at Chichen Itzá.