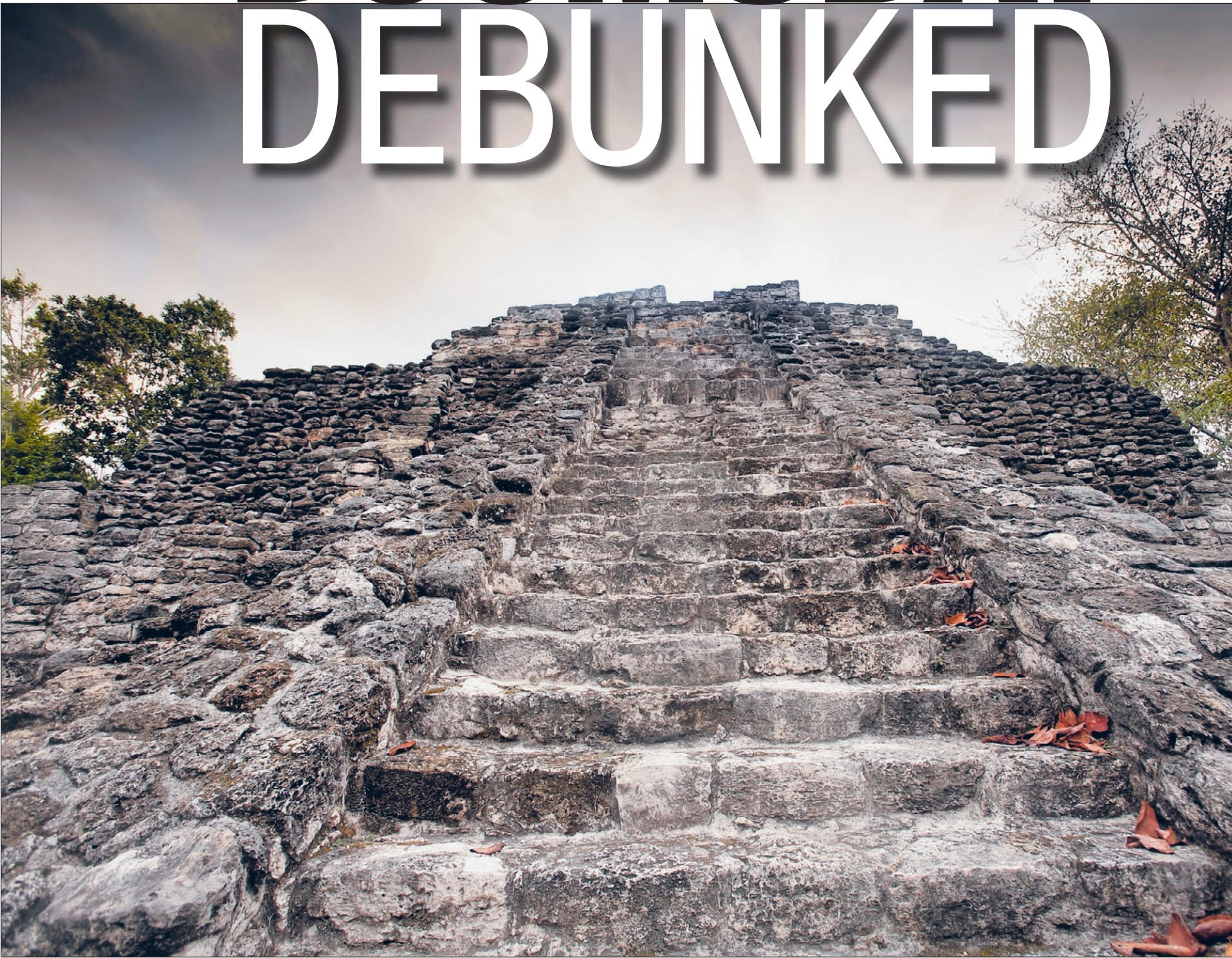




A Mayan calendar.

So-called Mayan prediction lacks credibility, experts say

DOOMSDAY DEBUNKED



Looking skyward from the base of a temple pyramid at the Mayan ruins in Chacchoben, Mexico.

BLADE PHOTOS/ANDY MORRISON

By ERICA BLAKE
BLADE STAFF WRITER

TULUM, Mexico — Standing at the base of a centuries-old pyramid expertly constructed of limestone, it's easy to see why more than a million visitors each year seek out a quiet walk among Mexico's many Mayan ruins.

Whether in the jungle, like the ruins at Chacchoben, or along the cliffs of the Caribbean Sea coast like Tulum, these complex and long-lasting structures command respect.

So, on a recent visit to the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico, I was sure to spend time among the last of the cities inhabited and built by Mayans. And of course, while taking in the beauty and serenity of my surroundings, I couldn't help but think that it'll be a shame when these magnificent structures — as well as the rest of the world, for that matter — come

to an end this year.

According to popular culture, when the Mayan calendar concludes on Dec. 21, 2012, so does the world. It's a doomsday theory that has gained such momentum that a poll commissioned by Reuters conducted earlier this year showed that 15 percent of the worldwide population believes that the world will end during their lifetime and one in 10 people think that it could be this week.

But according to experts in Latin American culture who have studied the Mayan population and their calendar, this belief is just plain wrong.

"The Maya never predicted the end of the world," said Joyce Marcus, an archeologist and professor of anthropology at the University of Michigan. "Dec. 21, 2012, merely marks the end of the 13th cycle, which the Maya called Baktun 13, and the be-



An antique Mayan mask on display at the Maya Palms Resort in Mahahual, Mexico.

ginning of the next cycle, which the Maya called Baktun 1."

A Baktun is about 400 years, she added.

Experts say that the doomsday

theory started with the discovery of a stone tablet in the 1960s that describes the return of a Mayan god at the end of a 13th period.

Elizabeth Bell, a senior lecturer in Ohio State University's department of Spanish and Portuguese, said the December date was chosen because it was 13 Baktuns after the Mayan calendar's beginning of creation on Aug. 11, 3114 B.C.

"The reason we got that [creation] date is not necessarily from the Mayans but from archeologists, from their interpretations of engravings and carvings," Ms. Bell said.

"You have two factions now talking about this. You have the Maya populations who are saying that this is not an ending but a new beginning and you have the people who are saying it's a doomsday," she said. "But these people are not Maya. They're Hollywood."

Ms. Marcus noted that contemporary interpretation of the end of the cycle can be compared to Y2K, or the year 2000, that we focused on 13 years ago. Just as chaos was predicted at the change of the millennium, so are fears of the unknown taking hold again.

As I peered up the length of steps leading to the temples at the top of the pyramids, the mystique of the Maya settled over me. Noted for their architecture, mathematics, and hieroglyphic writing system, the Maya are not simply an ancient civilization but also a modern-day segment of society still inhabiting southeast Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize.

And on Dec. 22, they plan to still be around.

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A temple pyramid.



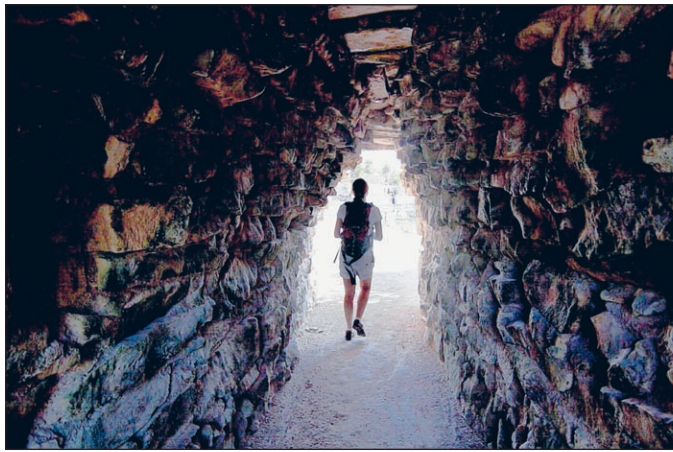
The God of the Winds Temple at the Mayan ruins in Tulum, Mexico.



The ruins at Chacchoben indicate a sophisticated society.



Temple of the Frescos.



A tourist enters the ruins through a hole in the wall.