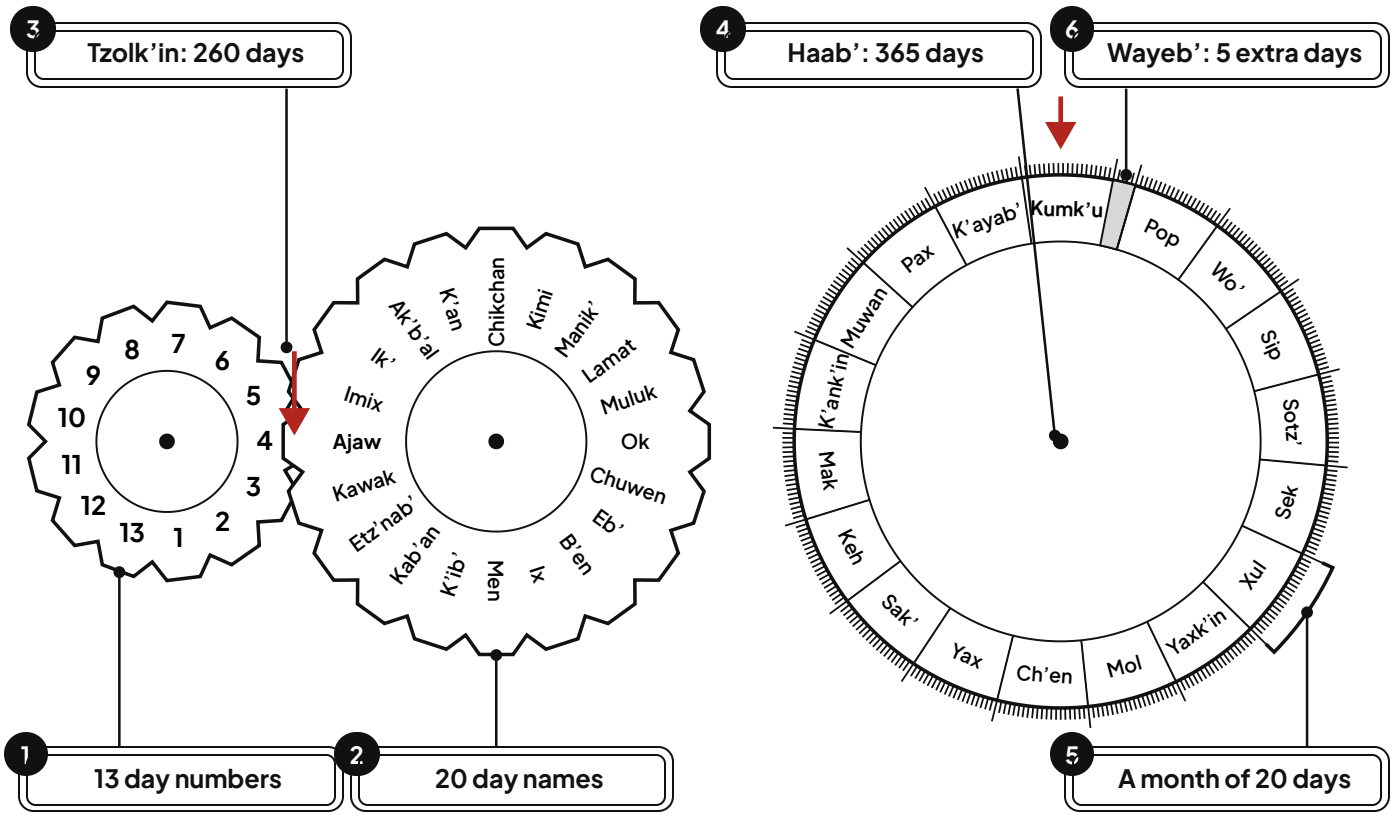
HOW THE MAYA CALENDAR WORKED

The Maya kept track of time with calendars that ran together like gears in a machine. A 260-day count of 13 numbers and 20 day names meshed with a 365-day count of 18 months and 5 extra days. Every day had a name in both counts, such as 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u. On monuments, kings also counted days in the Long Count.



▼ Read the date at the red arrows: **4 Ajaw** (Tzolk'in) **8 Kumk'u** (Haab'). 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u is the date the Maya gave for the start of the Long Count, a day in August 3114 BC in our calendar.

1. **13 day numbers.** The Tzolk'in counted day numbers from 1 to 13. After 13, the count began again at 1. Each new day took the next number and the next day name at the same time.
2. **20 day names.** Twenty day names, from Imix to Ajaw, turned like a second wheel. Each day moved one name forward and one number forward, so 1 Imix was followed by 2 Ik', then 3 Ak'b'al.
3. **Tzolk'in: 260 days.** Because 13 numbers mesh with 20 names, every pair of a number and a name comes up once in 13 × 20 = 260 days. Then the whole cycle starts again. Priests used it to choose days for ceremonies.
4. **Haab': 365 days.** The Haab' followed the sun's year of 365 days. It had 18 named months of 20 days each, making 360 days, plus 5 extra days at the end of the year.
5. **A month of 20 days.** Each Haab' month, such as Pop or Kumk'u, had 20 days, numbered 0 to 19. In the date 8 Kumk'u, the 8 tells the day of the month and Kumk'u names the month.
6. **Wayeb': 5 extra days.** After the 18 months came the Wayeb', only 5 days long, which filled out the 365-day year. The Maya believed these days were unlucky and dangerous, so people were careful during them.

The Calendar Round: 52 years

Every day had both a Tzolk'in name and a Haab' name, such as 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u. Because one cycle is 260 days and the other 365, the same pair comes back only every 18,980 days. That is 52 Haab' years, so this cycle is called the 52-year Calendar Round.

The Long Count

A Calendar Round date repeats every 52 years, so it cannot tell you which 52 years a date belongs to. For history, the Maya used the Long Count. It counted every day since a starting date in 3114 BC, so a Long Count date never repeats. Kings carved these dates on stelae. Tikal Stela 29, from AD 292, has one of the oldest known Long Count dates in the Maya lowlands.