

The Maya



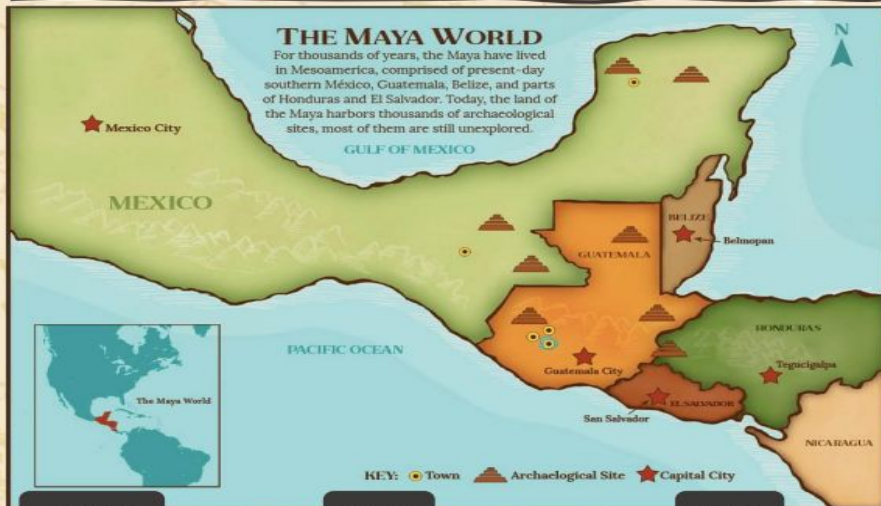
The Maya were a civilisation who lived in Mesoamerica (now central America) between approximately 2000BC and 900AD.

They are known for being the first Mesoamericans to develop writing. They also had a sophisticated culture in which they lived in city states.

They built spectacular monuments and stepped pyramids – some (e.g. Chichen Itza) have become world tourist destinations in the modern day.

They were also well-known for their advanced maths and calendars.

Around 900AD, Maya cities became abandoned. No one knows for sure why this happened.



Pakal the Great (603–683AD)

K'inich Janaab Pakal, also known as 'Pakal the Great' or simply 'Pakal', is perhaps the most famous Maya monarch. He was the King of the city-state of Palenque, for 68 years, longer than any other Maya king or queen. He became King when only 12, but grew to be a powerful leader, expanding his kingdom eastwards. He also oversaw the building of many magnificent monuments, aligned with the stars.



Palenque

Palenque (also anciently known as Lakamha) was a Maya state in what is now southern Mexico, which reached its peak between 600 and 700AD. Although it is only a medium-sized site, it contains some of the finest architecture and sculptures, showing the skill and intelligence of craftsmen from this area. Pakal the Great is the most famous Palenque ruler.



Chichen Itza

Chichen Itza was a large city built by the Maya people of the Classical period. Positioned on the Yucatan Peninsula, it appears to have been a major Maya centre – containing a number of large temples, monuments and pyramids. It is most famous for the large stepped pyramid at its centre, El Castillo, which is about 1km in diameter. The pyramid was built as a dedication towards Kulkulkan, the Plumed Serpent. Every year, during Spring and Autumn, the sun hits the pyramid in a way that creates the appearance of a serpent climbing the steps of the pyramid. Other famous landmarks include the Temple of Warriors and Great Ballcourt.

Yax K'uk Mo (426–437AD)

Yax K'uk Mo was the founder and first King of the Maya city of Copan (modern day Honduras). Although he only reigned for 11 years himself, he built a strong rule meaning that his dynasty was in place for around 350 years. Archaeological records, including inscriptions from later rulers, show that Yax K'uk Mo was a greatly respected leader. He brought stability to the region.



Tikal

Tikal was a Maya city that was built in an area of rainforest in what is now Guatemala. It dates back to the archaic Maya civilisation. Tikal was one of the most powerful kingdoms in Maya and probably reached its peak between 200 and 900AD. Tikal has some of the best-preserved ruins and tombs, giving historians some of the best clues about how the Maya people lived.



2000BC

The first Maya people emerge.

750BC

The first Maya cities are built.

250BC

The first Maya hieroglyphics were used.

100BC

City states begin to form, with powerful leaders.

219AD

The first King of Takal: Yax Moch Yok

615–683AD

The rule of Pakal the Great in Palenque.

800AD

The City of Tikal has around 100,000 people.

800–850AD

The huge stepped pyramid, El Castillo, is built at Chichen Itza.

800–870AD

Many city states (e.g. Copan, Tikal) are deserted.

909AD

The last recorded evidence of Classic Maya.

The Maya



Rulers

Maya society was formed of many different city-states, each with their own ruler. The King and royal family were believed to be closely related to the gods. It was the job of the rulers to keep the gods happy and to represent them in the human world. Rulers lived in the finest Maya buildings.

Architecture

Maya cities were characterised by huge, monumental buildings and sculptures. Although the Maya were able to use metal, they preferred to carve into stone. They built elaborate temples, steeped pyramids, observatories and palace complexes. These were very detailed with artistic designs.

Food

The Maya ate a wide variety of food. They grew crops such as maize, cacao, avocado and beans. Squash and chilli were also grown. They kept animals such as dogs and turkeys for meat. They were also able to hunt very well, capturing animals like rabbits and deer for food.

Clothing

Clothing was normally made from woven cotton or sisal (a fibre made from a local plant). For the rich, quetzal feathers were extremely popular for elaborate headdresses. The Maya also wore jewellery – highland areas provided stones such as jade and ores such as hematite for decoration.

Writing

Maya writing, also known as Maya glyphs, was one of the earlier forms of writing in the world, and the earliest in Mesoamerica. A series of pictures represented different words and letters. The earliest date back to around 2000BC.

Maths

Maya mathematics was highly advanced. The Maya people had a number system which included zero (many ancient civilisations didn't) which meant that complex calculations could be performed quickly and accurately.

Religion

The Maya were polytheistic (believed in many gods) and worship influenced most areas of their life. Buildings were constructed and games were played in worship to gods. The gods were bloodthirsty, and the people believed that they needed to make human sacrifices to keep them happy.



Key Vocabulary

Maya

City State

Mesoamerica

Polytheistic

Pyramid

Sacrifice

Civilisation

Sisal

Hieroglyphics

Settlements

Architecture

Mexico

Central America

Games

- ❖ Almost every Mayan city had a ballcourt to play a ball game called Pok-A-Tok. Pok-A-Tok games were often played as parts of religious ceremonies.
- ❖ Serious injury could be inflicted on a player with the hard ball, which was the weight of an average computer. Elbows, knees or hips were mainly struck, but hands, feet or calves were not to be hit.
- ❖ Players were known to throw themselves on the ground to hit the ball properly.
- ❖ Players wore equipment for protection such as chin pieces, masks, gloves, knee pads and leather aprons.
- ❖ Sometimes prisoners played. If they won they were set free.
- ❖ Sometimes, the losing team were sacrificed.

Hunting

- ❖ Used bows and arrows to hunt animals for food
- ❖ Hunted many different types of wildlife like deer, dogs, agouti, turkeys and peccaries

Gods

- ❖ Mayan gods could change themselves into human and animal shapes
- ❖ Priests performed ceremonies to keep the gods happy
- ❖ The Maya thought the world was divided into three parts: the Heavens, the Earth and the Underworld, all linked together by a giant World Tree
- ❖ Mayan kings were thought to become gods after their death