



HISTORY - How was life in the Mayan civilisation different to life in Britain?



Central America

Timeline

10,000 BC	2,000 BC	732BC	700BC	300BC	100BC	400AD	683AD	925AD	1000AD	1250AD	1519-1697
The ancestors of the Maya arrive. Simple farming begins.	Maya civilization starts to be created.	TiK'al Temple I starts to be built	Writing and religious rituals are developed	The Maya adopt a monarchy and are ruled by kings	Pyramid temples are built.	The city of Teotihuacan becomes the most powerful and rules over the Maya.	Pakal the Great of Palenque dies and is buried in the Temple of inscriptions.	Chichen Itza becomes the most powerful Maya city.	War breaks out between cities.	Many big Maya cities are abandoned	The Spanish arrive and begin to destroy the Maya civilisation.

Key Vocabulary

Hieroglyphs/codex	They used about 800 symbols to create writing, often on folded pages forming a book (codex).
Kings/Queens	The King/Queen was thought to be given the right to rule by the gods. Each city had a palace for them.
maize	The staple food of the Mayans which was so important that they even had a maize god.
numbers	Using a base 20 system (we use base 10), they used dots and bars to create numbers and had a symbol for zero.
pyramids	Built with a temple at the top to give sacrifices to the gods, others were built for the gods themselves.
sacrifice	Humans and animals were used as a blood offering to gods, mostly war prisoners by decapitation or heart removal.
stelae	Stone monuments glorifying Kings and recording his deeds, although early examples were of mythical scenes.

Did you know?

The Maya tied boards to their babies' heads to produce a flat forehead. They also tried to make their babies cross-eyed! Big noses were also considered beautiful.

General Knowledge

Mayan number system

- The Maya had a good understanding of numbers and they developed a complex number and counting system which was advanced for their time. The Maya people used symbols to represent their numbers.

Codex

- The Maya people wrote books made of the bark from fig trees. One book is called a codex and the plural is codices.
- The codices were written by professional scribes and contained information about astronomy, gods, war and history.

Mayan society

- Mayan society was organised into city states. Each city had its own king who was in complete control over his subjects.

What happened to the Maya?

- Around 900AD, many cities in the southern lowlands were abandoned but states in the uplands of the Yucatan peninsula continued to flourish until the arrival of the Spanish in 1502.
- One belief is that the Toltecs and the Aztecs took over with their own empires but later, when the Spanish arrived, they brought disease and forced them to give up their gods and become Christians.

Famous Figures

Mayan Gods

- Some were in human form, others in animal but the most supreme god was Itzamna, the creator God, Lord of day and night and ruler of the heavens.
- Many looked after the weather or crops such as Chac, the rain god and Kinich- Ahau the sun god.
- Priests were very important in Maya society as it was believed that they could communicate directly with the gods. The priests were responsible for leading rituals of worship and sacrifice, and telling the people what the gods wanted them to do.
- Mayans believed the world was divided into three parts (Heaven; Earth, known as Middleworld; and the Underworld - Xibalba), linked together by a giant world tree.