

The Mayan Civilization

Overview

The Maya were a civilization who lived between 2000BC and 1500AD.

They were the first Mesoamericans to develop writing. They also had a sophisticated culture in which they lived in states.

They built spectacular monuments and stepped pyramids- Chichen Itza is one of them which has become a tourist destination in the modern day. They were well-known for their advanced maths and calendar.



Chichen Itza

Chichen Itza was the largest Maya city. Positioned in the Yucatan Peninsular, it appears to be a major centre- containing many pyramids, temples and monuments. It is most famous for its large stepped pyramid, called El Castillo, which was built in dedication of Kulkulkan, the Plumed Serpent. Every spring and autumn, the sun hits the pyramid in a way that it creates the appearance of a snake climbing the steps of the pyramid- it also represents the equinox.

Chocolate

It all began with the cacao bean which was ground down by the Maya and mixed with water to create a drink. They believed it was a gift from the Gods. It would be drank after victorious battles, used as a religious ritual and would eventually become currency when the Hernan Cortes and the European invaders arrived.

Maya Life

Rulers - Maya society was formed of many different city states with their own ruler. The king and royal family were believed to be related closely to the Gods. It was the job of the rulers to keep the Gods happy.

Food- The Maya ate a wide variety of food. They grew crops such as maize, cocoa, avocado and beans. Squash and chili was grown easily. They were also able to hunt very well, capturing animals like rabbits and deer.

Clothing- Usually made from woven cotton or sisal (a fibre from a local plant). The rich would wear quetzal feathers especially in elaborate headdresses. They also wore jewellery using jade and ore found in the highland areas.

Writing- Maya writing also known as Maya glyphs, was one of the earliest forms of writing in the world. A series of pictures represent different words and letters.

Maths- Maya Maths was extremely advanced. The Maya number system had a zero which many ancient civilizations didn't have. This meant many calculations could be performed quickly and accurately.

Religion- The Maya had many different Gods and worship influenced their lives. They believed the Gods were bloodthirsty and needed to make human sacrifices to keep them happy.

TIMELINE

1100 BC



Hunter gatherers settle along the pacific coast.

1100 BC



Settlements begin to appear

700 BC



Maya writing is developed

500 BC



Solar calendar is created

300 BC



Trade between cities began and Kings began to rule

683 AD



Pakal the Great died plaque dies

900- 1100 AD









Chichen Itza is the most powerful city

1500 AD



First contact with Europe

Vocabulary Organiser- The Mayan Civilisation

Astronomy		noun	The Mayans were able to predict solar eclipses and used observatories and shadow-casting devices.
Architecture		noun	The art or practice of designing and constructing buildings.
Calendar		noun	These were circular and charted the movements of the sun, moon, stars and planets, with 365 days in a year.
Civilisation		noun	The society, culture and way of life of a particular period of time.
Central America		proper noun	This is the section of land which links North America with South America. Made up of seven different countries. Its main biome is rainforest. The main language spoken in these parts is Spanish.
Hieroglyphics		noun	They used about 800 symbols to create writing, often on folded pages forming a book.
Maize		noun	The staple food of the Mayans which was so important that they even had a maize god, also known today as sweetcorn.
Polytheistic		adjective	The Mayan people were polytheistic which means that they believed and worshipped more than one god.
Pyramids		noun	Built with a temple at the top to give sacrifices to the gods, others were built for the gods themselves.
Sacrifice		noun	Humans and animals were used as a blood offering to gods, mostly war prisoners by decapitation or heart removal.
Settlements		noun	A place, typically which has previously been uninhabited, where the Maya people established a community.
Sisal		noun	A Mexican agave/plant with large fleshy leaves, grown for fibre production.