



Vocabulary

Civilisation - The society, culture, and way of life of a particular area

Settlement - A place where people establish a community

Temple - A building devoted to the worship of a god or gods

Empire - A group of states or countries ruled over by a single leader

Sacrifice - An act of slaughtering an animal or person as an offering to a god or gods

Worship - To show love and devotion –usually to a god or group of gods

Calendar - A system used to divide up and organise events in time

Architecture - The design and construction of buildings

Crops - A plant that is grown on a large scale -usually a cereal, fruit, or vegetable

Agriculture Farming – growing crops and rearing animals

Astronomy - The study of space, planets, stars and the universe

Hieroglyphics - Writing which is made up of pictorial symbols



The ancient Maya people were quite a sophisticated bunch! They developed a writing and number system; studied and charted the stars and planets; invented three complex calendars to keep track of time; built impressive temples, palaces, monuments and cities; skilfully farmed the land and established a complex political system.

The ancient Maya were a clever, deeply religious people who valued intelligence and learning. This helps to explain how and why they were able to develop a complex, thriving civilisation which began over 2000 years ago.

Food

We need to thank the Mayan people for the discovery of the cacao plant . Hot chocolate was a sacred drink for the Mayans. The Maya produced maize as their main crop. The Maya ate pozole – a type of stew.



Worship

Mayan temples were stepped to create a route to the heavens. The Mayan religion was polytheistic (they believed in more than one god). Each god was associated with different areas of life. The Maya practised human sacrifice as well as animal sacrifice.

- The Maya civilisation came into being around 2000 BC and cities such as El Mirador became large and powerful from 300 BC onwards.
- By around AD 900, cities in the rainforest were abandoned and people moved up north to the highlands of Guatemala and the Yucatan. This was because there was an extensive drought in the area that lasted a long time and people needed to move out of the rainforest.
- Cities like Chichen Itza were still thriving in AD 1000 and the Maya civilisation was still in existence in AD 1500.
- It was due to the arrival of the Spanish in the 16th century that their ancient cities fell to ruin.

Civilisation

Mayan society was based in what is known as Mesoamerica. The Mayan empire was organised into city states; each city state was ruled by a different noble family. Mayan people lived in settlements with a central temple/pyramid as a focal point. Mayan city states traded with each other - sometimes using cacao beans as money. Chichen Itza (what remains of it) is a popular tourist attraction. There are lots of different theories about what happened to the Maya. The Mayan idea of beauty included a flattened forehead, cross eyes, tattoos, teeth filing and large noses.

Important dates	
2500 BC– 910 AD	Start and end of the Ancient Mayan civilisation
250 AD	Start of classical period of Mayan civilisation
1605AD	Spanish invaders (conquistadors) arrive in Mesoamerica
21 st December 2012	The Mayans predicted the end of the world would happen on this date - fortunately, they were wrong!

Culture

Music and art were important to the Maya. Each settlement had a wide open plaza area used as a central meeting point to play games such as pok-a-tok. The Maya used hieroglyphs to inscribe in stone slabs (called stelae) and in books (called codices). The Maya observed the movement of the sun, moon and stars to create calendars. The Maya created a logical and advanced number system. Masks were used for many purposes, but mainly funerals to protect important people in the afterlife.



