

Timeline of events

2000BC – Farming villages appear

1000BC – Larger settlements are created.

700BC – Maya writing begins developing

400BC – First Maya calendars are carved into stone.

100BC – First pyramids are built.

400AD – Many people live in a capital city.

925AD – Chichen Itza becomes capital city.

1517AD – The Spanish arrive and begin their colonisation of Central America



At a glance:



The Maya are native Americans of Central America, who built a great civilisation in the tropical rainforest that lasted for over 2000 years. The earliest Maya settlements were built in about 1800 BCE. The golden age of the Maya was between 250 and 900 CE

Vocabulary

abandoned: left for a long time

astronomer: someone who studies stars and planets

ceremony: a formal event at which special things are done

glyphs: Symbols used in the Mayan writing system. Each symbol represents a word or sound.

irrigation: supplying land with water

terracing: steps built into sloping land

traditions: customs that have existed for a long time

sacrifice: to kill an animal or person in a religious ceremony



Civilisation:

Whilst Europeans were living through a period often called the Dark Ages, the Maya were making huge innovations in mathematics, engineering, astronomy and writing. The Mayans were expert mathematicians and **astronomers**. They used this expertise to make calendars. This told the Maya when to plant crops, when to harvest and even when to make a sacrifice to the gods. Temples and other public buildings were built so that sunlight would hit certain places at particular times of the year, often in time for a religious **ceremony**.

The Maya was the only major civilisation in the Americas to develop a writing system that was able to represent their spoken language in symbolic form. It had over 500 symbols or **glyphs** to represent words and ideas

By 200 CE the Maya had moved from their smaller villages into larger cities. Each city was designed with characteristic features including large temples, stone pyramids, palaces and ball courts. Each city state had its own ruler. A large

At its peak, the Mayan civilisation was made up of 40 great cities and almost 2 million people. Suddenly, in around 900, many of these significant Maya settlements were **abandoned**. No one is quite sure why, but it is possible that changes in the climate or overpopulation made the cities uninhabitable. The Maya still live in the same areas of Central America today, continuing many of the **traditions**.



population of farmers growing corn, maize and squash surrounded Maya cities. The Maya created farmland by cutting away the trees and vines of the surrounding rainforest. The Maya people also used more advanced farming methods, such as **irrigation** and **terracing**, to help produce food.



Society

While the average Maya lived in small stone or thatched homes, the palaces and temples in the cities were decorated with beautiful murals and sculptures. The Maya people built sewer systems and there was even running water in the wealthiest people's homes. An educated elite of scribes, priests and nobles formed the ruling class. They occupied the finest buildings in the cities



Beliefs

Mayan religion was extremely bloodthirsty, demanding human **sacrifices** and blood-letting rituals. The Mayans believed in an afterlife and that those who were sacrificed, as well as those killed in war and women who died in childbirth, went to 'the place of misty sky'. The Maya worshipped different nature gods, including gods of the Sun, the Moon, rain and corn. The rulers of Maya society were the kings, or holy lords, who claimed to be related to gods.