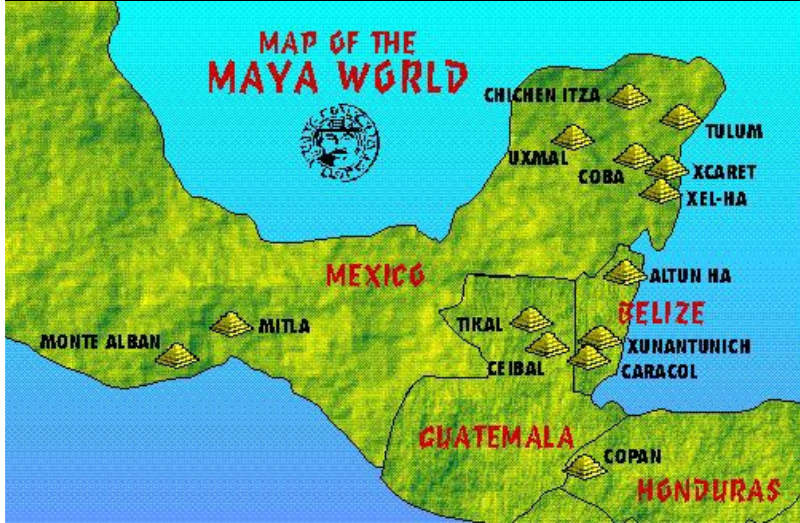




# What made the Mayans so special and what happened to them?



## The Mayans lived in Mesoamerica



The Maya are native Americans of Mesoamerica, who built a great civilisation in the tropical rainforest that lasted for over 2000 years. The earliest settlements were built in around 2000 BC to the peak of Maya civilisation between 250 - 900 AD.

Suddenly, in 900 AD, many significant Maya settlements were mysteriously abandoned, however some cities like Chichen Itza still thrived and to this day, some Mayan tribes still live here. At its peak, the Mayan civilisation had 40 cities and almost 2 million people. All Maya shared a similar culture and religion, but each city governed itself and had its own ruler. The cities never came together to form a single empire. Mayan Kings were constantly at war with one another, fighting for status and prisoners to sacrifice to the gods.

### Climate and Physical Geography

Mesoamerica has a tropical climate with lots of rainfall. The area inhabited by the Mayan people is characterised by dense rainforest and many mountains. This made it a tricky place to build, farm and live!



### How do we know about the Mayans?

More than 600 years later, Spanish conquistadors discovered the ruined cities of the Mayans! These cities and the artefacts which were discovered there tell us about this incredible civilization.



TIMELINE OF BRITISH HISTORY



Stone Age 15,000BC - 2,500BC	Bronze Age 3,000BC - 800BC	Iron Age 800BC - AD43	Romans in Britain AD43 - AD410	Anglo-Saxons AD449 - AD1066	Vikings AD793 - AD1066	Normans AD1066 - AD1154	Tudors AD1485 - AD1603	Civil War & Revolution AD1603 - AD1714	The Industrial Revolution AD1760 - AD1820 (approx.)	Victorians AD1837 - AD1901	World Wars First World War: 1914 - 1918 Second World War: 1939 - 1945	Modern Britain 1945 - Present Day

2000-1000 BC



The first hunter gatherers settle on the Pacific coast.

800 BC



Village farming and trade becomes established.

700 BC



Mayan writing is developed in Mesoamerica.

400 BC



Earliest solar calendars are invented.

300 BC



The social structure adapts to include Kings.

100 BC



The first pyramids are built.

800 AD



Sites in the rainforest are abandoned.

1,502 AD



First contact with Europeans made.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Nobody knows for sure why the Mayans abandoned their beautiful cities. It's a mystery! However Mayan people continue to live in Mesoamerica to this day - half of the population of Guatemala is Mayan!

## What makes the Mayans so special?

### Glossary

Absolute Monarchy	When one king has absolute power over his people
Archaeology	The study of the past through artefacts and remains
Artefact	An object made by a human
Cacao	The plant which gives us cocoa beans for chocolate
Chronological	In time order or the order in which it really happened
Civilisation	A large organised group of people with their own language and well-developed way of life
Codex/ Codices	Mayan books made from bark
Conquistador	Explorers and invaders who took over and exploited land
Climate	The typical weather for the region
Hierarchy	When people are ranked according to status or power
Hieroglyphics	The name for symbols which make up writing
Maize	Another name for corn
Mesoamerica	From the Greek meaning "Middle" America
Pok to Pok	Mayan ball game thought to represent battles of the gods
Rainforest	Dense forest in tropical areas with high levels of rain fall
Stele	A stone slab with writing
Sacrifices	To give up or kill something and give it to the gods



### Artefacts

The Mayans produced some of the finest art in Mesoamerica including paintings, murals and ceramics.

They used materials such as stone, wood, ceramics, jade and bone to decorate their buildings and to make objects.

### Writing and Calendars

The Mayans were a smart bunch! They were the only civilization in the Americas to develop numbers and hieroglyphs - a system of writing. Their precise observations of the movements of the sun, moon and stars combined with their advanced mathematical concepts produced calendars and a level of astronomical knowledge beyond European understanding.

### Religion

Religion was very important to the Mayans and it affected everything people did. They believed in lots of different **nature gods** who ruled people's lives and decisions, such as the gods of maize, the Sun and fire. They gave **gifts** to the gods to keep them happy including blood and even human **sacrifices**.



### Building

The Mayans built spectacular temples, pyramids and palaces without the use of metal tools, the wheel or the help of domesticated animals to help carry and pull materials! The ruins of some cities exist to this day.



### Society

Mayan society was very organised! Each city had its own **king** who was in complete control over his subjects - this is known as an **absolute monarchy**. The kings had nobles to help him control and run the city state. There was a strict hierarchy and everybody had their own position in society.

### Food and Farming

The Mayans developed advanced farming methods and had amazing understanding of the seasons that allowed them to grow all of the food they needed in a very difficult rainforest climate. The most important food for the Mayans was **maize**. Did you know that they also invented **chocolate** but only the most important people in Mayan society were allowed it!