

The Historical Time Line of Maya Civilization



B.C.

11,000

The first hunter-gatherers settle in the Maya highlands and lowlands.

3114 or 3113

The creation of the world takes place, according to the Maya Long Count calendar.

2600

Maya civilization begins.

2000

The rise of the [Olmec](#) civilization, from which many aspects of Maya culture are derived. Village farming becomes established throughout Maya regions.

700

[Writing](#) is developed in Mesoamerica.

400

The earliest known solar calendars carved in stone are in use among the Maya, although the solar calendar may have been known and used by the Maya before this date.

300

The Maya adopt the idea of a hierarchical society ruled by nobles and kings.

100

The city of [Teotihuacan](#) is founded and for centuries is the cultural, religious and trading centre of [Mesoamerica](#).

50

The Maya city of Cerros is built, with a complex of temples and ball courts. It is abandoned (for reasons unknown) a hundred years later and its people return to fishing and farming.

A.D.

100

The decline of the Olmecs.

400

The Maya highlands fall under the domination of Teotihuacan, and the disintegration of Maya culture and language begins in some parts of the highlands.

500

The Maya city of [Tikal](#) becomes the first great Maya city, as citizens from Teotihuacan make their way to Tikal, introducing new ideas involving weaponry, captives, [ritual practices and human sacrifice](#).

600

An unknown event destroys the civilization at Teotihuacan, along with the empire it supported. Tikal becomes the largest city-state in [Mesoamerica](#), with as many as 500,000 inhabitants within the city and its hinterland.

683

The [Emperor Pacal](#) dies at the age of 80 and is buried in the Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque.

751

Long-standing Maya alliances begin to break down. Trade between Maya city-states declines, and inter-state conflict increases.

869

Construction ceases in Tikal, marking the beginning of the city's decline.

899

Tikal is abandoned.

900

The Classic Period of Maya history ends, with the collapse of the southern lowland cities. Maya cities in the northern [Yucatán](#) continue to thrive.

1200

Northern Maya cities begin to be abandoned.

1224

The city of [Chichén Itzá](#) is abandoned by the Toltecs. A people known as the Uicil-abnal, which later takes the name Itzá, settles in the desolate city.

1244

The Itzá abandon Chichén Itzá for reasons unknown.

1263

The Itzá begin building the city of Mayapán.

1283

Mayapán becomes the capital of Yucatán.

1441

There is a rebellion within Mayapán and the city is abandoned by 1461. Shortly after this, Yucatán degenerates from a single united kingdom into sixteen rival statelets, each anxious to become the most powerful.

1511

A Spaniard named Gonzalo Guerrero is shipwrecked and washed up on the eastern shore of Yucatán. He defects to the Maya, tattooing his face, piercing his ears and marrying into a Maya noble family. Guerrero later becomes an implacable foe of the Spaniards and does much to help the Maya resist Spanish rule in Yucatán.

1517

The Spanish first arrive on the shores of Yucatán under Hernandez de Cordoba, who later dies of wounds received in battle against the Maya. The arrival of the Spanish ushers in Old World diseases unknown among the Maya, including smallpox, influenza and measles. Within a century, 90 per cent of Mesoamerica's native populations will be killed off.

1519

Hernán Cortés begins exploring Yucatán.

1524

Cortés meets the Itzá people, the last of the Maya peoples to remain unconquered by the Spanish. The Spanish leave the Itzá alone until the seventeenth century.

1528

The Spanish under Francisco de Montejo begin their conquest of the northern Maya. The Maya fight back with surprising vigour, keeping the Spanish at bay for several years.

1541

The Spanish are finally able to subdue the Maya and put an end to Maya resistance. Revolt continues, however, to plague the Spaniards off and on for the rest of the century.

1542

The Spanish establish a capital city at Mérida in Yucatán.

1695

The ruins of Tikal are discovered by chance by the Spanish priest Father Avedaño and his companions, who had become lost in the jungle.

1712

The Maya of the Chiapas highlands rise against the Mexican government. They will continue to do so off and on until the 1990s.

1724

The Spanish Crown abolishes the system of *encomienda*, which had given Spanish land barons the right to forced Maya labour, as long as they agreed to convert the Maya to Christianity.

1821

Mexico becomes independent from Spain. In general, life becomes more tolerable for the Maya than it had been under Spanish rule.

1822

An account of Antonio del Río's late eighteenth-century explorations of Palenque is published in London. The book raises a great deal of interest in further exploration of the "lost" Maya civilization and settlements.

1839

American diplomat and lawyer John Lloyd Stephens and English topographical artist Frederick Catherwood begin a series of [explorations](#) into Maya regions, revealing the full splendour of classical Maya civilization to the world for the first time.

1847

The Yucatán Maya rise up against the Mexican government, rebelling against the miserable conditions and cruelty they have suffered at the hands of the whites. The rebellion is so successful that the Maya almost manage to take over the entire peninsula in what has become known as the War of the Castes.

1850

A miraculous "talking cross" in a village in central Quintana Roo predicts a holy war against the whites. Bolstered by arms received from the British in Belize, the Maya form into quasi-military companies inspired by messianic zeal. The fighting continues until 1901.

1860

The Yucatán Maya rebel again.

1864

Workmen digging a canal on the Caribbean coast of Guatemala discover a jade plaque inscribed with a date of A.D. 320. The plaque becomes one of the oldest known objects dated in the Maya fashion.

1880

A new tide of government intervention in Maya life begins as governments attempt to force the Maya to become labourers on cash-crop plantations. This destroys many aspects of Maya cultural traditions and agricultural methods preserved over 4,000 years. Towns which had been protected for the Maya soon become a haven for mixed-race [ladinos](#) who prey economically on the indigenous Maya and usurp all positions of social and economic power.

1910

Rampant government corruption leads to the Mexican Revolution.

1946

American photographer Giles Healey is taken to the Maya city of Bonampak by the native Lacandón who live nearby. Healey becomes the first non-Maya ever to see Bonampak's stunning wall-paintings, which reveal new details about Maya civilization.

1952

The Priest-king [Pacal's tomb](#) at Palenque is discovered and excavated by Mexican archaeologist Alberto Ruz, marking the first time a tomb has been found inside a Maya pyramid. Prior to this, [Maya pyramids](#) were believed to be temples with a purely religious or ceremonial purpose.

1962

Maya [hieroglyphic signs](#) are first catalogued. Uncontrolled looting of Maya tombs and other sites begins around this time in the southern lowlands, continuing until well into the 1970s.

1992

A Quiché Maya woman from Guatemala named [Rigoberta Menchu](#), who has lost most of her family to the death squads and is known for speaking out against the extermination of the Maya, wins the Nobel Peace Prize.