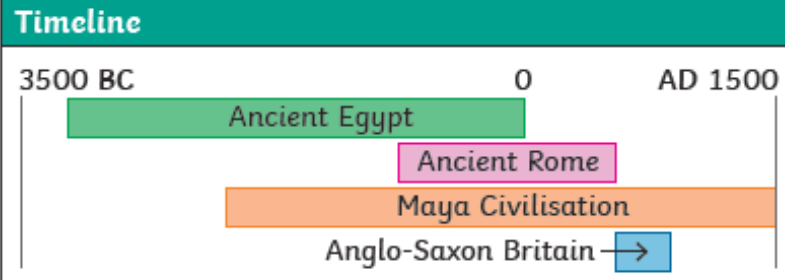


## Maya Civilisation

Key Events	
2000 BC	The Maya <b>civilisation</b> comes into being in Central America.
300 BC	Cities, such as El Mirador, become large and powerful.
AD 900	Cities in the rainforest are abandoned due to an extensive <b>drought</b> . People move north to the highlands of Guatemala and the Yucatán.
AD 1000	Cities like Chichén Itzá (which has two temple pyramids) are still thriving.
AD 1500s	The Spanish arrive and set out to conquer the Maya. They destroy their books and Maya cities fall to ruin.
AD 1839	American explorer and writer, John Lloyd Stephens, and British artist, Frederick Catherwood explore Copán and extensively document what they find, reigniting interest in the Maya <b>civilisation</b> . They go on to document other Maya cities, including Chichén Itzá.
AD 2014	The cities of Lagunita and Tamchén are rediscovered.



Religion
The Maya believed in and worshipped a number of different gods. They believed that the gods had a good side and a bad side and that the gods could help or hurt them. The Maya would dance, sing and sometimes make offerings of blood to the gods.
Priests were very important in Maya society as it was believed that they could communicate directly with the gods. They would perform different <b>rituals</b> during festivals or special ceremonies in order to appeal to the gods.

The Upperworld and the Underworld
The Maya people believed that the earth, which they called the Middleworld, was large and flat and resting on the back of a creature, such as a turtle or crocodile.
On the Middleworld grew a tree whose branches reached up into the heavens (the Upperworld) and whose roots grew down into Xibalba (the Underworld), which was guarded by gods of death who looked like <b>jaguars</b> .
Ordinary Maya people believed that, after they died, their souls would travel through a series of caves and tunnels to Xibalba. Rulers and noblemen believed that they had a chance of getting to the Upperworld.

## Key Vocabulary

<b>civilisation</b>	An organised society with its own culture and way of life, existing in a particular area over a particular period of time.
<b>drought</b>	A long period with very little rain.
<b>ritual</b>	A ceremony, often religious, with set actions performed in a set order.
<b>jaguar</b>	A big cat, heavier than a leopard, with yellowish fur and black spots.
<b>scribes</b>	People paid to write things down, either as an official record or for someone else unable to write.
<b>codices</b>	Ancient handwritten texts. Maya <b>codices</b> could be unfolded like a concertina. One text is called a codex.
<b>maize</b>	Another word for sweetcorn or corn on the cob. It can be made into a dough and baked into tortillas.
<b>cacao beans</b>	Cacao trees sprout pods directly from their trunks. When they are ripe, the pods can be broken open to reveal the beans, which can then be dried, roasted and ground.

## Writing

The Maya writing system, used to write several different Maya languages, was made up of over 800 symbols called glyphs. Some glyphs were logograms, representing a whole word, and some were syllabograms, representing units of sound. They were carved onto stone buildings and monuments and painted onto pottery. Maya **scribes** also wrote books, called **codices**, made from the bark of fig trees. Only priests and noblemen would know the whole written language.



The Maya logogram for b'alam - **jaguar**

## Maya Numbers

The Maya developed a complex number and counting system that was advanced for their time. They were one of only two cultures in the world to develop the concept of zero.



The Maya people used just three symbols in their number system. These are thought to represent items that the Maya people might have first used to count with, such as pebbles, sticks and shells.

The Maya used a base 20 number system, so after number 19, multiples of 20 were written above the bottom number.



## Food

**Maize** was a very important crop that formed up to 80% of the Maya people's diets. They believed that the first humans were made from **maize** dough by the gods.

The Maya made a bitter chocolatey drink from **cacao beans** that was enjoyed by the rich and used for medicines and in ceremonies.

The beans were highly valued and even used as a form of money.



# Mexico

## This is Mexico!

Mexico is located in the south of the continent of North America. It has a diverse landscape that includes mountains, rainforests and deserts. This means that its climate is also very varied and there are a wide range of plants and animals found there, including many types of cacti and over 700 species of reptile. Some people live in rural communities and others live in large cities. Mexico City is the capital of Mexico. It is home to nearly nine million people, with a vibrant, diverse population and a rich cultural heritage.



Mexico City and the Popocatepetl volcano

## Chihuahuan Desert

The Chihuahuan Desert is one of the largest in North America. It covers parts of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and Mexico. Winters are cool and summers are extremely hot. There is very little rainfall, but the Rio Grande River runs through the desert and provides water for the animals, plants and people who live there. The Chihuahuan Desert is said to have more species of cacti than any other desert. Shrubs and cacti, such as Mormon tea and prickly pear, are found in the desert. There are many different animals, such as the pronghorn antelope and kit fox, that thrive in the desert.

## Festivals and celebrations

Mexican people celebrate many different festivals and special days across the year. They are a central part of Mexican culture and may involve music, food, dancing and special clothes.

### Día de la Independencia (Independence Day)

This festival celebrates the start of Mexico's fight for independence from Spain in 1810. On 15th September, the President of Mexico rings a bell in the National Palace in Mexico City then shouts, 'Viva Mexico!' from the balcony. The Mexican flag is waved, and people sing the national anthem. The following day, banks, schools, offices and many businesses close and there are parties and parades for everyone to enjoy.

### Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead)

This festival takes place during the first two days of November. It is a positive celebration to remember loved ones who have died. Families set up brightly decorated altars with photographs of the deceased. Relatives place their loved ones' favourite foods on altars and skeleton costumes and skull decorations are popular.



### Fiesta de Santa Cecilia (Festival of Saint Cecilia)

Mexicans celebrate Saint Cecilia, the patron saint of musicians, on 22nd November. Musicians take part in open-air concerts and people celebrate with food and drink. Over 500 musicians perform a song called *Las Mañanitas* that is dedicated to Saint Cecilia.

## Food

Food plays an important part in Mexican culture. Many Mexican foods can be traced back thousands of years to the Aztecs or Maya and some contain flavours from other countries, including Spain. Traditional Mexican foods include chocolate, corn tortillas, avocados and beans. Popular Mexican dishes may contain a mixture of these ingredients, such as enchiladas, guacamole or churros with chocolate.



## Music

Music and dance are essential to the culture of Mexico. Each region of Mexico has traditional dances that are accompanied by music and feature colourful costumes. One well-known type of music is mariachi, which is performed by a group of musicians playing violins, trumpets and guitars. A traditional Mexican song is *La Cucaracha*, which means 'The cockroach'.

