

Maya

by

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Mayas are a Native American civilization. They originate in Mesoamerica. This stretches from central Mexico through much of Central America. The Mayas began in the Yucatan around 2600 B.C. By A.D. 250 they lived in present-day southern Mexico, Guatemala, northern Belize, and western

Honduras. The Maya are an intelligent civilization. They developed astronomy, calendar systems and hieroglyphic writing. Also, without metal tools, they build elaborate temple-pyramids, palaces and observatories. The Maya were skilled, too, as weavers, potters and farmers.



Dwellings

The Maya lived in small villages. Their homes are made of bamboo poles, standing in a loose frame, held by several horizontal poles. They are roofed with a thatch of palm leaves. The palm leaves are waterproof and last about ten years. The walls are interwoven wooden poles covered with dried mud. The huts were mostly used for sleeping. They slept on hammocks. Their cooking was done outside.

Food

In the Maya religion, humans are referred to as “Men of Maize”. Maize, a type of starchy corn, is eaten in many ways. Beans, meat, chili, vegetables, sugar and salt are all eaten, but mostly as a way to flavor the sacred maize. All over Guatemala, corn is grown, even on very steep slopes. The maize is dried and stored. When they are ready to eat it, they soak it in water with a little bit of lye. The maize has a tough outer covering which protects the inner kernel. The lye eats away the covering leaving only the kernel. The corn is ground on a rock and with another rock as a mortar and pestle. The ground maize or corn dough is called masa. The main food made from masa is tortillas. Maya women scoop up some masa, roll it into a ball, pat it between their

hands, and slap it onto the comal. A comal is a piece of flat metal set over a fire. Some other food made with masa is tamales and atole. Tamales are masa wrapped in corn husks and steamed. Atole is a hot liquid made from masa which is sweetened and drunk with meals, or served as a soup with hot sauce.

Clothing

Common Maya men wore plain cotton loin-cloths. Women wore woven cotton blouses and skirts or loose-fitting sack dresses with simple embroidery. Women and girls wore their hair long, and took care that it was always combed and arranged. Different hair styles signaled the marital status of women. Both men and women tattooed their bodies with elaborate designs. Maya noblemen wore an embroidered cotton loin cloth trimmed with feathers, sandals, and an elaborate feather headdress that was as large as him.

