



Use this guide to check your knowledge and ensure you haven't missed any great content!

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In Cincinnati Museum Center's *Maya: The Exhibition*, you can immerse yourself in the genius of the Maya, an urban civilization that grew from the seemingly hostile habitat of the dense tropical rainforest in the lowlands of southern Mesoamerica. We can marvel at the Maya's knowledge of nature, agricultural practices and how they have endured and live on today – in their inventions that continue to shape our daily lives and in the millions who carry on Mayan languages and traditions.

## Who are the Maya?

According to Maya belief, the present universe was created in 3114 BCE. Between 1700 BCE and 1300 BCE, the first settlements appeared on the Pacific coast and in the Maya lowlands. The world of the Maya extends over the modern countries of Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador.

### Check your knowledge!

How many Mayan languages are still spoken today? How many people speak these languages?

## Life in a Tropical Rainforest

The ancient Maya lived deep within the tropical rainforest, which was a source of food, medicine and building materials. Between 2400 and 2000 BCE, small groups began to regularly plant fields in the jungle, increasingly switching to crops for subsistence.

- Temples and Reservoirs: While most Maya lived in huts made of wood or palm fiber, at the heart of each major city was a royal palace, where the 'Divine King' lived. Many cities had sophisticated water supply networks, with the planning and maintenance of these being one of the king's or his officials' most important tasks.

### Check your knowledge!

How did the Maya use temples to collect water in reservoirs? Why was it important to collect this water?

## Life in a Tropical Rainforest (*continued*)

- Agriculture: The Maya used multiple methods of managing their forests and utilizing agricultural techniques to provide food and other goods. While their main crops were maize, beans and squash, they also grew avocados, peppers, tobacco and several medicinal plants.

### Check your knowledge!

What methods did the Maya use beyond slash-and-burn agriculture to provide fertile ground for growing crops? What were some of the items that grew wild in the forest that the Maya collected?

- Trade: The Maya had extensive trade networks between the lowlands, highlands and coastal regions. They traded many items, including cacao, jade, feathers, shells and cotton garments.

### Check your knowledge!

How did the Maya most often move trade goods from one area to another?

*Extra Challenge!* Does someone in your family have a garden? Have you eaten any of the crops or wild-grown products the Maya grew or collected? The next time you see a garden or farm, try to spot some of the techniques you learned here in action.

## Decline and Rise

By 700 CE, the entire Maya world was governed by two superpower cities—Tikal and Calakmul. When these powers collapsed, their golden age of creativity came to an end.

- Great Collapse and a New Maya Culture: By the beginning of the 17th century, only 10% to 15% of the pre-Columbian population survived. There are multiple theories as to why the Maya people left the densely-populated lowlands. Despite the drastic decline in population, the Maya would survive the political and social transformations after the downfall of their cities, just as they would survive the trauma of the Spanish conquest.

### Check your knowledge!

As many large communities declined, what geographic features allowed some locations to thrive? How did times of drought contribute to the decline?

## Decline and Rise (*continued*)

### Check your knowledge!

Why else do you think the Maya might have left their cities? How could you prove or disprove your hypotheses?

## New Discoveries

Breakthroughs from University of Cincinnati researchers reveal details about how ancient Maya people perceived the world around them and managed their land, forest and water resources. The work of UC researchers and their collaborators helps us understand ancient Maya culture and people.

### Check your knowledge!

What did you find fascinating about the UC professors' research? Do any of these career paths inspire you to learn more about archaeology or history?