



### The Ancient Maya Civilisation



People have lived in this region for over 12,000 years and when they settled here first, they were hunter-gatherers. This means that they migrated across the land searching for food and places to settle. Over time, these people learned to farm, and they settled in small villages. Eventually, these grew into large city states spread across what would one day become Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador and Honduras. These people were called the Maya and their power and might reached its height in the 10th century.

### How do we know about the Ancient Maya?

We know about the Maya because **archaeologists** have found evidence of their existence. The Maya were famous for their **wall art** and **beautiful writing**. Many examples of these have been discovered over the years and these two records give us an idea of what life was like for the different people in Maya



society. There have also been many other archaeological discoveries of Maya tombs, funeral masks, architectural remains of the large city-states and the famous stone pyramids still stand today. There is one mystery that still puzzles archaeologists today, and that is something strange began to happen in the 10th century – the Maya people of the central Maya Lowlands began to abandon their cities and there is no real evidence to tell us why, just multiple theories.

## How did the Maya civilisation become successful?

Farming was important for the Maya people. It was one of the main reasons that the civilisation grew and became so powerful. They developed many specialist **farming techniques** to help grow crops and invented a way of collecting and storing water to irrigate their crops.



limestone



obsidian

The Maya lowlands were also filled with **limestone** - a perfect material for building and they had access to plenty of **obsidian** - a volcanic glass which can be sharpened to use as a tool.

With a plentiful supply of water, specialist farming techniques, an abundance of natural limestone and obsidian for building materials and tools, the **Maya civilisation grew**.



Over time, the population of cities grew and they were filled with **temples, ballcourts and plazas**. These were attractive places to live and work by, and they provided a place for the Maya people to **worship their gods**.

## Who ruled the Maya people?

The Maya were not a united empire of people with a capital city like Ancient Egypt.

Instead, **each city was a state by itself** with its own ruler and council of high priests.

This meant that the city states of the Maya often went to **war with each other** to prove that they were the strongest in the region.

Artefacts show historians and archaeologists that life was **very different for the rich and poor** in Maya society.

