

### The Aztec Empire

Before the Spanish conquest, there were five major civilizations that influenced Mexico: the Olmec, Teotihuacan, Maya, Toltec, and Mexica empires. From those ancient civilizations, the Mexica Empire was the most important. By 1325 CE (common era) the Mexica (called Aztecs) had settled in the place which is the site of modern Mexico City. There, they built a big and powerful city, on a small island, that they called Tenochtitlan.



The Aztecs were very powerful and they expanded their empire by conquering other cities. Around 1431 the Triple Alliance was formed among the city-states of Texcoco, Tlacopan, and Mexico-Tenochtitlan. With the Triple Alliance, the Mexica Empire became more powerful and this empire conquered other cities that had to pay tribute to the Mexica monarch.



Mexico-Tenochtitlan was the most powerful city of the Triple Alliance and it was also the leader. Around 1519, Tenochtitlan was the largest capital in the world. Some historians say that it had a population of more than 360,000 inhabitants.

### *Aztec Lifestyle*

The Aztec empire integrated some ethnic groups that spoke different languages, but the most spoken one was Nahuatl.

The Aztecs were a well-organized society. The social structure was hierarchically divided in the nobility, the warriors, the artisans, the traders, and the peasants (dedicated to agriculture and food production).





41

The clothes of the Aztecs varied depending on their social class. The most common clothing was: the male *mactlatl*, it was a simple cotton loincloth tied in front; the male *tilmatli* or *tilma* was a cotton cloth that was tied over one shoulder; the female *cueitl* (similar to a skirt); and the female *huipil* (similar to a blouse). Besides, kings wore sandals while common people often went barefoot.

The Aztec food was very varied and nutritious; it included corn, beans, chili, fruits, vegetables, fish, insects (grasshoppers, maguey worm, ants, larvae), dogs, and turkey. Aztecs also used cacao beans to make *xocolatl*, their most famous beverage. Nowadays, many dishes of the Mexican cuisine are based on agricultural products produced by the Mexica.

42



45



The Aztec Empire prospered until 1521 when the Spaniards (also known as Spaniards) occupied the capital city of Tenochtitlan. In 1519 Hernan Cortes arrived in Veracruz. It took the Spanish two years to conquer Mexico-Tenochtitlan. In 1521, the Spaniards made their way to the city and conquered its people. The Spanish regime lasted almost 300 years. During this time, Mexico was known as "New Spain" (Nueva España). Napoleon I attacked Spain in 1807, and Mexico took advantage of that situation. In 1810, a Catholic priest named



Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla declared the Independence of Mexico. Mexico achieved its sovereignty through the Treaty of Cordoba which was signed on August 24, 1821.