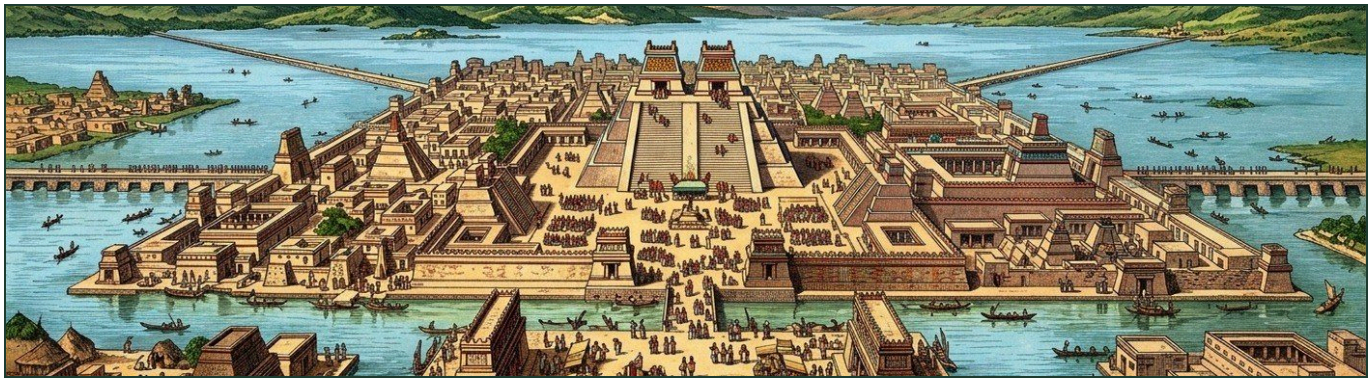


1325 – 1521

Aztec Empire Timeline

The Aztec Empire was one of the most powerful civilizations in the pre-Columbian Americas, ruling central Mexico from their island capital Tenochtitlan until the Spanish conquest in 1521.

1325 — **Tenochtitlan Founded**

Following an omen their god had promised — an eagle on a cactus devouring a snake — the Mexica people found their capital city on an island in Lake Texcoco.

> **Why it mattered:** *Tenochtitlan grew into one of the largest cities in the world, home to about 200,000 people, larger than almost any city in Europe at the time.*

1428 — **Triple Alliance Formed**

The Mexica join with the nearby cities of Texcoco and Tlacopan to form the Triple Alliance, launching rapid conquests across central Mexico.

> **Why it mattered:** *The Triple Alliance became the Aztec Empire — within decades it controlled most of central Mexico, with millions paying tribute to Tenochtitlan.*

1440–1502 — **The Empire Expands**

Under rulers like Moctezuma I and Ahuitzotl, Aztec warriors push the empire to the Gulf Coast, into Oaxaca, and down the Pacific coast to Soconusco, demanding tribute from hundreds of towns.

> **Why it mattered:** *The empire's power rested on tribute: conquered peoples paid in goods and labor, and captives taken in war were sacrificed, funding Tenochtitlan's great temples and markets.*

~1487 — **Dedication of the Great Temple**

The Templo Mayor — the great pyramid at the heart of Tenochtitlan — is expanded and rededicated with elaborate ceremonies.

> **Why it mattered:** *The Templo Mayor was the religious center of the Aztec world, honoring Huitzilopochtli (god of war and the sun) and Tlaloc (god of rain) — the two forces the Aztecs believed sustained the universe.*

Aztec Empire Timeline *continued*

1502

Moctezuma II Becomes Emperor

Moctezuma II becomes the ninth tlatoani (ruler) of Tenochtitlan, presiding over the empire at its height.

> **Why it mattered:** *Moctezuma expanded the empire's reach and centralized power in Tenochtitlan — but his reign would end with the Spanish arrival.*

1519

Cortes Arrives

Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortes lands on the Gulf Coast with about 500 soldiers, plus horses and cannons, which the Aztecs had never seen before.

> **Why it mattered:** *Cortes found many peoples conquered by the Aztecs who were eager to join him against their rulers. A year later, Spanish ships also brought smallpox, a disease new to the Americas.*

1519–20

Cortes Enters Tenochtitlan

Moctezuma II allows Cortes and his soldiers to enter the capital; Cortes eventually takes Moctezuma prisoner inside his own palace.

> **Why it mattered:** *The Spanish were able to enter because of indigenous allies, strategic boldness, and because many Aztec-subject peoples saw the Spanish as a chance for liberation from Aztec tribute demands.*

1520

La Noche Triste

Moctezuma dies while a prisoner of the Spanish. Days later, Aztec warriors drive the Spanish out of Tenochtitlan in a night of fierce fighting, and Cortes suffers heavy losses.

> **Why it mattered:** *The defeat showed the power of Aztec warriors. But a few months later smallpox swept through the city, killing many people, including the new ruler Cuitlahuac.*

1521

Siege of Tenochtitlan

Cortes returns with tens of thousands of indigenous allies and lays siege to Tenochtitlan for nearly three months; the city falls on August 13 and the last emperor Cuauhtemoc is captured.

> **Why it mattered:** *The fall of one of the world's greatest cities marked the end of the Aztec Empire — and the deaths of millions from European diseases transformed the Americas forever.*

1521 onward

Colonial New Spain

The Spanish build Mexico City on the ruins of Tenochtitlan and establish New Spain; Aztec culture, religion, and people are suppressed but never fully erased.

> **Why it mattered:** *Aztec language, art, food, and traditions survived the conquest — millions of people of Aztec descent still live in Mexico today, and Nahuatl words like tomato, chocolate, and avocado are used worldwide.*