

Hernán Cortez (1485–1547)



Hernán Cortez was a Spanish conquistador who conquered the Aztec empire in central Mexico. Cortez left Cuba in 1519 to find the Aztec's gold. He landed on the coast of Mexico with eleven ships and over 600 men.

The Aztecs had built an empire in Mexico and had forced people in the surrounding area into slavery. Indians from many of these groups joined Cortez as he traveled toward Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital city. Montezuma, the Aztec emperor, lived in this city. It was built on islands in the middle of a great lake. Roadways built across the water linked one island to another.

When Cortez arrived at Tenochtitlán, he was greeted by Montezuma himself. Montezuma was dressed in gold and fine jewelry. He offered gold to Cortez, hoping he would leave. However, when Cortez saw the wealth of the Aztecs, he was even more determined to conquer the people.

Montezuma housed the Spaniards in his own lodgings, which were richly painted and furnished. Cortez soon captured Montezuma and held him prisoner. In a struggle that followed, Montezuma was killed, and Cortez and his troops were forced to flee for their lives. A year later, however, Cortez returned with additional troops. The Aztecs were defeated and Cortez sent the golden treasures he found back to Spain. Cortez was made the governor of the land called New Spain. Today that land is known as Mexico.

1. Was Cortez's trip to Mexico in 1519 successful? Why or why not?

2. Why were some Indians in Mexico willing to aid Cortez in conquering the Aztecs? _____

3. What made Tenochtitlán an unusual city? _____
