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# Spanish conquest of the Americas

(c.1492–c.1572)

## Student Research Guide

History | Year 8

Cover: [Tzompantli](#), 2013, by Rafael Saldaña

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# Overview

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This guide is designed to help you discover items on the **Spanish conquest of the Americas** that you can access on site, from your school or home.

## Before you get started

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## Featured Databases

The [National Geographic Virtual Library](#) has articles, images, books and more on the Spanish conquest of the Americas.

The screenshot shows the National Geographic Virtual Library interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Search..." and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar, the title "Visitor's Guide to the Aztec World" is displayed. The main content area features a large illustration of an Aztec figure on the left, a central text block titled "VISITOR'S GUIDE TO THE AZTEC WORLD" with a sub-header "Produced by the Cartographic Division National Geographic Society NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE", and a map of Mexico on the right. The text block contains a paragraph starting with "THEY CAME FROM AZTLAN, a place of myth and dreams situated, perhaps, somewhere in the west of Mexico. They came, the fierce Aztecs, wandering out of the wilderness with their trust god Huitzilopochtli, leader on human hearts, who gave them the name Mexica. Uninvited they were, judged by the standards of other Nahuatl-speaking people - earlier arrivals in the Valley of Mexico who lived in city-states ruled by kings. The Aztecs settled on Chapultepec - the 'hill of the grasshopper' - in the 13th century. At first they were left alone by the people around them, but soon those neighbors grew to despise their heathen ways and forced them out. The Aztecs moved to a barren expanse of land, near where the University of Mexico stands today, where they subsisted on a diet of snakes and serpens. There they remained for a generation as solitary nomads, first to the Culhuacan of Culhuacan and later to the Tepanecas of Azcapotzalco. Seeking another home, they landed on a marshy island in Lake Texcoco at a place where they spotted an eagle perched on a cactus. The sighting fulfilled an ancient prophecy, and the Aztecs adopted the eagle as the emblem of their new home - Tenochtitlan. In memory of Azcapotzalco they launched into unremitting warfare against the other city-states, sharing with their overlords the booty from their conquests. In 1428 the Aztecs established their supremacy in the valley by crushing the Tepanecas. A three-city alliance with Texcoco and Tlacopan (today's Tacuba) brought Tenochtitlan more power and riches. As the Aztec Empire expanded, so did its artistic accomplishments, including massive stone sculpture and fine feather- and goldwork. By the 16th century they had brought most of present-day Mexico into a rich, tribute-paying empire that was at the peak of its flowering when Hernan Cortes, hungry for gold and glory, landed in Mexico in 1519. The end of empire came even faster than its rise. By August 13, 1521, the last Aztec ruler had surrendered." Below the text is a map titled "EXTENT OF THE AZTEC WORLD" showing the geographical spread of the empire. To the right of the text is a detailed map of Mexico City, titled "MEXICO CITY FROM INAUSPICIOUS beginnings in the 16th century as an island settlement in Lake Texcoco, the city of Tenochtitlan became the seat of the Aztec Empire. Its high pyramidal temples, its canals and canals, its palaces and markets, and the ingenuity and inventiveness of its people so impressed Cortes that he compared Tenochtitlan favorably with the great cities of Spain. With just 400 Spanish troops, but more than 100,000 Indian allies - some of whom fought from the water - Cortes overcame the city. With the storming of the city, the Aztec Empire fell. In 1521, the Spanish had the foundation of the capital of modern Mexico, a growing, bustling metropolis that is expected to become, by this century's end, the world's most populous city." The interface also includes a sidebar with navigation options like "Explore", "Table of Contents", and "Illustrated Works".

The [Britannica Library](#) has articles, images, videos, primary sources, eBooks and more on the Spanish conquest of the Americas with a selection of resources especially for teenagers.

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## Introduction

During the 15th century, the European countries of Spain and Portugal began sending ships on expeditions to find new [trade](#) routes to Asia. An

[JSTOR](#) is an excellent resource for finding primary sources on the Spanish conquest of the Americas.

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