

Yaqui

Yaquis (YAH kee) are a Uto-Aztecan speaking people whose homeland is the Yaqui River valley of Southern Sonora. They call themselves Yoemem (yo EM mem), or “People”. Their nearest neighbors are the Mayos, with whom they share many customs and beliefs. For many Yaqui, the heart of their culture is the five enchanted worlds that mirror the land in which they live. These mystical realms play a part in the everyday life of the Yaqui people.

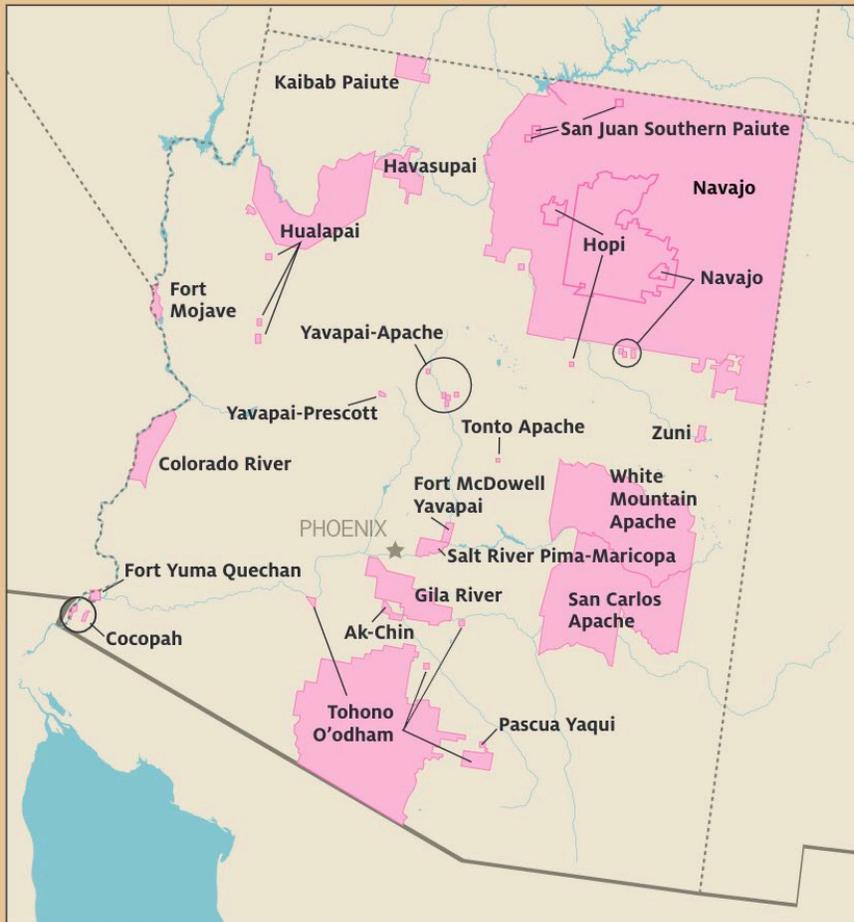
One of the most important worlds is the *Sea Ania* or Flower World. The flowers of the Sea Ania unite the people and connect them to their past. The deer dance is an important ceremony that lets Yaqui people communicate with the Flower World. It is performed at Easter, as well as other times of the year. It is an excellent example of how Yaquis combine their own spiritualism with traditional Catholic rituals.

In the deer dance, Saila Maaso (SIE lah MAH soh) “little brother deer” leaves the Flower World to visit the Yaqui people. The dance was created a long time ago after a man saw the deer having a party of their own in the woods. He practiced their dancing and was able to do it himself. The deer songs that are now part of the ceremony were traditionally used for hunting. For Yaquis, songs are bridges between the natural world and the enchanted worlds. They are the language that unites people and animals. The participants in the ceremony are: the Deer Dancer, Deer Singers, Musicians, and the Pakkola dancers who are the ceremonial hosts and who often perform clownish antics.

Despite their visions of beautiful spiritual worlds, the history of the Yaqui people is full of harsh realities. Following Mexican independence in 1821, the Mexican government stepped up attempts to control Yaqui farm lands. For ninety years, Yaqui guerrilla fighters resisted attacks by the Mexican government. By 1880, Yaquis created a formal army of 4,000 troops; the fighting which took place after this time was known as the “Yaqui Wars”.

The Mexican army finally defeated the Yaqui troops at the battle of Buatachive in 1886. Many Yoemem fled hundreds of miles to the United States to avoid deportation, or execution. As a result of the years of fighting, the Yaqui population dropped from 20,000 to less than 3,000.

During the 1970s, the Yaqui in Arizona petitioned the US government to receive Federal Recognition as a U.S. tribe, an Indigenous sovereign nation. They received Federal Recognition on September 18, 1978. Today, there Yaqui people live in small communities in southern Arizona, California, and Texas, as well as in their Mexican homeland. In Tucson there are four Yaqui communities: New Pascua, Old Pascua, Barrio Libre and Yoeme pueblo in Marana. The Yaquis’ vision of the enchanted worlds, like the Flower World, along with their religious ceremonies, like the Deer Dance, bind them together and help them endure as a people.



Arizona's 22 Federally Recognized Tribes

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Ak-Chin Indian Community | Navajo Nation* |
| Cocopah Indian Tribe | Pascua Yaqui Tribe |
| Colorado River Indian Tribes* | Pueblo of Zuni |
| Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation | Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community |
| Fort Mojave Indian Tribe* | San Carlos Apache Tribe |
| Fort Yuma Quechan Tribe | San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe |
| Gila River Indian Community | Tohono O'odham Nation |
| Havasupai Tribe | Tonto Apache Tribe |
| Hopi Tribe | White Mountain Apache Tribe |
| Hualapai Tribe | Yavapai-Apache Tribe |
| Kaibab Band of Paiute Indians | Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe |

*Reservation boundaries extend into neighboring states.



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

ARIZONA STATE MUSEUM

<http://statemuseum.arizona.edu>