

GOLDMANS



Although America's first inhabitants had arrived thousands of years before and the Vikings had visited Newfoundland about five centuries earlier, Christopher Columbus—seeking a sea route to the Orient—discovered America for the Europe of his time and launched the greatest migration in human history.



At dawn on March 15, 1493, Christopher Columbus came up onto the deck of his ship, *Niña*, and saw that he was sailing off the coast of Spain near the town of Palos. It was from Palos that he had departed 32 weeks before on his first voyage of discovery. What Columbus and his men found during their eight months at sea forever changed how Europeans viewed their world.

The journey followed years of planning and preparation. As early as 1484 Columbus proposed such a voyage to King John of Portugal. The king's advisors counseled him against financing this "Enterprise of the Indies," for it would cost a great deal of money with no guarantee of profit. Rejected in Portugal, Columbus traveled to the court of Spain, where he presented his plan to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella in 1486. At first he was again refused royal support, but in 1492 Isabella finally agreed to finance the voyage.

Columbus was not trying to prove the earth was spherical by sailing westward to reach the Indies. Educated people of the day already knew the shape of the earth and had a fairly good idea of its size. Resistance came from scholars who argued that the distance from Europe west to Asia was more than sailing ships of the time could cover. They were right. Ships would surely have run out of supplies before reaching the Orient. Luckily for Columbus, America lay in between.

Columbus left Spain on Friday, August 3, 1492, with about ninety men aboard three ships, *Niña*, *Pinta*, and *Santa Maria*. They sailed south to the Canary Islands off the coast of Africa, where the wind usually blew from east to west. On September 9 they left the Canaries, and on October 12—just a little more than a month later—they again sighted land. Columbus was not surprised; the land was just about where he expected it to be. But because he had underestimated the distance to Asia, he thought he had arrived in Japan.

Where had the fleet really arrived? At least a half-dozen locations have been suggested. Most believe that Columbus landed on San Salvador or Watling's Island, a small island in the Bahamas, but no one can be sure. Whatever the location, it was the site of one of the most important encounters in history. When Columbus stepped ashore to claim the land for Spain he met the Tainos, whom he described as a mild and hospitable people. This exchange between Europeans and Native Americans has lasted—for better and for worse—five hundred years.

Columbus and his men visited other Bahama islands, Cuba, and Hispaniola (now the Dominican Republic and Haiti). At each they found usually friendly "Indians" and intriguing evidence of gold. On Christmas Eve the fleet was off Cape Haitien on Hispaniola when *Santa Maria* ran aground. Using the timbers of the wrecked ship, the men built a small fort and prepared to stay until a relief expedition could be sent. This first Spanish settlement in the New World was named La Navidad (Christmas) for the day of its founding.

Columbus set sail for home on January 4, 1493, leaving 39 crewmen at La Navidad. *Niña* and *Pinta* made excellent time most of the way back, sometimes sailing as fast as modern vessels. After reaching Palos, Columbus hurried to tell Ferdinand and Isabella of his discoveries. He was given the honors and privileges they had promised, including the title "Admiral of the Ocean Sea."

Columbus made three more voyages to the New World, during which he explored most of the Caribbean and the northern coast of South America. The second voyage, with 17 ships, carried farmers, artisans, livestock, and seeds for planting. By the time of the fourth voyage in 1502-04, a growing colony had been established on Hispaniola. Columbus initially governed the colony under his agreement with the Spanish rulers. Although his failure as a governor led to his removal, his vision and success as a sailor won him lasting fame as one of those who most shaped world history.



The National Park Service administers many parks related to America's Hispanic heritage. Established in 1992, Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve in the Virgin Islands is the only site in U.S. territory known to have been visited by Columbus.



Some people and places important to Columbus: Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand, his Spanish patrons; Palos, his port of departure and return; and the Tainos, the original Americans of the West Indies.

Among the world's most famous men, Christopher Columbus is also among the most mysterious. Perhaps because the impact of his accomplishments has been so great, many who have written about him have sought to make him larger than life. Others, in reaction, have tried to diminish his reputation. Historians have had to sift through many accounts—some conflicting—in seeking to arrive at the truth.

Some aspects of Columbus's life are unquestioned. It is known that he was born in Genoa, Italy, in 1451 to a weaver named Domenico Columbus and his wife Susanna. Genoa was a trading center dependent upon the sea for its livelihood. It was also a center of map making. It is safe to assume that young Christopher was shaped by these influences.

It is also known that Columbus went to sea at an early age. Exactly when he first shipped out as a hand is uncertain, but he was aboard a merchant vessel bound for the Greek island of Chios in 1474. This voyage introduced him to the Oriental trade and helped him appre-

ciate the exotic goods from Asia. The wonderful spices, incense, and perfumes of the East must have excited his imagination.

In 1476 Columbus sailed with a merchant fleet out into the Atlantic and north up the coast of Portugal. His ship was attacked by the French and sunk, and he was cast up on the Portuguese shore. He eventually made his way to Lisbon, where he lived for a time. His brother Bartholomew may have opened a map-making shop there and taken Christopher into partnership with him. He may also have shipped out on voyages to England and Iceland.

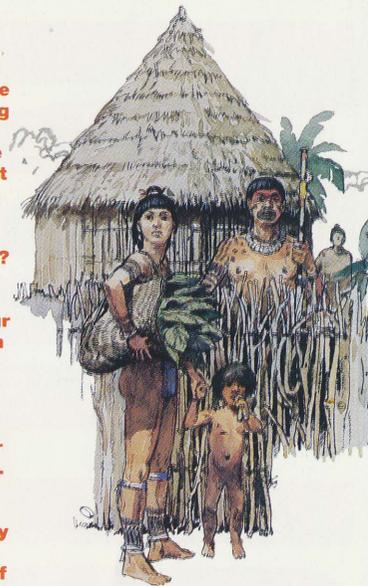
We do know that in 1479 Columbus married a young noblewoman, Felipa Moniz Perestrello, who was the mother of his son Diego and who died sometime before he left Portugal in 1485. During this period he made at least one voyage to Guinea on the African coast and also spent some time at Porto Santo in the Madeira Islands.

What did Columbus look like? No one really knows. All the pictures and statues of him are conjectural. We have four physical descriptions of him from people who knew him, but they do not completely agree. Apparently he was taller than average and well built, with blue eyes and fair skin that tended to be ruddy. Most descriptions say that his hair, once blond or reddish, turned white at an early age. He seems to have been blessed with acute senses of sight, hearing, and smell—all valuable to a sailor who must be constantly sensitive to the moods of the sea.

What of Columbus as a person? Was he kind or malicious, calm or excitable, agreeable or argumentative? Here we enter a morass of conflicting opinion, depending on the viewpoints of those who have written about him. Obviously he was intelligent

and persistent. Probably he was very ambitious, and there is abundant evidence that he was religious. Any further description of his personality depends on how one wishes to view him, because sufficient lore exists to make of him what one will.

From the standpoint of history, the unknowns about Columbus are unimportant. His fame rests deservedly on his genius as a navigator and practical sailor. The route he pioneered on his first voyage to America is still—five centuries later—the ideal path for sailing vessels. Whatever one's view of his life and personality, no man better represents the advent of the modern age.



This brochure is published on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of Columbus's first voyage to the Americas.

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