

Know Many people today like spices, European countries had very few and had to travel far to bring spices and other goods from distant lands.

Columbus

Columbus sailed to the islands in the Caribbean to reach Asia.

Columbus was born in 1451 near Genoa, Italy. He studied navigation and sailing in Genoa. He wanted to reach Asia by a new route. He wanted to sail around the Atlantic Ocean, instead of south around Africa. He did not know that North and South America were in Europe and Asia.

Columbus asked King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella to pay for a westward voyage to Asia. They said they would pay if Columbus found a route to Asia. Columbus didn't have money for the voyage, so he had to ask the king and queen for money. They were fighting to take back land from North African Muslims, who had been in control of the area for 300 years.



Christopher Columbus, explorer of the Americas, sailed to India.



Columbus Sails West

Six years later, in 1492, Columbus again asked Ferdinand and Isabella for money. This time they agreed. Spain had won the Reconquista and needed to pay for it. Ferdinand and Isabella hoped to make money from the gold and spices they believed Columbus would find in Asia. They also wanted to teach others about their religion, Roman Catholicism.

Columbus set sail from Palos, Spain, on August 3, 1492. He carried enough supplies for a year. Close to 90 men traveled in three ships named the Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa María. The sailors did not know how long the trip would take or where they would land. Shortly after midnight on October 12, 1492, a sailor aboard the Pinta saw land. The ships had arrived at an island in the Caribbean Sea that Columbus named San Salvador. This island is part of the present-day Bahamas, east of Mexico.

Columbus mistakenly believed he had reached land off the coast of Asia, near India. He named the islands the West Indies and the people living on them Indians.

The sailors on this expedition were the first Europeans to meet people of the Caribbean. These people called themselves the Taíno (TY noh), which means “good.” The Taíno were peaceful and fought only to defend their villages from attacks. More than 600,000 Taíno lived in the Caribbean at the time of Columbus’s visit.

After meeting the Taíno and trading with them, Columbus sailed on with his crew. They visited two other large islands, Cuba and Hispaniola, before returning home.

REVIEW Why did Ferdinand and Isabella finally agree to give Columbus money for his voyage in 1492?

Daring Journey

Columbus sailed into unknown waters for more than a month before seeing land.

SKILL Reading Maps

Where did the three ships first land?