



THE EXPEDITIONS OF

# *Christopher Columbus*

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Four Voyages That Changed the World | 1492 – 1504



# THE AGE OF EXPLORATION

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By the late 15th century, European nations were eager to find new sea routes to Asia. The Ottoman Empire's control of overland trade routes made spices, silk, and gold far more expensive. Portugal led early exploration down Africa's coast, but Spain sought a bolder path — west across the Atlantic.



## Motivation

Find a western route to the Indies and its lucrative spice trade



## Sponsor

Queen Isabella I and King Ferdinand II of Spain



## Promise

Columbus would be named Admiral and Governor of all lands found



# 1492

*The year that changed history*

# 1

## FIRST VOYAGE

1492 – 1493

Columbus departed from Palos de la Frontera, Spain on August 3, 1492, with three ships and about 90 crew members. After a stop in the Canary Islands, they sailed west into uncharted waters for over five weeks.

On October 12, 1492, land was sighted — an island in the Bahamas that Columbus named San Salvador. He went on to explore Cuba and Hispaniola before returning to Spain in March 1493 as a celebrated hero.



### Santa María

Flagship – ~100 tons  
Ran aground off Hispaniola



### Pinta

Fastest of the three  
First to sight land



### Niña

Columbus's favorite  
Survived the return voyage

# KEY MOMENTS: FIRST VOYAGE

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- **Aug 3, 1492** Departed Palos de la Frontera with 3 ships and ~90 men
- **Sep 6, 1492** Left the Canary Islands, sailing west into the open Atlantic
- **Oct 12, 1492** Landed on San Salvador (Guanahani) in the Bahamas
- **Oct 28, 1492** Reached Cuba, believing it to be mainland Asia
- **Dec 5, 1492** Arrived at Hispaniola (modern Haiti and Dominican Republic)
- **Dec 25, 1492** Santa María ran aground; built La Navidad from wreckage
- **Jan 16, 1493** Began the return voyage to Spain aboard the Niña
- **Mar 15, 1493** Triumphant arrival in Palos; received by the Spanish court

# 2

## SECOND VOYAGE

1493 – 1496

Columbus returned on a grand scale — 17 ships and over 1,200 men, including soldiers, farmers, and priests. The mission was colonization: establish a permanent Spanish presence and find gold.

He explored the Lesser Antilles, Puerto Rico, and Jamaica, and founded the colony of La Isabela on Hispaniola — the first European town in the Americas. However, the colony struggled with disease, dwindling supplies, and conflict with the indigenous Taíno people.

**17**

Ships in the fleet

**1,200+**

Men on the expedition

**1493**

La Isabela founded

# 3

## THIRD VOYAGE

1498 – 1500

With six ships, Columbus sailed further south than before, reaching the coast of present-day Venezuela — the first time a European had set foot on the South American mainland. He noted the massive flow of freshwater from the Orinoco River, leading him to speculate he had found a vast continent.

Back in Hispaniola, Columbus found the colony in chaos. Spanish settlers were in open revolt. Reports of mismanagement reached Spain, and in 1500, royal commissioner Francisco de Bobadilla arrested Columbus and his brothers, sending them back to Spain in chains.

### Turning Point

- First European on South American mainland
- Colony of Hispaniola in revolt
- Columbus arrested and sent back to Spain in chains
- Stripped of his titles as Governor

# 4

## FOURTH VOYAGE

1502 – 1504

Now aging and in poor health, Columbus set out one last time with four ships. His mission: find a strait leading to the Indian Ocean. He explored the coast of Central America — Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama — but found no passage.

The voyage was plagued by storms, hostile encounters, and shipworm-damaged hulls. Columbus was stranded on Jamaica for over a year before being rescued. He returned to Spain broken and largely forgotten by the court.



### The Final Voyage

4 ships departed Cadiz

Explored Central American coast

Stranded on Jamaica for 1 year

Returned to Spain, November 1504

# COMPARING THE FOUR VOYAGES

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	First Voyage	Second Voyage	Third Voyage	Fourth Voyage
<b>Dates</b>	1492–1493	1493–1496	1498–1500	1502–1504
<b>Ships</b>	3	17	6	4
<b>Crew</b>	~90	1,200+	~200	~150
<b>Key Lands</b>	Bahamas, Cuba, Hispaniola	Lesser Antilles, Puerto Rico, Jamaica	Trinidad, Venezuela	Honduras, Panama, Jamaica
<b>Outcome</b>	Discovery; Hero's welcome	Colonization; Conflict begins	Arrested; Sent home in chains	Stranded; Broken return

# LANDS COLUMBUS REACHED

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## The Bahamas

First landfall — San Salvador  
(Guanahani), October 1492



## Cuba

Explored extensively; Columbus  
believed it was the Asian mainland



## Hispaniola

Site of first colony; modern-day Haiti  
and Dominican Republic



## Puerto Rico

Visited on the second voyage,  
November 1493



## Jamaica

Explored and later stranded here for  
over a year



## Venezuela

South American mainland — first  
European contact, 1498

# IMPACT & LEGACY

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## Historical Significance

Columbus's voyages initiated sustained contact between Europe and the Americas, triggering what historians call the Columbian Exchange — a massive transfer of plants, animals, culture, and ideas between hemispheres. This reshaped diets, economies, and ecosystems around the globe.

*His journeys opened the door to European colonization of the Americas, fundamentally altering the course of world history.*



## A Complex Legacy

Modern scholarship has re-examined Columbus's legacy with a critical eye. His expeditions led to the enslavement and brutal treatment of indigenous peoples, the destruction of native cultures, and devastating population decline through disease and violence.

*Today, many communities observe Indigenous Peoples' Day as an alternative to Columbus Day, honoring those who suffered the consequences of colonization.*

# THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE

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*Columbus's voyages triggered an unprecedented transfer of goods, organisms, and ideas between the Old World and the New.*

## Americas → Europe

- Potatoes — became a staple across Europe
- Tomatoes — transformed Mediterranean cuisine
- Maize (corn) — widely adopted as a crop
- Cacao — gave the world chocolate
- Tobacco, squash, peppers, vanilla

## Europe → Americas

- Horses — transformed indigenous life
- Wheat, sugarcane, rice — new agriculture
- Cattle, pigs, sheep — livestock
- Diseases — smallpox, measles, influenza
- Iron tools, weapons, Christianity

# THE FINAL YEARS

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Columbus returned from his fourth voyage in November 1504, exhausted and suffering from severe arthritis. Queen Isabella, his most powerful patron, died just weeks later. He spent his final years petitioning King Ferdinand to restore the titles and wealth promised to him — largely without success.

Columbus died on May 20, 1506 in Valladolid, Spain. He went to his grave believing he had reached the outskirts of Asia, never knowing he had encountered entirely new continents.

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## 1451 – 1506

Born in Genoa, Republic of Genoa

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Died in Valladolid, Spain  
aged approximately 54

*Never knew he had found  
new continents*



A JOURNEY THAT RESHAPED THE WORLD

# *Christopher Columbus*

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Four voyages across the Atlantic between 1492 and 1504  
brought two worlds into contact and forever changed both.

