

Christopher Columbus

Christopher Columbus is often thought of, and celebrated, for the discovery of America (and South America). He is often remembered as a brave hero, who went in search of a new world. The truth, however, is a bit different than the legend would suggest. Read on to discover who Columbus really was.



Columbus - Quick Facts

- Christopher Columbus was born in Genoa, Italy in 1451.
- His parents were Susanna and Domenico Columbus. His father was a weaver by trade. Though Christopher worked in his father's shop when he was young, he wanted to be a sailor.
- When he was older, he got his wish and became a sailor. Then, in 1476, when Columbus was twenty-five, the ships that he was sailing with were attacked by French Pirates. His ship sank, and he swam to the nearest shore, which was the coast of Portugal.
- When he was well, he moved in with his brother Bartholomew in Portugal and, together, they ran a small shop that sold maps for sailors.
- It was in Portugal that Columbus met and married his wife, Dona Felipa Moniz de Perestrello. The couple had a son named Diego.

Columbus - the earth is flat?

Despite what you may have read before, Columbus and the people of his time didn't believe that the world was flat. They knew that it was round, but didn't know how big it was.

Where was he heading?

During Columbus' time, the only place to get certain spices or precious silks was by traveling to the Indies. The only sea route that had ever been used took a long time since they had to sail east around Africa.

That is why Columbus wanted to sail to the west to try and reach the Indies. Since no one knew how big the Earth was, he argued that you could reach the Indies quickly by sailing to the west.

However, when he went to the King of Portugal to tell him his idea and get money for a voyage, Columbus was denied. He then went and asked the Kings of France, England, and Spain for help. They didn't help him either.

The New World

Then, in 1492, the king and queen of Spain agreed to help him. They gave him three ships: the *Nina*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria*. He and his crew set sail in August in search of the Indies.

However, in October his crew sighted land. Columbus claimed that they had reached the Indies, though, in reality, it was an island off the coast of Florida, which he named San Salvador.

Since Columbus thought that he was in the Indies, he called the locals Indians, though he had actually found part of the American continents.

Who found it first?

The reason that Columbus is considered as the first European to discover America is because he went back to Spain and told everyone about it. His discovery helped to shape the world we live in today, and so he is remembered.

However, he was not the first European to set foot in the New World. The first people to find the Americas were actually the Vikings, led by Erik the Red, in the year 985. That is a full 500 years before Columbus!

Vikings were notoriously self-reliant though, and they did not share this discovery with other Europeans. Not-to-forget the Native Americans who had walked there many years before!

Was Columbus a hero?

That depends on who you ask. For those in Europe, who saw the Americas as a chance for conquest and gold, the answer is yes. For the natives, however, he was not. His discovery led to many native cultures being wiped out or changed forever.

Later life

Columbus returned to America several times throughout his life. Even after it had been disproven, he still insisted that he had found the Indies and not the New World. He died in 1506.