

# Introduction

Vasco da Gama was born in 1460 to a wealthy Portuguese family in Sines, Portugal. Vasco's father was also an explorer and was supposed to make the epic journey from Portugal to India that would eventually make his son famous. He died, however, before he could successfully complete the journey. In the late 1400s, Portugal was desperately trying to find a sea route to Asia so they could obtain spices for cheap prices. Explorers such as Bartholomeu Dias had made some progress in making the journey, but none had been able to sail around the southern tip of Africa at the Cape of Good Hope (where the Atlantic and Indian Oceans met) and into the Indian Ocean.

# Sailing to India

In 1497, Portuguese King Manuel I financed a voyage led by Vasco da Gama. Many, however, still believed the trip to be impossible because they did not think the Atlantic Ocean connected with the Indian Ocean. Da Gama believed it was possible and left Lisbon, Portugal, on July 8, 1497, with four ships full of criminals and set sail on the Atlantic. After five months on the Atlantic, da Gama and his crew successfully sailed around the Cape of Good Hope and into the Indian Ocean on November 22. After making several stops along ports in the eastern African nations of Kenya, Mozambique, and others, and after struggling with Muslim traders in the Indian Ocean who did not take kindly to interference with their trade routes, da Gama reached Calicut, India, on May 20, 1498.

# Return to Portugal

In India, da Gama traded extensively for Asian products and spices. Although he was initially well received in India, he eventually wore out his welcome. Da Gama left India in August of 1498, after he was told to pay a heavy tax and to leave the goods he traded for. Da Gama refused to leave the goods and only left India after taking Indian hostages. By the time da Gama returned to Lisbon in 1499, many of his crew members had died of scurvy (a disease caused by a lack of vitamin C), and he had become a hero. King Manuel I made him an admiral.

# The Tyrant

In 1502, King Manuel sent da Gama back to India. This time, however, da Gama came with 20 armed ships to prevent problems with Muslim traders. In one case, da Gama ordered the massacre of a Muslim vessel with 380 people on board. When he reached India, he brutally murdered many Muslims to demonstrate his power and bombarded Calicut to force the Portuguese will on Asian trading markets. Da Gama's conquests paved the way for future conquests in Asia.

Da Gama returned to Portugal in 1503. He died in India in 1524 from an illness.