

Christopher Columbus

Christopher Columbus, credited with discovering the New World, was an adventurer who didn't give up on his dream. Columbus did not learn to read and write until he was an adult. Once he learned, he began to study accounts of voyages west from the European continent, and he started contemplating a voyage to Japan, where he dreamed of becoming a spice trader. Spices were valuable in the 1400s, when people used them to preserve food because there was no refrigeration.

In 1484, Columbus approached King John II of Portugal to see if he would finance a voyage to Japan. The king declined because he didn't believe that the ships of the day could withstand the long trip. Columbus then approached Queen Isabella of Spain in 1486, but it wasn't until six years later that Columbus was able to convince the queen and her husband, Ferdinand, to put up the money for the trip.

Finally, on August 3, 1492, Columbus and his crews set sail with three ships. On October 12, the lookout on one of the ships spotted land. But instead of reaching Japan, the explorers were in the Bahamas. They sailed on to a land they thought was China, but it was actually Cuba. From there, they traveled east and discovered an island Columbus named *Hispaniola*. Today, that island is home to the countries of Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Although his royal sponsors were unhappy when he failed to bring back Asian spices and treasures, Columbus did discover pearls off the coast of South America. And, ultimately, his discoveries would prove to be far more valuable than anyone could have imagined.

Despite all his travels, Columbus did not receive the honor of having the newly discovered region named after him. That distinction went to Amerigo Vespucci, another Italian explorer who discovered what is now Brazil and Venezuela in 1499.

