

Christopher Columbus: Biography

- 1451** Christopher Columbus (Cristoforo Colombo) is born in Genoa to Domenico Colombo and his wife, Susanna Fontanarossa. They were weavers who lived above their small shop. At that time, Genoa was a naval power and independent republic that rivaled Venice and traded with the Orient. In 1453, two years after Columbus's birth, Constantinople fell to the Moslems, cutting off Europe's eastward trade routes to the Orient and making the finding of a westward route imperative.
- 1465** Columbus takes his first sea voyage at age 14. Later he studies navigation in Greece and mapmaking in Portugal, where he lives for nine years in a colony of Genoese businessmen and shippers. He also travels to Africa, Ireland, England and Iceland.
- 1479** Columbus marries Felipa Perestrello y Moniz (1479), has a son, Diego, and is widowed (1480). [Later, he has another son, Fernando, with Beatrice de Harana, whom he never marries.]
- 1481** Columbus presents his plan to reach the Orient by sailing west across the Atlantic to the kings of Portugal, England, France and Spain. Only Spain's King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella accept his offer, but it takes Columbus six years (1486-1492) to convince them to underwrite his explorations.
- 1492** On August 3, Columbus sails from Palos, Spain. On October 12 at two o'clock in the morning, land is sighted -- an island which he names San Salvador (Holy Savior). Deeply religious, Columbus believes one of his missions is to bring Christianity to the New World.
- 1502** Columbus makes his last voyage across the ocean. He crossed the Atlantic four times in 10 years: 1492, 1493, 1498 and 1502.

On his **first voyage** he lands on Haiti and the Dominican Republic, which he calls Hispaniola, where he founds the first permanent European settlement in the Western Hemisphere. On his **third voyage**, his political enemies bring him back to Spain in chains, but the Queen absolves him of any blame. On his **fourth voyage**, he was shipwrecked for nearly a year on what is today Jamaica.

- 1506** Columbus dies in Valladolid, Spain, on May 20 at age 54. He insists on being buried with the chains he wore when he was brought back to Spain, following his third voyage. No one is sure where he is buried. Some scholars believe his remains are in the Cathedral of Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic while others believe they are in Spain in the Cathedral of Seville.

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