



ABOUT CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

During the 1400s, some European explorers were trying to find an eastward sea route to the Indies so they could buy silks and spices. A sea captain from Italy, named Christopher Columbus, decided to sail in the opposite direction. He thought that a westward sea route would be shorter.

Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain agreed to pay for Columbus's trip. The queen and king wanted to make money for Spain by trading goods with the Indies. They also wanted to spread their Christian faith.

In late spring of 1492, Columbus set off from Palos, Spain, with a crew of 89 men and three ships. The *Santa Maria* was a caravel. The *Nina* and the *Pinta* were both carracks. After stopping at the Canary Islands to repair the *Pinta*, they set sail again on September 6.

The ships headed west across the Atlantic Ocean. Several days later, they no longer saw land. Columbus's crew became afraid because they thought they were getting too far from home. Columbus calmed the sailors by telling them they had traveled fewer miles than they actually had.

On October 11, 1492, the explorers came upon an island. There they met friendly people. Columbus thought he had



reached the Indies, so he called these people "Indians." These native people called their island Guanahani. Columbus claimed the island for Spain and renamed it San Salvador. When Columbus left the island, he took six Indians with him.

Still believing he had landed in the Indies, Columbus sailed south to find Japan. He landed on a large island. The native people called their island Cuba. Columbus thought this was an Indian name for Japan.

On December 6, Columbus sailed east and came upon another island, which he named Hispaniola. Today, Haiti and the Dominican Republic make up this island.

Columbus headed back to Spain in January. He left behind 39 of his own men to set up a town in Hispaniola. Columbus reached Spain in March. The people of Spain, as well as the queen and king, cheered him.

Columbus sailed west three more times. On each voyage, he believed he had reached the Indies. In fact, part of the area he explored in the Americas is still called the "West Indies." Columbus never knew he had actually found new lands that Europeans hadn't known about.