

# CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS, PART 2

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Columbus called the people he saw “Indians.” He thought he was in the East Indies. These people hid in the woods. They were afraid. Later they came back to worship the white men. They thought the white men came from the sky. They thought the ships were birds and the sails wings. Columbus and his men traded with the Indians. They gave tiny bells, red caps, and glass beads. They wanted the tame parrots, cotton yarn, and gold the natives wore in their noses.

Columbus wrote in his journal saying they were very poor. Their skin was dark and they wore no clothes. They seemed to be young and strong. Their hair was long in back. It was cut short over in front. Colors were painted all over their bodies. The men carried sticks. The tips were made of pointed fish-bones. They rode in canoes with paddles that looked like wooden shovels.

The canoes were made of tree trunks. Some were large enough to carry forty men. Homes were put in groups of twelve to fifteen. They were shaped like tents and had high chimneys. Inside the tents, hanging between posts, were nets used as beds and called “hammocks.”

Columbus called the island where he landed San Salvador (Holy Savior). He wrote:

“I know not where first to go, nor are my eyes ever weary . . .” of looking. The singing of the birds was so pretty he never wanted to leave. There were so many parrots he could hardly see the sun. In fact all of the birds were very different from any he had seen. The many kinds of trees had fruits of all different tastes.

Columbus sailed about landing here and there. He sent parties to find out about the land and people. Everywhere he looked for the cities of Asia. He always believed that he was in East Indies.

On Christmas morning (December 25, 1492), the Santa Maria ran up on a sandbar. It was still dark. The waves soon broke her in pieces. As the Pinta had already gone. Now the Nina was the only ship left. This little vessel was too small for all the men. Forty men wanted to stay where they were. They wanted to build a fort out of the wood from the Santa Maria. The ship’s guns would keep the fort safe. These men had supplies for one year. They began the first Spanish settlement.

On January 4, 1493, the Nina sailed for Spain. On February 12th, a great storm began breaking up the little Nina. Poor Columbus! He was afraid. He and his men had gone through so many hard things. Were they going

to die in this strange sea? Was the world never going to hear about his new world?

Columbus wrote two papers about his discovery. He sealed them. He addressed them to Ferdinand and Isabella. He wrapped each in a cloth. He put big cakes of wax around them. Columbus placed them in barrels. One barrel he tossed into the sea. The other barrel stayed on deck with him. The *Nina* passed safely through the storm. On March 15th, seven and a half months after they left, the *Nina* came home.

The king and queen welcomed him. There was a great parade. Six Indians whom Columbus had brought back with him walked in the parade. They were painted, wore feathers, and bits of gold. Next came men carrying birds and animal skins from the New Land. Columbus rode on horseback. Many of Spain's great men rode horses beside him.

The parade stopped at the house where King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella waited. Columbus went into the throne room. They stood up to honor him. When he bowed to kiss their hands they asked him to rise and sit by them.

The poor sailor, once despised as an idle dreamer, had become a distinguished personage, honored alike by kings and princes and people. It was no longer necessary to force men by royal decree to sail with the great admiral. Many were now eager to go where they might reap wealth and honor.

In September, 1493, Columbus again sailed, this time with a fleet of seventeen vessels and fifteen hundred men. Many of the

latter were young men of noble birth, and belonged to families of wide influence. All supposed they were going to the East Indies, the land of jewels and spices and precious metals. With the purpose of founding a colony, Columbus took with him not only horses, mules, and cattle, but vines, vegetables, and seeds of many kinds.

When the fleet reached the island of Hayti, and the place where he had in the previous winter left the little colony of forty men, he found that the fort and provisions had been destroyed, and that eleven corpses had been buried near by; but not one of the forty men was ever again seen alive. After building a little town, called Isabella in honor of the queen, Columbus began exploring by land and sea. He found much that was beautiful and interesting, but much more that was disappointing. Moreover, the Indians were sometimes unfriendly, and his own men were often unruly and treacherous. At length, after four years of varying fortune, he started home, and after a long, hard voyage, during which provisions gave out, he and his men, weak with hunger, finally reached Spain in June. He was kindly received and was promised more ships for another voyage.

In May, 1498, with six vessels and two hundred men besides the sailors, Columbus started on a third voyage, this time directing his course more to the south than he had done before. He landed on an island, which he named Trinidad, and then sailed along the northern coast of South America.

He was not well, however, and in August turned his course for Santo Domingo, where he found things were going badly. Trouble with the Indians had arisen, and even more serious trouble in the colony itself had broken out. For two years Columbus struggled to set things right. But he was not successful as a colonizer. Besides, many people were beginning to lose faith in him because he did not get expected treasures for Spain. Many others were jealous of his fame, and plotted to ruin him. At length an official was sent from Spain to Hayti to look into the situation. When he reached the island he confiscated Columbus's property, put him in chains, and sent him as a prisoner to the country from which he had but recently sailed with high honor.

In Spain the people were sympathy with the admiral in his disgrace; so too was the queen, who sent money and summoned him to court. She received him there with tears in her eyes, and he broke down and wept at her feet.

In 1502 Columbus started on a fourth voyage, sailing along the eastern coast of Central America. But he was not able to accomplish much, and finally suffered a shipwreck on the island of Jamaica, where he spent a year of misery. At last he set out for home, arriving there only a short time before Queen Isabella, his only protector, died.

Poor, sick, and discouraged, Columbus dragged out a weary life for eighteen months longer. He died in Spain of a broken heart, May 20, 1506, in utter ignorance of the great-

ness of his discovery. So little appreciated was he that the city annals make no mention of his death. It remained for succeeding generations to lift his name from obscurity and to give faithful acknowledgement of his achievements in the advance of human progress.