

Born in Genoa, Italy, Christopher Columbus was a navigator and explorer who planned and led the voyage which landed in the West Indies in 1492. Columbus believed that, because the world was round and because long-distance navigation was technically possible, sailors should be able to head west to arrive in the East. Trade with the East was highly prized; spices and other commodities brought profit to merchants involved in overland trade. An ocean route could increase profit. King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain partially funded the expedition at Columbus' request. Earlier attempts made by Columbus to secure Portuguese funding for voyages to chart new routes to the Far East failed, but in 1492, with Spanish support, he set sail with three ships. When he touched land after a 37-day voyage, debarking on present-day San Salvador on October 12, 1492, he believed he had reached the East Indies. He led three more voyages to the New World searching for gold and other treasures prior to his death in 1506. He established the first permanent colony in Cuba during his second voyage in 1493, deposited more settlers near Venezuela in 1494, and completed his fourth voyage in 1503. Though Columbus never made the financial gains he envisioned, European nations realized the potential of the new continent as a source of riches and agricultural commodities and competed for colonization rights. The significance of Columbus' discovery is remembered every Columbus Day, a federal holiday on the second Monday of October.



The Life of Christopher Columbus

