

What caused the Age of Exploration?

Europe came out of isolation

The Crusades: During the Middle Ages (500-1500), Europeans lived in local villages and towns. When the Crusades began in 1099, Europeans suddenly travelled to the Middle East! For 150 years Christian Europe tried and failed to conquer the Muslims and retake the Holy Land.

Trade with China: Middle Eastern merchant sold great stuff from a wonderful place called China. European merchants wanted to trade directly with China. In those days, merchants took the land route – along the Silk Road. In 1271, Marco Polo travelled to China – then returned to tell Europeans all about it. European merchants wanted to cut out the Arab middlemen and trade directly with China. To do that they needed to find a sea route to China.

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- The Renaissance: During the Renaissance (1300-1600), Europeans became curious about everything. Thanks to trade with the Middle East, Europeans re-discovered books, maps, mathematics and geography. Thanks to trade with China, Europeans had the magnetic compass and the astrolabe – the keys to sea travel.

The Age of Exploration

Explorers went in search of China...

Sailing to the East: In the early 1400s, Prince Henry the Navigator launched an exploration of the world. That is, Portuguese sailors explored the coast of Africa. In 1497, Vasco da Gama went around the Cape of Good Hope. He landed in India. It was not China, but he was close.

Sailing to the West: In 1492, Christopher Columbus sailed west in hope of reaching China. He thought he landed in India, so he named the native people “Indians.” Instead, he landed on continents that no Europeans knew existed – the Americas.

The reasons for European exploration and colonization of North America

1. Search for a direct route to the spices of Asia. Economic
2. Find gold. Economic
3. Set up trading posts. Economic
4. Conquer new land. Political
5. Convert people to Christianity.
Religious