Marco Polo

7 Marco Polo is one of the most famous explorers of all time. Marco lived in Venice in Italy in the 1200s and traveled to Asia at a time when most people in Europe never ventured far from their home village. Altogether, Marco traveled over 25,000mi (40,000km).

- When Marco Polo visited Far Eastern lands such as China, hardly anyone in Europe had ever been there.

- This map shows Marco Polo's route across Asia. The journey home took three years.

8 Marco Polo started exploring when he was just 17 years old. His father and uncle were merchants who went to the Far East on business. When Marco was old enough, they took him with them. In 1271, they all set off for China—a journey that took them three years.

9 In China, the Polos stayed with a mighty emperor called Kublai Khan. He had enormous palaces, rooms full of treasures, and many wives and servants. Kublai Khan gave Marco the job of traveling around his lands to bring him news. Marco went all over China and Southeast Asia.

10 On his travels through Asia, Marco Polo discovered all kinds of amazing inventions. He saw fireworks, coal, paper money, pasta, ice cream, and eyeglasses for the first time. He was also impressed to find that the Chinese had a mail system and could send each other letters.

11 After 20 years away, the Polos were ready to go home. They sailed most of the way in a junk—a Chinese sailing ship. More than 600 passengers and crew died of diseases on the way, but the Polos got home to Venice safely in 1295.

12 Later, there was a war in Italy and Marco Polo was captured. He ended up sharing a prison cell with a writer, and told him his life story. The writer wrote down Marco's travel tales to make a book called The Travels of Marco Polo. It became a bestseller!
Ibn Battuta

13 Ibn Battuta became an explorer because of a dream. Battuta was visiting Mecca, the Muslim holy city, in 1325. There he dreamed that a giant bird picked him up and carried him away. Battuta thought the dream was a message from God, telling him to go exploring. Since he was a Muslim, he decided to visit every Muslim country in the world.

14 Ibn Battuta set off on his travels, and kept going for nearly 30 years! He visited more than 40 countries, including present-day Kenya, Iran, Turkey, India, and China. Just as he had planned, he visited every Muslim land that existed at the time. Altogether, he traveled more than 80,000 miles (120,000 km).

15 Ibn Battuta stayed in India for seven years, working for the Sultan. Battuta's job was to be a judge, deciding whether people charged with crimes were innocent or guilty. Battuta was afraid of the Sultan, who was cruel. If anyone disagreed with him, he would have them boiled, beheaded, or skinned alive. Once he nearly beheaded Battuta for being friends with a man he didn't like.

16 Ibn Battuta was lucky to finish his travels alive. During his journey, Battuta was attacked by robbers in India, kept prisoner in the Maldives, chased by pirates in Sri Lanka, and shipwrecked several times. At the end of his journey, he saw people suffering from the Black Death, a terrible and deadly disease. Fortunately, Battuta managed to avoid catching it.

17 At last, Ibn Battuta went home to Morocco, his own country. When the Sultan heard about his adventures, he asked Battuta to write them all down for him. Battuta didn't have to do the writing himself, though. Instead, he told his story to a scribe (writer) who wrote it all down for him. The finished book was called the Rihlah, meaning the travels.
**Sailing around Africa**

22 In Europe in the 1400s, people loved **spices**. They used the strong-tasting seeds and leaves to flavor food and make medicines. Nutmeg, cloves, ginger, and pepper came from Asian countries such as India. The spices had to be transported on camels across Asia and Europe, which took a long time. They wanted to find a way to sail from Europe to Asia, to make the journey easier.

23 The best way to sail to Asia was around Africa. But nobody knew how. A Portuguese prince named Henry (1394-1460) started a sailing school to train sailors for the task and began sending ships around the coast of Africa. At first, the sailors were too scared to sail very far because they thought the Atlantic Ocean was too stormy and dangerous. But slowly they sailed further and further.

24 In 1488, a captain named Bartolomeu Dias sailed around the bottom of Africa into the Indian Ocean. Dias had a rough journey, so he named the southern tip of Africa The Cape of Storms. It was renamed The Cape of Good Hope to make sailors think it was safe.

25 In 1497, a Portuguese sailor finally sailed around the coast of Africa. His name was Vasco da Gama. After sailing around the Cape of Good Hope, da Gama sailed up the east coast of Africa to Malindi. From there he crossed the Indian Ocean to Calicut in India. Here he hoped to buy spices, but the Rajah, Calicut's ruler, told da Gama he would have to come back with some gold. Da Gama went home empty-handed, but the king of Portugal was very happy. The sea route to Asia had been found, and many traders used it from then on.
26. Lots of people think Christopher Columbus discovered America, but he didn’t. The Vikings were the first to sail there, in around the year 1000. They found a land with lots of trees, fish, and berries, and called it Vinland. They didn’t stay long—they went home after getting into fights with the native Americans. After that, many people forgot that Vinland existed.

27. Almost 500 years later, Christopher Columbus found America—by mistake! Columbus set sail from Spain in 1492, with three ships called the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria. Columbus wasn’t looking for a new land. Instead, he wanted to sail right around the Earth to find a new route to Asia, where he planned to buy spices. Although he was Italian, it was Queen Isabella of Spain who gave Columbus money for his trip.

28. When Columbus found land, he was sure he’d sailed to Japan. In fact, Columbus had found the Bahamas, which are close to the United States mainland.

29. Back in Spain, no one believed Columbus’ story. They knew he couldn’t have reached China in such a short time. Instead, they realized he must have found a brand new country. People called the new country the New World, and many more explorers set off at once to see it for themselves.

30. America wasn’t named after Columbus. Instead, it was named after another famous explorer, Amerigo Vespucci. In 1507, a map-maker put Amerigo’s name on a map of the New World, and changed it from Amerigo to America. The name stuck.

31. It’s thanks to Columbus that Native Americans were known as Indians. Since he thought he was in Asia, Columbus called the lands he found the West Indies, and the people he met Indians. They are still called this today—even though America is nowhere near India.
The Conquistadors

32 “Conquistador” is a Spanish word that means conqueror. The Conquistadors were Spanish soldiers and noblemen who lived in the 1500s. After Christopher Columbus discovered America in 1492, the Conquistadors set off to explore the new continent. Many of them wanted to get rich by grabbing all the land, gold, and jewels they could find in America.

33 Vasco Nuñez de Balboa was one of the first Conquistadors. He sailed to America in 1500 to look for treasures. In 1513, Balboa trekked through the jungle with his dog, Leoncito, and an army of soldiers. He was the first European to cross America and see the Pacific Ocean on the other side. Balboa loved his dog so much, he paid him a wage like the soldiers. But like most Conquistadors, Balboa could be cruel too—he killed local people and stole their gold.

34 Hernan Cortes was a very cunning Conquistador. In 1519, he went to what is now Mexico, to conquer the Aztec people. When he arrived at their city, Tenochtitlan, the people thought he was a god. Cortes captured their king, Montezuma, and took over the city. Montezuma was killed by his own people. Then, after lots of fighting, Cortes took control of the whole Aztec empire.

35 To conquer the Inca people of Peru, Francisco Pizarro, another explorer, played a nasty trick. In 1532, he captured Atahualpa, the Inca leader. Atahualpa said that if Pizarro set him free, he would give him a room filled to the ceiling with gold. Pizarro agreed. But once Atahualpa had handed over the gold, Pizarro killed him anyway. Then he took over Cuzco, the Inca capital city. Cuzco was high in the mountains, and Pizarro didn’t like it. So he started a new capital city at Lima. Today, Lima is the capital city of Peru.
At the start of the 1500s, no one had sailed around the world. Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan wanted to sail past South America, and across the Pacific Ocean. It is possible that Magellan thought he could get to Asia that way, where he could buy spices. Then he could sail home past India and Africa—an around-the-world trip.

Magellan had an argument with the king of Portugal, but the king of Spain agreed to help him. The king paid for five ships and Magellan set off in 1519. Magellan sailed down the coast of South America until he found a way through to the Pacific Ocean. Sailing across the Pacific, many of the crew died from a disease called scurvy. It was caused by not eating enough fresh fruit and vegetables.

Magellan made it across the Pacific—but then disaster struck. After landing in the Philippines in 1521, Magellan made friends with the king of the island of Cebu. The king was fighting a war and he wanted Magellan to help him. Magellan and some of his crew went into battle, and Magellan was killed. The rest of the crew took two of the ships and escaped.

In the end, just one of Magellan's ships made it back to Spain. It picked up a cargo of spices in Indonesia and sailed home. Magellan had taken over 200 crew with him, but less than 20 of them returned. They were the first people to have sailed all the way around the world.

Another 55 years went by before anyone sailed around the world again. Queen Elizabeth I asked an English privateer (a kind of pirate) named Francis Drake to try an around-the-world trip in 1577. He made money on the way by robbing Spanish ships (the Queen said he could!). After his three-year voyage, Drake returned to England. Queen Elizabeth gave him a huge reward of £10,000.
Captain Cook

41 Captain James Cook spent just 11 years exploring, from 1768 to 1779. But he was still one of the greatest explorers. Cook sailed all over the Pacific Ocean and made maps that have helped sailors ever since. He also sailed around the world, north to the Arctic, and south to the Antarctic.

As well as studying the planets, Cook took wildlife experts with him on his explorations. They collected plants that weren't known in Europe, and drew sketches and made notes about them.

42 In 1768 the British navy asked Cook to go on an important mission. He was to go to the Pacific island of Tahiti, to make measurements and observations of the planet Venus passing in front of the Sun. After that, Cook went to look for a new continent in the far south—but he didn't find one. Instead, he explored Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands and made new maps.

Cook needed high-quality drawing instruments to help him make his measurements for maps.

43 Many people still believed there was an unknown continent in the south. So they sent Cook back to look for it again in 1772. He sailed further south than anyone had been before, until he found the ocean was frozen solid. Cook sailed all the way around Antarctica, but he was never close enough to land to see it. It wasn't explored until 1820, nearly 50 years later.

For Cook's third voyage, he headed north. He wanted to see if he could find an ocean route between the Pacific Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean, across the top of Canada. After searching for it in 1778, he went to spend the winter in Hawaii. At first, the Hawaiians thought Cook was a god named Lono!

I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
Captain Cook was the first European to discover Hawaii, in 1778. He called it the Sandwich Islands.

45 Cook found his way around better than any sailor before him. An inventor named John Harrison had created a new clock (called the chronometer) that could measure the time precisely, even at sea. Before that, clocks had pendulums, so they didn't work on ships. From the time that the sun went down, Cook could work out exactly how far east or west he was.

An early chronometer, invented by John Harrison.
When the first Europeans arrived in North America, there were hundreds of different tribes of native people there. Each had its own customs, language, and way of life. Those on the east coast, where the settlers first landed, were farmers, hunters and food gatherers. They lived in small villages and grew corn and some vegetables. This picture is based on drawings made by some of the early European settlers. The arrival of Europeans in the early 17th century was a disaster for these Indians. Many of them died of diseases brought from Europe and many others were killed or driven from their lands.

In 1607 a group of English settlers set up a colony at Jamestown in Virginia. Here, their leader, Captain John Smith, is being rescued from death by Pocahontas, the daughter of the local Indian chief.

Another group of English people, who became known as the Pilgrim Fathers, sailed to America in 1620 in the ship, "Mayflower". They were Puritans, who wanted freedom to worship God in their own way.

The Puritans called the area where they settled New England. During their first winter they had a terrible struggle getting enough food.

Local Indians helped the English to survive. After their first harvest they held a feast to thank God. "Thanksgiving Day" is still celebrated in America.

Many other Europeans sailed with their families and belongings to live in America. Here is a ship full of settlers unloading. Some of them went because they wanted religious freedom, some were escaping from troubles at home and others came in the hope of finding adventure, or a better life and land of their own. The settlers on the east coast soon formed 13 colonies, each with their own laws and system of government. Gradually they were all brought under the control of the British government.

Most colonists settled down as farmers, at first. It was hard work clearing the land, growing crops and defending themselves against hostile Indians.

In the south the colonists started growing tobacco. There was a craze for it in Europe so they grew rich by making African slaves work for them.

Trade with Europe became profitable and some of the money was used to build towns. This is part of 18th century Boston.

A few people, mainly Frenchmen, chose to live trappers and hunters. They explored along the Mississippi River, claiming land for France.