

## **Reasons for Exploration**

So why did Europeans explore the world during the Age of Exploration? Many different European countries paid for explorations for many different reasons. Some of the reasons that they explored were:

- To find a sea route to the spices of Asia
- To find gold, silver, and precious stones
- To expand their knowledge of the world
- To control a larger empire
- To expand Christianity
- To find animal furs

### **Sea Route in Search of Spices**

In the 1400s, there was no refrigeration. To prevent meat from spoiling, people drowned their meat in salt to preserve and dry it (like beef jerky). They also used a lot of spices like pepper to cover up the taste of the salted or spoiled meat.

### **Land route from Asia to Europe**

Unfortunately for Europeans, these spices did not grow anywhere in Europe. They were only found in Asian countries like China, Japan, and India (these countries were known together as "The Indies"). It was very difficult to get the spices from Asia to Europe. Spices had to be brought across thousands of miles of dangerous mountains and deserts by spice traders, with bandits waiting to rob the spice caravans. The alternative was to bring the spices by ship, but the sea voyage was also dangerous because of pirates and storms. Since it was so difficult to get spices from Asia to Europe, spices were very expensive.

### **Major European powers in 1500**

In 1453, spices became even more expensive and difficult to find in Europe when the land route from Asia to Europe was cut-off by the Turkish Empire. The European rulers tried several times to defeat the Turks in battle, but they were turned back each time. Several European rulers finally decided to try to find a route around the Turkish Empire. If a country could find a way to get these valuable spices to Europe, the rulers would be very rich.

### **Gold, Silver, and Precious Stones**

European rulers fought many wars. They fought against each other and against the Turkish Empire. These wars were very expensive, so they needed to find lots of gold, silver, and precious stones to pay for them. They believed that Asia was loaded with gold, silver, and precious stones, so they decided to find it and bring it back.

## **Expand Knowledge**

In the late 1400s, Europeans did not know much about the world. Most of them had never been outside of Europe. The European map of the world included only Europe, Asia, and the top of Africa. They thought there was only one ocean, the Ocean Sea. Although many people thought the world was flat, educated Europeans knew that it was round. The problem was they had no idea how large the world was.

## **Larger Empires**

Some European rulers, especially the King of Spain and the King of Portugal, wanted to claim as much land as they could. They wanted to take all of the natural resources from this land and use the people that lived there as slaves to do their work.

## **Expand Christianity**

In the late 1400s, there was only one religion in Europe, Christianity. The European rulers were very religious. They wanted to convert everyone to Christianity.

## **Animal Furs**

Eventually, the French found that animal furs, especially beaver hats, were very valuable in Europe. Imagine everyone walking around in a beaver hat!

**Portugal** wanted to get everything they could get their hands on, except maybe furs. They left those to the French. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to explore the unknown world, and they were the first to sail around the southern tip of Africa. Although Portugal was the first country to find a route to the Indies around the southern tip of Africa, it only explored what is now Brazil in the New World.

**Spain** wanted a lot of things. It wanted to expand its knowledge of the world that they had never seen. Of course they were curious, wouldn't you be? They also wanted to have a larger empire, find spices and other riches, and expand Christianity. They weren't really interested in animal furs. The big thing they wanted was gold and silver to pay for their wars with the Turkish Empire.

**England** wanted the same things Spain wanted, especially gold and silver, but the Spanish had a much more powerful navy than England had. So when England tried to explore the New World, they ran into a lot of trouble if the Spanish navy caught them. Since they couldn't really explore the New World and take its gold and silver, the English ships would attack the Spanish ships as they sailed across the Atlantic Ocean and steal their goods.

**France** wanted a larger empire, spices and riches, and to expand Christianity. They also wanted animal furs. They enjoyed wearing hats and coats made out of animal skins.