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MARCO POLO TRAVELS TO CHINA

MARCO POLO's father Niccolò and uncle Matteo were Venetian merchants, who had already travelled to Asia. In 1271, they set out from Venice on another journey to the Far East. This time, the 17-year-old Marco accompanied them. The journey to China took more than three years. At that time, China was ruled by the great Mongol emperor Kublai Khan. Marco Polo made a good impression on him and became his loyal servant. For the next 17 years, Marco travelled around the empire, reporting back on everything that he saw. In 1292, the Polos left for Venice by sea, escorting a Mongol princess as far as Hormuz.

1. In 1271, the Polos sailed from Venice to Acre. They then journeyed by camel to Hormuz. The boats they saw there looked too flimsy for travel

by sea, so they continued their journey overland. They followed the Silk Road through the Persian Desert. It took them 40 days to cross the Pamir Mountains, during which time they saw no other people.

2. Crossing the Gobi Desert took one month. It was the toughest part of the journey. Some travellers said the desert was haunted. The Polos were very glad to reach China.

3. In May 1275, the Polos arrived at Kublai Khan's summer palace in Shangdu. He gave them a warm welcome and invited Marco to work for him.

4. During his travels around Kublai Khan's empire, Marco Polo saw many wonders. He was very impressed by Kinsai, "the City of Heaven", a city far larger than any in Europe. He remarked on its many canals and bridges. Marco was amazed that the Chinese used paper money, which did not exist in Europe at that time.

A DESERT CARAVAN

In the Polos' time, travellers were often attacked by bandits who stole their goods. It was safer to cross the desert in a large group, called a caravan. At night, the travelers camped together for protection.



THE TRAVELS OF IBN BATTUTA

DURING THE 14th century, the great Muslim explorer Ibn Battuta travelled more than 120,000 km throughout Africa, Asia, Arabia and Europe. His adventures began in 1325 when he set out from Morocco on a *hajj* (pilgrimage) to the Muslim holy city of Mecca in Arabia. This initial journey inspired him to continue travelling around the Islamic world. As a well-educated Muslim, he was welcomed by scholars and rulers wherever he went. Ibn Battuta returned to Morocco in 1349. Just over two years later, he decided to make one last voyage across the Sahara Desert to the kingdom of Mali. When he finally returned home, he recorded his amazing journeys in a book known as the *Rihlah*.



1. Ibn Battuta left Tangier in 1325. He joined a camel caravan and headed east. In Alexandria, he saw the Pharos lighthouse, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. In the holy city of Jerusalem he visited the amazing golden-domed Haram al Sharif mosque. On reaching Mecca, he worshipped at the Muslim shrine called the Kaaba.

2. From Mecca, Ibn Battuta headed north with another group of pilgrims. They traveled at night by torchlight because it was too hot to travel during the day. In Isfahan and Shiraz, he saw beautiful mosques. He also visited Baghdad where he had an audience with the ruler of the region.

THE SULTAN OF DELHI

Ibn Battuta reached India in 1333. There he was appointed as a judge by the eccentric Sultan of Delhi. In 1342, the Sultan sent Ibn Battuta on a long expedition to meet the Emperor of China.

3. In 1327, Ibn Battuta fell ill. He returned to Mecca to rest. When he recovered, he explored the Red Sea and travelled to the port of Aden. Here, he joined a trading ship which sailed south to Mogadishu.

4. Ibn Battuta then travelled down the African coast to Kilwa. Here, he saw traders exchanging gold and ivory. He then sailed to the port of Zafar where he saw horses being shipped to India.