

Vasco da Gama: Discovery of India

December 21, 2022

Vasco da Gama was an explorer, sent by King John II of Portugal in a convoy of 4 ships to chart the route to India.

For decades, Kings and their explorers had been searching for **India, which was known as the fabled land of riches and as the source of swords and other such weapons of the highest quality and of exotic clothes and other products.** Thousands of lives had been lost in ship-wrecks and attacks on the explorers, sent by one king by the armed forces of the other king.

Vasco da Gama succeeded in finding the route to India and landed in Calicut, India on 20th May 1498.

Thereafter four armadas were sent by Portugal to India. Vasco da Gama led the first and the fourth. In 1524, da Gama was appointed Governor of India, with the title of Viceroy.

Access to the routes to India boosted the economy of the Portuguese empire, which was earlier along northern and western Africa. Portugal retained a monopoly of the trade with India for about a century before other European powers like the Dutch Republic, England, France and Denmark were able to obtain shares in this trade.

VOYAGE of DISCOVERY: On 8 July 1497 Vasco da Gama set sail from Lisbon with a crew of 170 men. He went along the coast of Africa via Tenerife and the Cape Verde Islands.



After reaching the coast of present-day Sierra Leone, da Gama took a course south into the open ocean, crossing the Equator.



ST. HELENA: For almost four months they sailed across the Atlantic without sight of land until, on 4 November 1497, they reached a bay (current day St Helena). For months the ships had sailed more than 10,000 kilometres (6,000 mi) of open ocean, by far the longest journey out of sight of land made by that time.



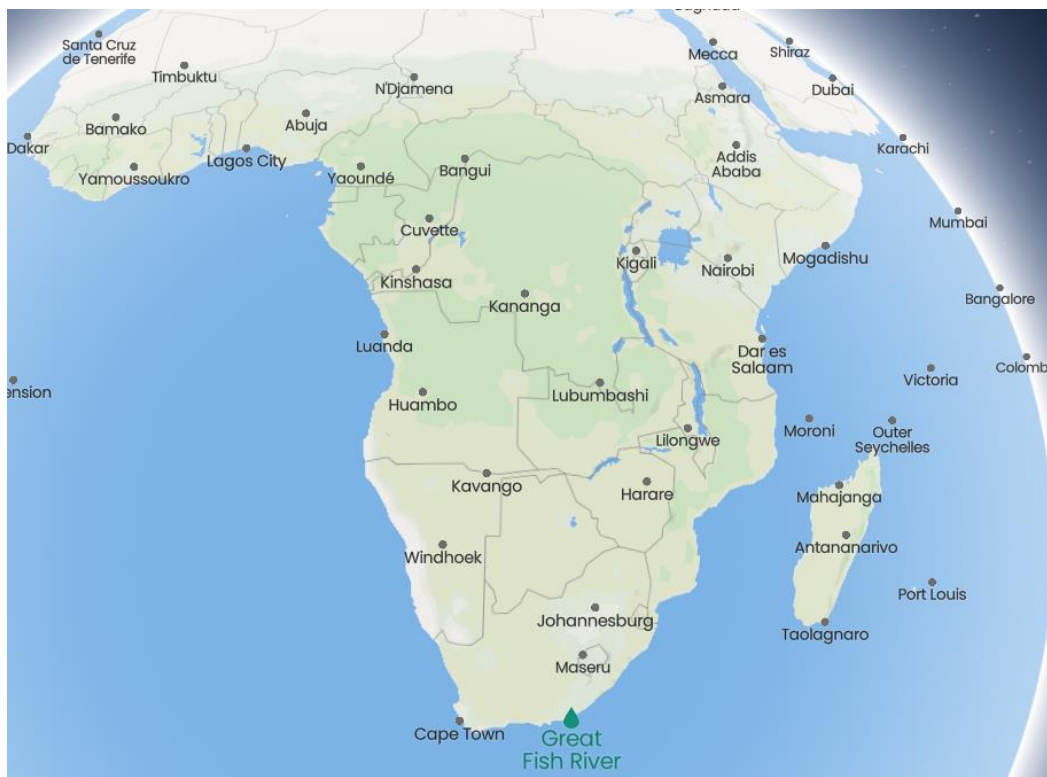
Close to, or near the mouth of the **Berg River in St. Helena**, the explorers set in to make repairs, look for water, and check their position. It was here that they had their first encounter with the Khoikhoi. A misunderstanding arose between them, and fearing attack, the Khoikhoi threw spears, wounding da Gama in the thigh.

THE CAPE and MOSSEL BAY: While facing a gale, the Portuguese fleet went round the Cape on 22 November 1497, and three days later, the battered ships sailed into Santa Bras (Mossel Bay).



Da Gama's crew unloaded their damaged store ship and then burnt it, while da Gama traded gifts with the Khoikhoi. However, they offended the Khoikhoi when they took fresh water without asking the chief's permission, and the Khoikhoi began to assemble in an armed mass. The sailors hurriedly took to their boats while a couple of cannon blasts dispersed the Khoikhoi.

NATAL: By 16 December 1497, the fleet had passed the **Great Fish River** (Eastern Cape, South Africa). With Christmas pending, da Gama and his crew gave the coast they were passing the name Natal, which carried the connotation of "birth of Christ" in Portuguese.



INHARRIME in MOZAMBIQUE: With winds blowing northwards, da Gama decide to move up. The ships reached INHARRIME in the SOUTH of Mozambique. The crew found the people of the area to be friendly. So, they were able to replenish water and rations.

From an island of Mozambique, they engaged two Arab pilots. When the inhabitants realized that the explorers were not Muslims, they the people became hostile. Vasco da Gama ordered bombardment of the town and sailed away.



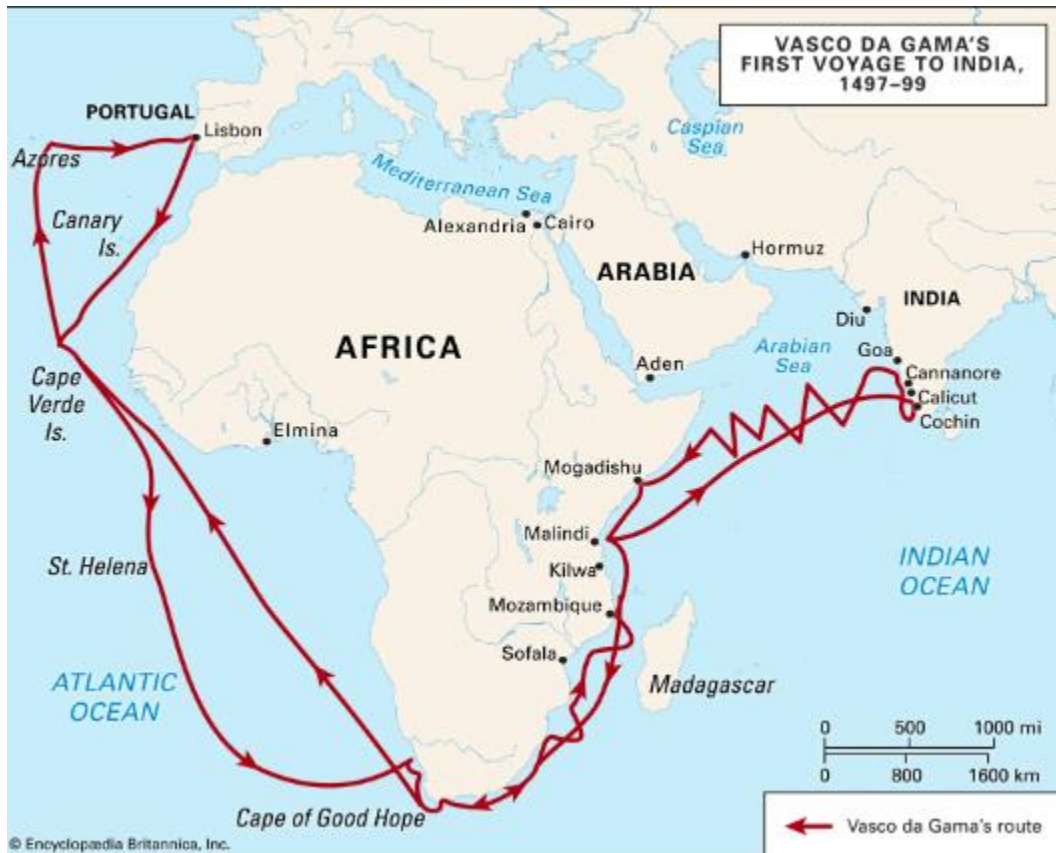
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MOMBASA in KENYA: On 7th April 1497, Da Gama anchored off Mombasa in Kenya. The Sultan seemed to be friendly. However, when an Arab pilot tried to jump aboard da Gama's ship, the Portuguese became suspicious. They forced some Muslims come aboard and tortured to learn of a plot to avenge the bombardment of a town in Mozambique. Vasco da Gama was able to stave off the attack and moved to a nearby port of Malindi.

The Sultan of Malindi proved to be friendly and he provided them with a knowledgeable pilot, who knew the route to India.

CALICUT in INDIA: On 20th May 1498, Vasco da Gama anchored off Malabar coast. Initially the Portuguese were able to have profitable trading with the local people. The Muslim traders, who till then, had a monopoly on trade with India, succeeded in creating enmity for the Christian traders and Vasco da Gama had to set sail on 20th September 1498 to escape death.

On the way to Malindi, the three ships faced strong winds and currents. Thirty men died on the way before they reached Malindi on 7th January 1498. At Malindi, da Gama found that the number of men had reduced. So one ship was burnt and the fleet of two ships went back to Portugal and was honored by the King.



Thanks to Encyclopædia Britannica for the map