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SANTA MARIA H262



No original pictures, plans or models of the *Santa María* are known to exist. This model is therefore based on the famous ship's likely appearance, using information about similar vessels from contemporary sources. A modern full-size version of the *Santa María* can be seen below left.



The *Santa María* was the largest of the three ships used by Christopher Columbus in his first voyage across to the Americas in 1492. She was a carrack - a three- or four-masted sailing ship developed in the Mediterranean in the fifteenth century. Carracks had a high stern (rear) with an aftcastle and a forecastle (platforms to shoot at other ships from or which could be used as a fortress if the ship was boarded). Carracks were one of the first proper ocean-going ships in Europe, being large enough to be stable in heavy seas and roomy enough to carry provisions for long voyages.

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The famous sixteenth century English ship the *Mary Rose* was of the carrack-type. The *Mary Rose* was built in 1509 as a military vessel. It was equipped with 78 guns (91 after an upgrade in 1536). A contemporary picture can be seen on the right. Unfortunately, the *Mary Rose* illustrates one of the drawbacks of the carrack's high-decks as, in 1545, she toppled over while heading out to sea from Portsmouth harbour to fight the French navy. On 11 October 1982 the wreck was lifted from the water and the remains are now on display in Portsmouth Historic Dockyard.



Columbus set sail on his first expedition to the New World from Spain on the evening of 3 August 1492. He had three ships, the biggest of which was the *Santa María*, nicknamed *Gallega* (*the Gallician*). The *Santa María* was about 70 to 80 feet long (25m) and about 25 feet wide (8m). She may have had a crew of 40 men. She had three masts. The other two were caravels - smaller, faster vessels, lacking the high fore and aft-castles found on carracks - called the *Pinta* (*the Painted*) and *Santa Clara*, nicknamed *Niña* (*the Girl*). A photograph of a modern reproduction of a caravel (with square sails of the kind Columbus used) can be seen on the left. All these ships were second-hand vessels and were never meant for exploration.

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From Spain the three ships sailed for the Canary Islands where Columbus restocked the provisions and made repairs. On 6 September they began their five-week voyage across the ocean. An island in the Bahamas group was sighted at 2 a.m. on 12 October 1492. Columbus went on to explore the northeast coast of Cuba (landed on October 28) and the northern coast of Hispaniola. Here, the *Santa Maria* ran aground on Christmas morning 1492 and had to be abandoned.

Columbus used the remains of the ship to build a fort on shore, which he named La Navidad (Christmas). At this point Martín Alonso Pinzón, captain of the *Pinta*, had gone off without permission in search of an island where he had been told by his native guides that there was much gold. Columbus therefore only had one ship left, but the tiny *Niña* could not hold all of the remaining crew. Columbus was forced to leave about 40 men at La Navidad to await his return from Spain. Unfortunately, by the time Columbus returned on his second voyage in 1493, all the men left behind were dead and the fort had been burned to the ground.



A statue of the Santa Maria. The statue is at the House of Columbus in Valladolid, Spain, the city where Columbus died.