

NEW TRADE ROUTES

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, many people undertook trade expeditions across Asia, North Africa, and Europe. Some of these travelers documented their journeys, collecting knowledge about a range of cultures along the way.

Whether by foot, on the back of a camel, or by ship, products have been transported from one place to another in large quantities for thousands of years. Despite the large number of people traveling around during the late medieval period, only a few reports remain of their journeys. Thankfully, the likes of Ibn Battuta, Marco Polo, and Zheng He documented their travels. These three figures all came from very different parts of the world.

Ibn Battuta

Ibn Battuta was from northern Africa, and began his travels aged 21. During his lifetime, he traveled 72,700 miles (117,000 kilometers) through northern Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, and all the way to China—the equivalent of circling the globe three times!

I know the way!

1325–1354

In 1334, Ibn Battuta arrived in Delhi, now the capital of India.

Marco Polo

Despite receiving large quantities of goods from China, Europeans knew very little about this giant empire. This all changed when the Italian Marco Polo returned from his 24-year exploration of the Far East. Despite the length of his travels, his reports make no mention of Chinese tea ceremonies or of the letterpress. This has led many to believe that he was never actually there.

1271–1295

Zheng He

China wanted to advertise and sell its valuable products to the rest of the world. This was the reason behind Admiral Zheng He being sent off with a fleet of merchant ships. During his seven expeditions, he traveled to many far-flung locations, including the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, and even East Africa. On these journeys, he traded tea, silk, and porcelain for pearls, cinnamon, and precious stones.

1405–1433

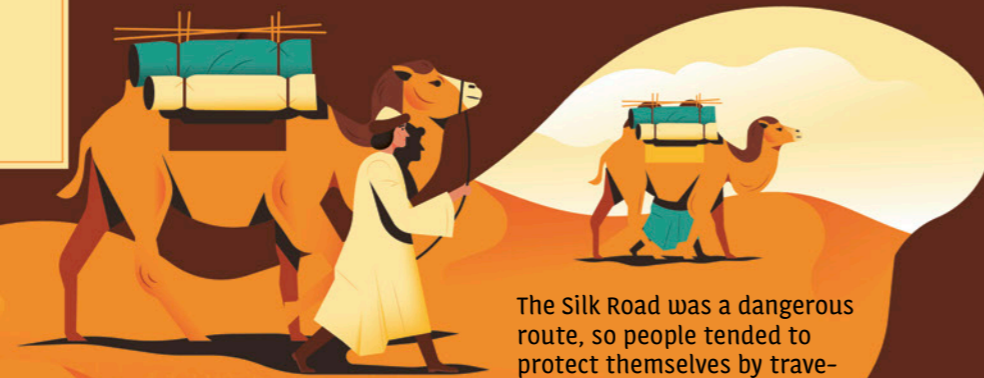
Ha, I already drew the best route on the map!

1487–1488

1497–1499

By Land

The Silk Road was a giant network of trade routes that connected East Asia and the Mediterranean. It was used for transporting spices, fabrics, and porcelain.



The Silk Road was a dangerous route, so people tended to protect themselves by traveling in large groups.

To India by Sea

There were many checkpoints on the Silk Road where guards demanded a fee from those who wished to continue their journey. This led the Portuguese to search for a cheaper trade route. On the hunt for a way to Asia by sea, Bartolomeu Dias was the first European to sail around the southernmost tip of Africa, with navigator Vasco da Gama later making it all the way to India. Now Europeans could trade with Asian peoples without first having to traverse the entire Middle East. But because this new route was still very long, the search for alternatives continued.