

## EXPO'98 - The Oceans, Patrimony of the Future

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### Back to the past on the paths of the future

In Lisbon on May 22, 1998 this important event opened its door to the public, and can be visited until September 30. This venue is the last international exposition scheduled to take place this century. A new structure in Lisbon was especially built to showcase this powerful exposition. Important pavilions will inform you on the oceans and on sea life; in the international area around 100 countries will be represented. Visitors will be brought through the annals of time to a time when the world was still a mystery to be solved by the curious, brave, enterprising Portuguese people.

With this major event, Portugal will celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Discovery of the Sea Route to India by Vasco da **Gama**. A crucial turning point in the history of the Old Continent, this extraordinary enterprise, together with the discovery of America by Christopher Colombo, gave rise to a universally new mentality, expressed in various forms of artistic rebirth: the Renaissance.

Although the maritime tradition of the Portuguese people has been lost in the memories of time, its contribution to world culture remains to this day. The real challenge began in 1433 when Gil Eanes rounded the Cap Bojador. From then on, the adventure was pushed further and further, and in 1487 Bartolomeu Dias reached the Cape of Good Hope, which allowed the access to a new sea space and the possibility of contact with the legendary world of the oriental civilisations. The Portuguese maritime adventure will culminate in 1498 with the arrival of the Gama's fleet in India. Two years later, another Portuguese navigator, Pedro Alvares **Cabral**, discovered Brazil, and other Portuguese vessels continued their route to the East, reaching Malacca and China; it was not until the 16th century that the Portuguese reached Japan, the first Europeans to make contact with the Japanese culture.

In those days, such a voyage was not only dangerous but also extremely arduous for the crew: a round trip to India by sea would take about one year, the ocean was a gigantic mass of water full of pitfalls and secrets which men had not yet been able to perceive. Vasco da Gama had left Lisbon on July 8, 1497 and arrived in Calicut, one of the most important mercantile cities of India, on May 20, 1498. His return trip began in August; he was back in Lisbon in March 1499. During the return trip, he lost one vessel, and half of the crew did not survive the extremely bad conditions of the voyage.

A fantastic adventure for the explorer of the day, the repercussions of its findings added significantly in the practical combination of scientific and technical knowledge, resulting in the construction of new instruments and weapons, and the development of new scientific methods of astronomical observation. These voyages provided a means for the circulation of navigational knowledge and techniques, some of these already used by the Portuguese long before the maritime expansion.

Portugal opened the way to a variety of human objectives like the development of other lands and new markets, a broader understanding of different people and cultures, and the wakening of a curiosity for the botanical and zoological diversity of a living world unknown to the Europeans until then. In terms of geographical knowledge, this event confirmed the direct communication between the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans - which put an end to the old idea that the Indian Ocean was an interior sea.

Lisbon became one of the most cosmopolitan cities in Europe, a city into which novelties flooded from the new world, attracting people and offering opportunities for business and cultural exchange. The Portuguese "caravelas" crossed the seas in every direction, collecting experience and information through direct observation, and spreading, in turn, the European ways of thinking and, above all, another religion: Christianity, which was invoked as the spiritual driving force and main goal of the maritime expeditions.

In those far away continents from Asia to Africa and America, the Portuguese left their language and their culture, bringing to Europe in exchange new ideas and materials, precious stones and spices. The enormous cultural impact of the Portuguese contribution to the world may well be summarized in the words of Camões, the great Portuguese poet of the Renaissance: "... *to give new worlds to the world*".

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