

## Heroes of the Sea

*Question: Why were the Portuguese once called the “Heroes of the Sea?”*

**Answer:**

The Portuguese were once called the heroes of the sea because of the discoveries and conquests they carried out some centuries ago.

During the 15th and 16th centuries, Portugal experienced a golden age of discoveries, mainly due to the push of the Portuguese kings, princes and other renowned navigators.

One of the main reasons for Portugal’s expansion seawards was because it was impossible to expand or reach new markets except by sea, since the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon controlled the territory outside the land borders of Portugal at the time. This Portuguese expansion overseas resulted in the first and largest colonial empire of the 15th and 16th century.

The Portuguese empire began around 1415 when the Portuguese fleet organized by Henry the Navigator, prince of Portugal, explored the west coast of Africa and continued throughout the next century.

In 1434, Portuguese navigator, Gil Eanes, went around Cape Bojador, South of Morocco. This deed marked the beginning of the Portuguese exploration

of Africa, leading to the discovery of several uninhabited islands and the conquest of several African territories.

When the Portuguese navigator Bartolomeu Dias turned the Cape of Good Hope in Southern Africa in 1488, it opened the maritime route to India and contradicted Christopher Columbus’ idea of reaching India from the west. As a result of Dias enterprise, some years later the famous Portuguese navigator, Vasco da Gama, sailed to India where he arrived in Calicut on May 20, 1498.

In 1500, Pedro Álvares Cabral sighted the Brazilian coast and ten years later Afonso de Albuquerque conquered the Indian State of Goa in the Malabar Coast, which was annexed by the Republic of India in 1962.

Besides the above mentioned territories, the Portuguese explorers also discovered or conquered other important territories in Africa, the Far East, and Southern Asia and reached China and Japan.

Of all these territories and possessions, Portugal presently only owns the archipelagos of the Azores and Madeira. All other territories were either gradually lost to their respective peoples or



granted independence after the 1974 military coup that restored democracy in Portugal that had been lost 47 years before.

The last pillar of the Portuguese empire fell when Portugal handed the territory of Macao to China in 1999 under the terms of a negotiated agreement similar to the one Great Britain made when it handed over Hong Kong.

### *Other significant discoveries and conquests*

The following is a chronological list of some of the most important Portuguese discoveries and conquests overseas which are not listed above:

**Aug. 21, 1415**

The city of Ceuta in North Africa, an Islamic trade center is conquered.

**1418**

Navigators João Gonçalves Zarco and Tristão Vaz Teixeira found the Island of Porto Santo.

**1419**

Zarco disembarked on the Island of Madeira

**1427-1432**

Most of the Azorean islands are discovered.

**1448 and following years-**

Portuguese ships explored the Gulf of Guinea and led to the discovery of Cape Verde Islands, Fernão Pó and São Tomé and Príncipe.

**1482**

Explorer Diogo Cão reached the Congo River.

**1510**

Conquest of Goa, India.

**1511**

Conquest of Malacca, Western Malaysia.

**1517**

Fernão Pires de Andrade visited Canton, China, and opened trade with that country, where the Portuguese were allowed to occupy the territory of Macao in 1557.