

# Famous Explorers:

## Ibn Battuta



Ibn Battuta was born in Tangier, Morocco in 1304 to a family of judges. At the age of 21, he set out to make a **pilgrimage**, or religious journey, to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. When Ibn Battuta first left home to visit these cities, he said,

“Swayed by an overmastering impulse within me, and a long-cherished desire to visit [Mecca and Medina], I resolved to quit all my friends and tear myself away from my home. As my parents were still alive, it weighed grievously upon me to part from them, and both they and I were afflicted with sorrow.”

After the 16-month pilgrimage to Mecca, he wouldn't return to Morocco for another 24 years. He became obsessed with travel, and covered a distance of 75,000 miles in 30 years. This averages to about 7 miles a day at a time when people didn't have cars or airplanes, and all boats were powered by wind. In the 1300's, most people traveled by foot, camel, horseback, or sea. During his lifetime, Ibn Battuta met almost 60 rulers of the countries he visited, and used his skills as a judge to serve as an **advisor**, or helper, to two dozen of them.

He wrote a book, called the *Rihla*, which describes his experiences in places such as West Africa, Malaysia, Central Asia, Turkey and India. The descriptions given in the *Rihla* help us understand how people in different countries lived during the 1300's.

Ibn Battuta's journeys were often very dangerous. He survived encounters with pirates and bandits, and in the Middle East, he witnessed and survived the Black Death, the same **plague**, or widespread disease, that swept through Europe in the 14th century. He writes, “I went to Damascus and arrived on a Thursday; the people had been fasting for three days... The number of deaths among them had risen to 2400 a day... We went to Gaza and found most of it deserted because of the number that had died... I went to Cairo and was told that during the plague the number of deaths had risen to 21,000 a day. I found that all the sheikhs I had known were dead. May God Most High have mercy upon them!”

Among the important people Ibn Battuta met were the Greek Emperor, Andronikos III Palaiologos, and Uzbek Khan, the warlord ruler of the Golden Horde in central Asia. For a few years, Ibn Battuta was sponsored by Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq, and was sent as his chief ambassador to China, where he traveled as far as Fuzhou to the east. Of China, he said, “The Chinese are of all peoples the most skillful in depiction... The artisans had come to the palace while we were there and observed us, drawing our portraits without our noticing. If a stranger commits any offense among them, they send his portrait far and wide. A search is then made for him. Wherever a person resembling that portrait is found, he is arrested.”

After he returned home to Morocco, he finished writing the *Rihla* and served as a judge until his death in 1368.

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## Define these Terms:

**Pilgrimage**

**Advisor**

**Plague**

## Reading Comprehension:

Where did Ibn Battuta witness the black death? Name two cities he visited that were struck by the plague.

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Ibn Battuta noticed that Chinese artists were ordered to paint his picture while he was visiting the Emperor's palace. What does the passage tell us about why artists were ordered to paint foreigners?

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## Writing Prompt:

Re-read the quote from Ibn Battuta in the first paragraph. What do you think he's trying to say about travel? Do you think it would be hard to leave your friends and family for a long time, even if you were excited to see places that the people back home had never seen before?

*Write your response on a separate sheet of paper.*

## Activity:

Ibn Battuta saw the horrible effects of the Black Death in Gaza, Damascus and Cairo. Find Cairo on a map of the world. Find out how far away Cairo is from Ibn Battuta's home in Tangier, Morocco. Find out how far away Cairo is from Fuzhou, China.

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