

Ibn Battuta's Journey

The Pearl Fisheries in the Persian Gulf

On our journey to Qalhat (in Oman), my friend and I decided to leave the crew of my ship, and continue on foot. The decision almost cost us our lives. Our guide that we had hired to take us there plotted to kill us and steal our clothes and valuables. Luckily I had my spear and managed to control the would-be robber. Finally, after becoming sick and walking with swollen feet, we arrived at Qalhat. We stayed with the governor for six days and recovered. From there, we continued to the Persian Gulf.

There, many boats with divers and merchants came to the pearl fishery. The divers put a mask made from a tortoiseshell over their faces and also something looking like scissors (also made from a tortoiseshell) which they fasten to their nose. They tie a rope around their waist and dive into the water. At the bottom of the sea, the divers collect shells and put them into a bag which they carry around their neck.

When they come back to the surface, the divers take shells out of their bags and open them. Inside the shells are pieces of flesh which are cut out with a knife, and when they come into contact with the air, they become hard and turn into pearls. Big and small pearls are gathered together. Some are given to the Sultan and the rest are sold to the merchants in the boats.

Escape From India!

I arrived in Delhi in 1334, needing to find work and money. I worked as a judge for the Sultan Muhammad Tughluq for 7 years until 1341. He showered me with gifts and money, but he was a cruel man. He tortured people in the most horrible way. The Sultan began to suspect that I was plotting against him, and he kept me under guard for nine days. I had to go to live in a cave for five months to prove that I was worthy of the Sultan's trust. When I returned, the Sultan asked me to go to China to become an ambassador there. He knew my love of travelling, and although the journey was going to be dangerous, I could not refuse.

A few days outside of Delhi, we were attacked by bandits and I was separated from my companions. Ten horsemen chased me across the fields. I was able to escape by jumping into a ditch. However, days later, I was robbed of everything except my shirt, trousers and cloak. Luckily, as I had nothing left to rob, my captors let me go in exchange for my clothes. Exhausted, barefooted, and wearing nothing but my trousers, I was rescued by a man who carried me to his village.

Painters in China

The Chinese are very skilled craftspeople. One day, I went through the painters' bazaar to the Sultan's palace with my friends. When I came back from the palace I walked through the bazaar again and saw that there were pictures of myself and my friends hung on the walls. They were amazing and looked just like us. We learned that when we were at the palace, the painters had watched us and begun their paintings. It is the custom in China to paint everyone who visits them. If a foreigner does something bad, they send his painting around the country and look for the foreigner. When someone is found who looks like the painting, they arrest him.

Salt Mines in Mali

I set out a caravan and we reached Taghaza, which is not a pretty village. People dig in the sand for slabs of salt. A camel can carry two slabs of salt. The slabs are cut into pieces and merchants sell the salt. We stayed in a house in Taghaza for ten unhappy days that was built entirely of salt, except for the camel skin roof! There are no trees. There were a lot of flies and the water did not taste good. We had to set off to cross 500 miles of desert where usually only one water place exists. We were lucky; it had rained that year. I was finally on my way home.