



Going Global

Before 1492, there was already an exchange of food, animals, and plants among Europe, Africa, and Asia. Europe and Asia were connected by land, and Africa was a short sail away. But not many people thought there was any reason to sail across the Atlantic Ocean, because few people believed that there were more continents there. This kept the Americas apart from everyone else for a long time. But after Columbus and his men landed in the Americas in 1492, the exchange of foods and animals grew worldwide.

Today, American plants, like corn, cocoa, tomatoes, and tobacco, are grown all over the world. Italian tomato sauces that are now world famous did not exist before Columbus—there were no tomatoes in Italy before the Columbian Exchange. Swiss chocolate is famous, too, but there was no chocolate in Europe before cocoa was imported from the Americas. American animals that are now found around the world include the Canada goose, the red fox, and the grey squirrel.

Coffee, apples, and bananas have been grown in the Americas for so long that many people think they are native to the Americas. After all, what's more American than apple pie? But that's not true. Coffee was originally from Africa, and apples and bananas are native to Asia. Europeans brought all three to the Americas. There were also no chickens, sheep, cows, or horses in the Americas before the Columbian Exchange. Most dog and cat breeds that we now keep as pets were a result of the exchange. There was no wheat to make bread. The tortillas made from wheat flour now used in Latin American cooking did not exist before Columbus.



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The Columbian Exchange changed life worldwide.

People have also been part of the Columbian Exchange—traveling to the Americas from Africa, Asia, and Europe nonstop since 1492. Some people traveled to the Americas to start a new life; others were forced to come as slaves. In the end, the Americas became home to many new people who brought their customs with them. Americans have traveled to other continents, too. Today, airplanes make it fast and easy to travel to and from the Americas. With the Internet, an exchange of ideas and trends now goes on every minute of every day.