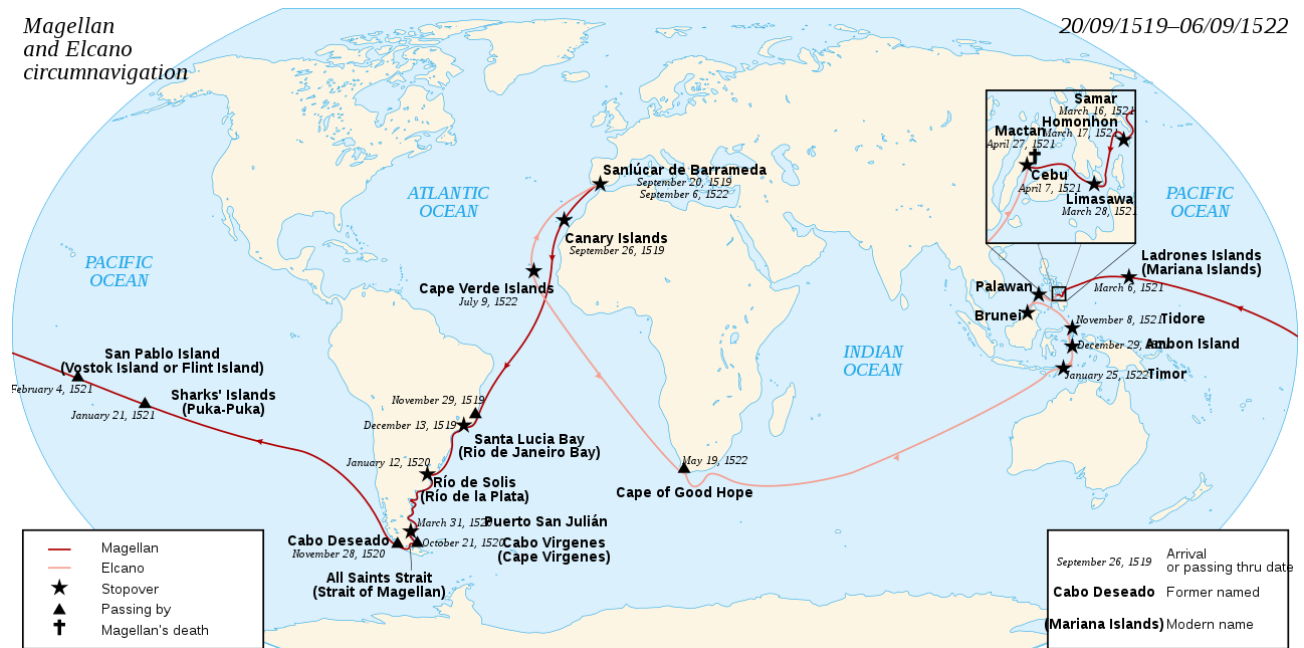


# The Spice Islands

It was 500 years ago in September 1521 that a Spanish expedition discovered the Spice Islands through the south west passage at the foot of South America. These were two volcanic islands, Ternata and Tidore, which now form part of North Maluku, Indonesia. They are famous for nutmegs and cloves.



Magellan\_Elcano\_Circumnavigation-fr.svg: Sémhurderivative work: Uxbona, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

In September 1519 *Ferdinand Magellan*, a Portuguese sailor, had successfully petitioned the Spanish King (having failed with his own ) to fund 5 ships to set sail from Seville. The 16thC was to prove to be the age of discovery. Columbus had found the Americas a few years earlier.

There survives a world globe from 1515 with the south west passage depicted but as yet undiscovered.

*Sebastian Ocano*, a Spanish shipbuilder, was also on board. He was from Sans Sebastian, Northern Spain. The coastline of Sans Sebastian was full of shipbuilding sites-using oak from specially selected oak tree woodland and iron for making the nails.

Spain and Portugal were constantly at loggerheads over territory, so they had drawn up an agreement to draw a line around the world but cutting the Atlantic in half-to the West would be Spanish, to the East Portugese.

However the other half of the world was not all discovered - this line cut through the Spice Islands. The

Portuguese had already found islands there and were keeping them secret.

The fleet of ships set off, not straight across the Atlantic but south to the Cape Verdi Islands. Then across to

South America. They search every bay hopefully for that passage, then one day they test the waters but it is freshwater! They had found the huge river mouth of Rio de Solis. They continue searching until they reach the Port of St. Julian. Magellan tells the men they must overwinter here but the men had been promised hot island beaches etc. not this cold and the lack of food was getting to them. They don't trust him. He's Portuguese and they don't like him. They are Spanish.

The mutiny that follows is quashed by Magellan executing the organisers. One of these is Sebastian Ocano but although he survives he is demoted and not mentioned in the reports of the voyage from then on.

A year has passed now and the San Antonio ship has deserted him. The passage is now known as the Straits of Magellan and the land around is called the Terra del Fuego, due to the locals' fires and columns of smoke. The Portuguese seize land here and build a huge fleet with 3000 men but in a short space of time due to bad luck, bad weather and shortage of food they all perish.

Magellan's crew is dying as they are running out of food. He had expected the Spice Island to be only a week or so away but were in fact 20,000 nautical miles. The dead were hastily buried at sea. No doubt to avoid any cases of cannibalism. 100 days later they hit land in the Philippines.

On the island of Cebu he forms an alliance with the people, helped by his Filipino slave he had bought along with him. But the fighting between local warring islanders lead to a large battle in which many die including Magellan. The unheard-of Sebastian is now in charge of the remaining two ships, the Victoria and the Trinidad, and at last after 2 years from setting sail they land on the island of Tidore.

The Portuguese have been on Ternate since 1512. Europeans, Egyptians and Chinese came for the Spices travelling round the Cape of Good Hope and Indian Ocean to get these spices. A handful of nutmegs would be enough for a sailor to live on for life!

They fill the holds of both ships. The Victoria sails the usual route home but the Trinidad sails towards the Pacific and the Passage but huge storms make them turn back only to be captured and sunk nearby by the Portuguese.

The Victoria returns safely to Seville with tales and riches of their new discovery.