

The Voyage with Cabrillo - The Adventures of a Pajé [pah-héy] (Ship's Page)

Date: September 28, 1542

Place: San Diego harbor

My name is Miguelito and I have been away from my home for three months now. I am a **Pajé** for Capitán Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo on his ship, the *San Salvador*. I was so excited when we first left Navidad, and so happy to get away from working every day in the cacao fields. I worked for Señor Cabrillo, just like the rest of my family. But is this any better? At least at home my mother would cook hot food for me. On this ship I have to eat the same thing every day: dried meat or fish mixed with olive oil, maybe some smelly beans or moldy bread that is as hard as a rock. I miss my family and I want to go home.

Most of the time the water tastes so bad that we drink wine. At each meal we say grace and then pull worms out of our food before we begin to eat. The Capitán says that when we are out at sea, it is too dangerous to light a fire on a wooden ship, so we eat things that do not have to be cooked. Now that we are at anchor, we can go ashore and get fresh foods. Maybe someone will kill a deer. I want to fish for a while. A good big fish would taste wonderful.

There was a furious storm last night. If we had been out at sea, the wind and rain would have rocked the ship to and fro, getting everyone and everything soaked. Many of us would have been seasick. But our ships are anchored in a large bay near the little finger of land that guarded the harbor entrance. We are protected from the winds here. In the Log, Cabrillo wrote, "...we discovered a port closed and very good." Even though the weather is stormy, the Capitán will go ashore and do a special claiming ceremony today. He promised to name this place San Miguel.

Capitán Cabrillo is very proud of our little fleet of ships. I know he is especially proud of the *San Salvador*. He often stands on the deck of this galleon and looks at the beautiful ship he designed and built in Guatemala. The *San Salvador* is nearly 100 feet long and 25 feet wide. He was pleased that this ship handled well. It has brought us safely a thousand miles along the coast of California to where no other Spaniard has gone before.

When we left New Spain we all hoped to become rich by sailing to China, and perhaps discovering gold. We have found friendly people, fresh water and some food. We have not found much gold or anything else of value. And worst of all, this coastline goes mostly north and that does not lead toward Asia. The Capitán says that we need to continue our voyage and map the coast. Hopefully we will soon reach the places where we will trade our trade goods for spices, silks and other things that we can sell when we get back to New Spain. But the men have been telling me this for three months and still we find nothing of value!

We have other responsibilities than just finding places to trade for spices, silk and maybe gold. We are looking for fresh water ports. This will tell us that we have found rivers emptying into the ocean. We have only found harbors that have salt water. But surely, finding friendly people is not enough to make the trip a success. Friendly people bring us no money. When will we have any real success?

The end of the story: Miguelito, along with the crews of the three ships, returned to Navidad on April 14, 1543. The expedition provided a coastal map and a log of the area they visited. However, they did not find a waterway entering the ocean nor gold. They did not find the Spice Islands, or reach Asian waters. But they did find friendly people and a coastline that had adequate food and water for colonization. They had lost their Capitán, and were discouraged by heavy seas and unpleasant weather. This coastline was clearly not what the early maps had pictured. But the land was under the guardianship of Spain. And one day it would provide them with great wealth. But not in 1543.

In the years that followed, the Spanish in New Spain learned how to use their resources to provide for their families and their people. New Spain expanded towards the north. It became a mighty nation and eventually separated from Spain. They called their country Mexico.