



Fact sheet Coming and Going

Every person and object on St Helena has travelled here by ship. Changes in maritime technology have shaped the island's identity and role in the world.

From the 16th century onwards, trading ships sailed here on the prevailing south-easterly winds using the stars, sextants or astrolabes to navigate. Many battles were fought in Jamestown harbour between tall ships filled with riches like the *Witte Liew*. During the East India Company era (1659-1833), the island was visited by hundreds of company ships each year.

Trade from ships began to decline in 1833. St Helena lost its East India Company business when the island was transferred to the Crown. Steam powered vessels cut the journey to England from a minimum of three months by tall ship to just a few weeks. Further losses to trade occurred in 1869 when the Suez Canal opened, offering a shorter route to Asia. Improvements in refrigeration also reduced the need to take fresh provisions on board.

Ships once depended on St Helena, now St Helena depends on ships. Since 1990, the *RMS St Helena* has been the sole supply ship and almost the only means of travelling to and from the island.