

# The Vikings



Quick summary



The Vikings, from Scandinavia, were excellent sailors, explorers and warriors. They colonised large parts of Europe between 790 and 1100 CE and were involved in a long and bloody battle with the Anglo-Saxons for control of Britain. Also known as Norsemen (men from the north), the Vikings belonged to many different clans, led by chiefs who ruled over the lands they had conquered. After battles, the Vikings often forced local rulers to pay a tribute called Danegeld (meaning Danish tax) – a large amount of money that had to be paid so that the Vikings would not attack the locals and destroy their land.



Location



Travel and exploration

The Vikings were excellent sailors, traders and explorers who travelled as far as North America in search of lands to colonise and trade with. The famous Viking explorer Leif Eriksson was the first European to set foot in North America, 500 years before Columbus. Scandinavian countries were rich in timber, iron and fur and the Vikings sold these materials across western Europe. The 'Vikingr' name came from the word 'pirate' in Old Norse and is further evidence of their reputation as fierce warriors who would fight and raid as they explored new lands.



Main events

**793:** Vikings attacked the holy monastery of Lindisfarne

**867:** Viking invaders named Yorvik (now York) the Viking capital of England

**886:** England divided into Viking and Anglo-Saxon kingdoms



Beliefs

The Vikings worshipped many gods. Each god had different human strengths and weaknesses. Odin, the god of war, death, wisdom and poetry, was the most important. Thor, the god of thunder, was Odin's son. Warriors who fought bravely in battle would be carried to Valhalla – the Viking warrior heaven.



Vocabulary

**Scandinavia:** Norway, Sweden and Denmark

**explorers:** people who travel to a new place to discover what is there

**colonised:** settled in a place

**evidence:** proof, information showing whether something is true

**raid:** enter a place to steal something



Settlements



Beliefs



Culture and pastimes



Location



Main events



Food and farming



Travel and exploration



Conflict



Society



Artefacts



# Viking sailors and raiders



## Quick summary



The Vikings were the first global explorers, reaching the New World nearly 500 years before Columbus first set sail. But while some may think of them as great sailors and explorers, it is as fierce warriors and raiders that they are often known. Most of what we know about the Vikings comes from historical accounts and diaries which tell of the terror communities faced when Viking longboats came into view. When the Vikings first appeared on the coastline of Britain, they did not come to conquer but to steal everything of value and return home. While they did colonise some of the lands they sailed to, their place in history will always be connected to these violent seaborne raids.



## Travel and exploration

The Vikings were excellent sailors and very good at navigation. They found their way by using visual landmarks, including wildlife, and looking at the colour of the sea. They also sailed as close to the coastline as possible. It is also possible the Vikings invented a type of sunstone compass that helped them find their way in open water.



## Conflict

The longship was an essential part of the Vikings' ability to travel and explore. Longships were also perfect for raiding. They had banks of oars at either side and often had sails. As the name suggests, the longship was long, but it was also symmetrical. This design allowed the sailors to reverse direction rather than turning around. This ability to change direction quickly was very useful in battle. Longships could sail right up to the coast, or even travel up rivers, and quickly escape. Another significant feature of the longship was its size, with many craft able to hold a large group of warriors and whatever treasure and resources they took from a raid.



## Settlements

Not all Viking expeditions were simple raids, and over time the Vikings began to colonise the places they sailed to. They brought their language and customs and changed the culture of the colonised societies forever.



## Location



## Vocabulary

**accounts:** written or spoken reports of something that happened  
**colonise:** go and live somewhere and take control of it  
**seaborne:** carried on a ship  
**navigation:** finding a way around  
**symmetrical:** with two halves exactly the same



## Settlements



## Beliefs



## Culture and pastimes



## Location



## Main events



## Food and farming



## Travel and exploration



## Conflict



## Society



## Artefacts

# Viking kingdoms and conquests



## Quick summary



The Vikings earned their **reputation** as vicious warriors, but they were also excellent traders. Setting out from **Scandinavia**, the Vikings established many trading colonies across Northern Europe. In the late eighth century, after many successful raids, the Vikings settled across Britain and Ireland. However, the successful **colonisation** of large parts of England marked the beginning of decades of struggle between the Vikings and Anglo-Saxons. The balance of power in England was continually changing as Vikings from Denmark and Norway laid claim to England's throne. One of the most significant dates in British history, 1066, finally saw an end to these **volatile** times with the arrival of William, the Duke of Normandy and a direct **descendant** of Viking settlers in northern France. Viking settlements were also established in modern-day Canada and Russia.



## Conflict

The Vikings' raiding strategy was effective for lots of reasons, but speed and surprise were two of the most significant. It was very difficult to respond quickly to these attacks which were often over before warriors could be gathered to fight the Vikings off. The raids were so successful that soon the Vikings thought about taking territory as well as goods to be traded. Before long, much of the north and east of England was under Viking rule (also called Danelaw). The 10th and 11th centuries saw Viking and Anglo-Saxon armies fighting many significant battles for control of Britain.



## Travel and exploration

The same longships that made the Vikings such capable raiders also made them great traders. The longship allowed the Vikings to sail upriver and build settlements and towns (Dublin and Kiev were both Viking settlements). The Vikings' ability to defend themselves and their goods (including wool and fish) meant that they were able to maintain a trading empire that stretched across northern and western Europe.



## Beliefs

Churches and monasteries were prime targets for Viking raids. They had lots of gold and silver ornaments and little in the way of defences. The famous Viking raid of the monastery at Lindisfarne in 793 CE shocked Christians across Europe.



## Main events

**954:** Last Viking king of Jorvik (York) killed in battle  
**1066:** Harold Hardrada, King of Norway defeated by King Harold at the Battle of Stamford Bridge  
**1066:** King Harold defeated by William at the Battle of Hastings



## Vocabulary

**reputation:** beliefs held about someone  
**Scandinavia:** Norway, Sweden and Denmark  
**colonisation:** taking control of a place and living there  
**volatile:** likely to change suddenly  
**descendant:** relative from later generations



## Settlements



## Beliefs



## Culture and pastimes



## Location



## Main events



## Food and farming



## Travel and exploration



## Conflict



## Society



## Artefacts