



# Who were the Vikings?

KS2

KS3

Ages 7-14 ⌚ 4 min read

The Vikings were Scandinavian people — from what is now Norway, Sweden, and Denmark — who, from around 793 to 1066 AD, expanded dramatically outward from their homelands. They raided, traded, explored, and settled across an enormous area: from North America in the west to the rivers of Russia in the east, from the Arctic in the north to the Mediterranean in the south.

The word "Viking" actually refers specifically to the act of raiding — a Viking was someone who went on a *viking* (a sea raid or expedition). Most Scandinavians of the period were farmers and fishermen, not raiders. But the raiders are the ones who left the most dramatic mark on history.

Imagine if the residents of a remote coastal region suddenly developed faster boats than anyone else on Earth. They could arrive somewhere unexpected, take what they wanted, and be gone before any response was possible. That's the Viking advantage: longships that could cross open oceans and also navigate shallow rivers, travelling deep inland to places no seaborne force had ever reached before. The longship wasn't just transport — it was the entire strategic advantage.

## Where did they go?

The Norwegian Vikings raided and settled Britain, Ireland, Iceland, Greenland, and — around 1000 AD — North America (Vinland, in modern Newfoundland). The Danish Vikings focused on England and France — the Duchy of Normandy was founded by Viking settlers, and those Normans later conquered England in 1066. The Swedish Vikings largely moved east, trading down the great rivers of Russia and Ukraine to reach Constantinople and Baghdad.

## Were they just raiders?

Emphatically not. Vikings founded Dublin, established trade networks from Newfoundland to the Caspian Sea, and set up the ruling dynasty of Russia (the Rus). They were skilled craftsmen, poets (Norse sagas are sophisticated literature), and merchants. The raid-and-pillage reputation comes partly from the fact that most historical sources were written by Christian monks — who were the people most

frequently targeted by Viking raids, for the obvious reason that monasteries contained valuable goods and had no armies.

## **What ended the Viking Age?**

There's no single end point, but by around 1100, Scandinavian kingdoms had adopted Christianity and become more integrated into broader European culture. The raiding culture faded as the societies settled. The descendants of Vikings — Normans, Rus, Icelanders — became distinct peoples with their own identities, and Scandinavia itself became conventional medieval kingdoms.