

## Who Were the Vikings?

The Vikings were a seafaring Norse people from Scandinavia — present-day Norway, Sweden, and Denmark — who dominated much of European history during the Viking Age, roughly AD 793 to 1066. The period is traditionally said to have begun with the brutal raid on the monastery of Lindisfarne, off the northeast coast of England, which sent shockwaves across Christian Europe.

Central to Viking success was their revolutionary longship. Constructed from overlapping planks of oak — a technique called clinker building — these vessels were both flexible in rough seas and remarkably light. A double-ended design meant they could reverse without turning, and their shallow draught allowed navigation deep into river systems, bringing Viking warriors to the heart of cities like Paris and Kiev.

Viking expansion was driven by a combination of overpopulation, a shortage of farmable land, and a desire for wealth. Their settlements reached Iceland and Greenland, and the explorer Leif Eriksson is credited with reaching North America — called Vinland — around AD 1000, nearly five centuries before Columbus.

At home, Viking society was governed by 'things' — public assemblies where free men debated laws and settled disputes. This early form of democracy was remarkable for its time.

The Vikings eventually converted to Christianity and integrated into European society, but their impact on language, law, navigation, and exploration proved lasting and profound.

## Questions

1. Name the three modern-day countries that made up the Viking homelands.
2. What event traditionally marks the start of the Viking Age, and why was it significant?
3. What is "clinker building"?
4. Give two features of the longship's design that made it especially effective.
5. Name three factors that drove Viking expansion beyond Scandinavia.
6. Which Viking explorer is credited with reaching North America, and what did he call it?
7. Approximately how many years before Columbus did this explorer reach North America?
8. What was a "thing" in Viking society?
9. What eventually happened to the Vikings and their religion?
10. The article says the Vikings had a "lasting and profound" impact. Using the text, explain two ways in which they influenced the world.



Text D Quiz



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