

Press feature  
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## Experience the Øresund's Viking Past

Historical tourism is a fast-growing sector of the travel industry with increasing numbers of tourists seeking to explore the past and discover more about how our ancestors used to live. The Vikings hold a special place in the public's imagination – the myths and legends of this supposedly violent, warring race have long obscured a truth that is far more interesting than the clichés of marauding, barbaric sea warriors with horned helmets and bad table manners, as many visitors to the Øresund region are discovering thanks to the many recreations of the Vikings' life and sea going travels on offer in the region.

### Sifting myth from truth

The Vikings were a race of Norsemen – made up of Norwegians, Swedes, Icelanders and Danes. This means that, there are of course Viking sites throughout Sweden and Denmark – from the Neolithic barrows and hillock-top piles of stones signifying the presence of a burial chamber that you see in fields across the region, to world class museums and heritage sites dedicated to preserving their legacy.

The Viking empire replaced the Romans as the pre-eminent force in northern Europe for three hundred years from the late 8<sup>th</sup> century. In their state of the art longships they traded and raided as far north as Scotland and as far south as North Africa and colonised much of Ireland and eastern England. Contrary to popular myth, the Vikings were a sophisticated, civilised people – they washed once a week, for instance, which was very unusual in those times, and were renowned for their complex oral histories. And though their violent raids on, for instance, the eastern coast of England did much to cement their image as bloodthirsty invaders, they were as much a peaceful race of farmers.

### Where to find them today

One of the best places to learn more about the Vikings is **Nationalmuseet** in Copenhagen. Denmark's leading museum has recently been extensively renovated and has a large collection of Viking treasure looted from as far away as Russia including several stunning *lurs* (horns), burial finds and enigmatic rune stones. The museum explodes the old myth about the Vikings' horned helmets once and for all with displays of real Viking armour which is characterised instead by nose protectors. In the children's section kids can dress up in Viking costumes and play in a replica Viking boat.

### The Viking city of Roskilde

If you want to see their sailing vessels for yourself, there are few better places in the world than the **Viking Ship Museum** in Roskilde, 25 minutes west of Copenhagen by train. Here, in a purpose built museum, with outdoor

ship yard and other exhibition spaces overlooking Roskilde Fjord, you can see the actual remnants of real Viking ships of various kinds discovered in the fjord itself.

Towards the end of the Viking era the narrow end of the Roskilde fjord was deliberately blocked by the locals who sailed five ships out onto the water, and scuttled them with several tons of stones. Latter day locals had long harboured a hunch that there was something out there, but it wasn't until researchers made a series of dives in the late 1950s that the truth was revealed and excavations began in 1962 to raise the ancient vessels. The fragments found were reassembled and put on display in a purpose built museum, overlooking the water, which opened in 1969. In the 1990s, nine more ships were discovered during construction work – some from the Middle Ages, but yet more from the Viking era including one over 30m in length which would have had a crew of 60 men. The ship was made from timber from the Dublin area, felled in 1042.

### **A Viking ship takes to the seas once again**

A sea-going recreation of this ship, named the **Sea Stallion** from Glendalough, has recently been completed by the craftsmen of the open air ship yard beside the Viking Ship Museum.

The ship is perhaps the finest Viking ship recreation ever built and the pinnacle of nautical archaeological research into this period. In honour of its origins, the Sea Stallion will embark on an ambitious journey this summer. It will sail across the North Sea to Dublin in early July 2007, returning to Roskilde in 2008. It promises to be an event to stir the souls and arouse the interest of history fans the world over.

If that journey perhaps sounds a little too ambitious, during the summer visitors to Roskilde can also take a short tour of the fjord in a smaller Viking ship recreation or on the more modern MS Sagafjord.

### **The Viking plays of Frederikssund**

You can also sail on the ferry Harald Blåtand (Harold Bluetooth – from which the wireless communications technology takes its name) from the museum following an original Viking route, to another notable Viking sight, **Frederikssund**. Every year since 1952 Frederikssund has hosted a production of the Viking Plays. These elaborately staged productions of episodes from Viking sagas featuring casts of over 150 amateur actors and flaming long boats are popular with locals and visitors and take place from mid-June to early July.

If you book in advance you can really get a feel for the Viking era with a guided tour of the nearby Viking settlement followed by a traditional Viking feast - complete with foaming beer and flame-grilled meat - to get you in the mood for the evenings festivities. The plays themselves are performed in the open-air amphitheatre on the outskirts of the Viking settlement. Here you can find authentic copies of five pit houses, a plank road and jetty and the latest addition, a Viking Long house.

### How the Vikings lived

Also close to Roskilde is the **Lejre Experimental Centre**, 106 acres of nature and historical attractions which include, during the summer, a Viking market with costumed stallholders selling authentic Viking produce, such as butter and bread. Lejre is a unique place where the atmosphere of a real Viking settlement is accurately evoked in an authentic setting – a true ‘goose bump’ destination where history comes to life before your eyes.

The Viking ring fortress of **Trelleborg**, further west on the island of Sealand is another evocative Viking location. Constructed in around 980AD, probably on the orders of Harald Blåtand, Trelleborg has been a constant treasure trove of Viking finds over the years – excavations continue in the area with regular new finds such as arrow heads and pieces of pottery - many of them on display in the on-site museum, itself an impressive recreation of a Viking long house. Here you will also find films, models and exhibits on the life of the people who lived here over a thousand years ago.

### The north's largest Viking centre

Both Trelleborg and Lejre are popular with historical re-enactment societies – over 3,500 people in Europe are members of Viking societies and one of their most popular meeting places is **Foteviken Viking Reserve**, south of Malmö, 50km from Copenhagen. The reserve is the largest Viking centre in the Nordic region featuring an entire Viking town with 24 buildings. It hosts numerous events, concerts, exhibitions and festivities for the public from April to October. At the centre of the site is the Foteviken museum with handicraft workshops, a recreation of a Viking village, a Valhall, or hall (mainly used for events during the winter) and numerous other Viking era buildings.

And Sweden has its own Trelleborg as well. In fact the word literally means a kind of ring fort, but **Sweden's Trelleborg** is also a town that takes its name from the nearby fort, probably also built by Blåtand at around the same time as the Danish one. The fortress here was only discovered in the 1990s since when it has been entirely rebuilt/recreated with impressive ramparts and buildings and now hosts a wide range of events and activities, with a café and shop open during the summer season.

### The National Museum

[www.natmus.dk](http://www.natmus.dk)

10, Ny Vestergade

Tel.: +45 33 13 44 11

### Viking Ship Museum

[www.vikingskibsmuseet.dk](http://www.vikingskibsmuseet.dk)

Strandengen, Roskilde

Tel.: 46 30 02 00

### MS Sagafjord

[www.sagafjord.dk](http://www.sagafjord.dk)

Tel.: +45 46 75 64 60

**Viking Pageant** (Frederikssund)

June-July only)

[www.vikingspil.dk](http://www.vikingspil.dk)

**Frederikssund Tourist Office**

[www.frederikssund-tourist.dk](http://www.frederikssund-tourist.dk)

5 A, Havnegade, Frederikssund, Denmark

Tel.: 45 47 31 06 85

**The Viking Fortress Trelleborg**

[www.vikingeborg.dk](http://www.vikingeborg.dk)

West Sealand, near Slagelse, Denmark

**Lejre Experimental Centre**

[www.lejre-center.dk](http://www.lejre-center.dk)

near Roskilde, Denmark

**Foteviken Viking Reserve**

[www.foteviken.se](http://www.foteviken.se)

Halörsvägen, Hoellviken, Sweden

**For more information about the Øresund region:**

Visit: [www.visitoresund.info](http://www.visitoresund.info)

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**Facts about Copenhagen / Øresund**

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Links to our partners:

[www.visitcopenhagen.com](http://www.visitcopenhagen.com)

[www.visitdenmark.dk](http://www.visitdenmark.dk)

[www.malmo.se/turist](http://www.malmo.se/turist)

[www.skane.com](http://www.skane.com)

[www.flysas.com](http://www.flysas.com)



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