



## Birka the international Viking settlement

The old Viking settlement Birka is beautifully situated on the island of Björkö in lake Mälaren. Its location on a small island has kept it untouched from urban exploitation.

Birka was a crown jewel in the Viking age trading network in northern Europe. The trading settlement of Birka flourished during 800-900 AD. Birka had trading connections to the east via the Baltic countries and the Russian rivers down to Greek and Byzantine cultures, in turn connected to Arabia, southwards along the Swedish Baltic coast down to Denmark and the dominant trading center Hedeby, and further to Frisia connected to German and Frankish lands. Westward there were trading routes to Anglo-Saxon areas and Ireland. All these connections have left footprints in Birka. Actually, the name Birka stems from an old Scandinavian word that means trading. The Birka settlement had a city status, probably with considerable autonomy, with its own council and law.

The excavation of Birka has uncovered rich finds of valuable properties of silver, glass, pearls, and textiles from the Orient, including China, as well as objects reflecting every day life in a lively Viking settlement with international connections. Of course there are also finds showing weapons and armour for defense of the town. From northern Scandinavia, via Finns and Lapps, fur was an important input in the trading activities at Birka.

The settlement, with about 1000 inhabitants, was surrounded by a defensive rampart including a harbour. There was also a fortress with a garrison to protect the "town". The garrison probably consisted of high ranked elite warriors.

The earliest known Christian congregation in Sweden was founded by the German monk Ansgar, who visited Birka in 829 AD.

Birka was abandoned in the late 900s AD, maybe due to the rise in land level, blocking access to the Baltic sea via Södertälje. An attack to the settlement can not be excluded. Around 1000 AD the city of Sigtuna, north of Birka, at the sailing route to Uppsala, took over Birka's role as a trading node and became an important administrative center.

At today's Birka there is a modern museum showing the history of the settlement and the ongoing excavations, and there are very informative guided tours in the historic area. A marine archaeological excavation in the harbour is going on during the summer.

### **Boat trip to Birka in lake Mälaren**

9-Aug, 10.00 - 17.30. The price is SEK 380, which includes the boat trip, guided tour and entrance to the museum.

There is also a shop and a restaurant on the island.

The boat starts at the City Hall (Stadshuskajen) at 10.00, arrives at Birka 11.45. The boat leaves Birka at 15.30 and reaches Stockholm at 17.30.

More information:

<http://www.stromma.se/en/Stockholm/The-Archipelago/Day-trips/Birka---The-Viking-City/>

