

Viking Houses in Hedeby



Dear Visitors,

At the historical site of Hedeby, a section of the Viking Age trading settlement has been reconstructed within the semicircular rampart. A total of seven buildings and a jetty which have been erected here are intended to make tangible the world of the people living in this early urban settlement. This environment differed from that of rural settlements not only in the scale and density of development, but above all in the dominance of manufacturing and trade. Ample evidence for this is provided in the archaeological findings, which show both an absence of an area serving as a cattle byre inside the houses and the presence of manufacturing debris as well as objects from faraway countries.

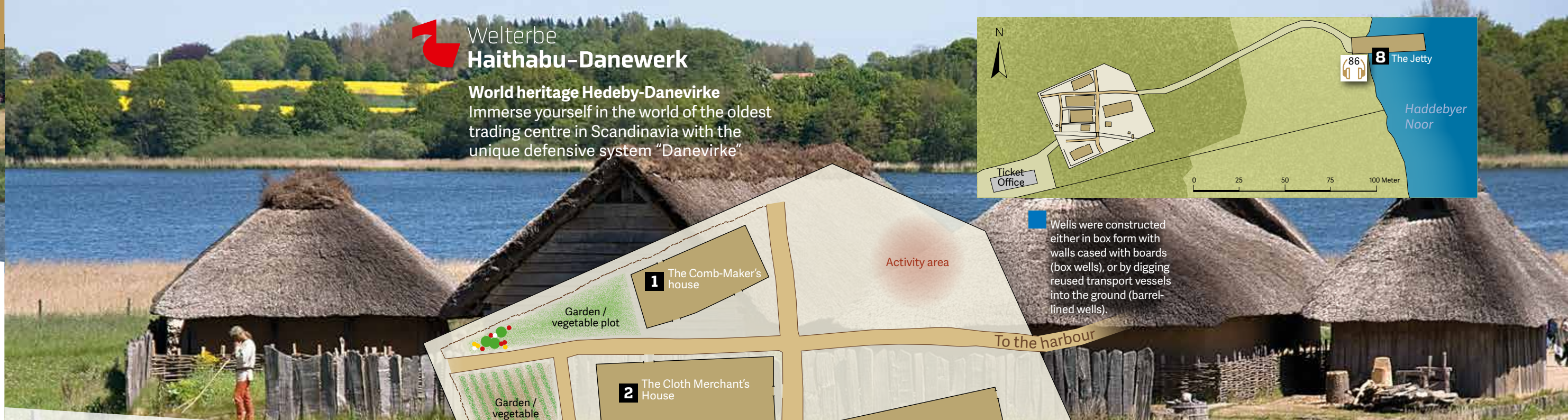
The reconstructions are based on the results of a century of research on the site, where the good preservation of organic material allows substantial conclusions to be drawn about the former appearance of the built environment. Between 2005 and 2008, local craftspeople were involved in erecting the structures, which are based on archaeological evidence and show the various types of building construction.

The features of the houses displayed are not intended to replicate exactly the original internal fittings of any one particular house. Instead, they serve as examples to show certain aspects of everyday life in an early town. The themes chosen for the individual buildings were those which were especially well attested through the extensive excavations that have taken place in Hedeby.



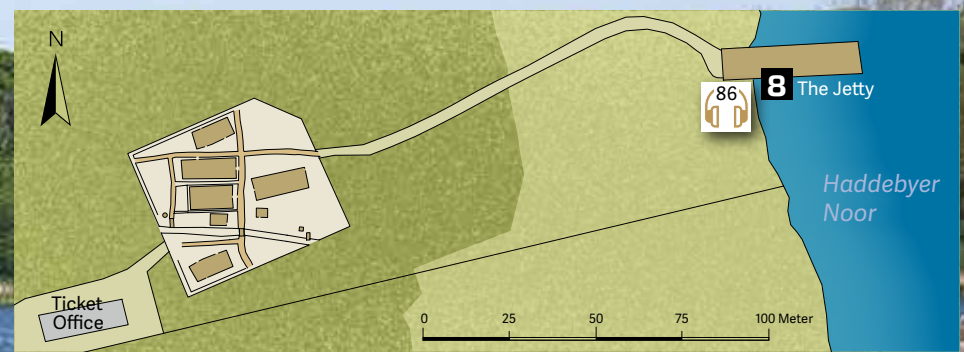
Media guide

Additional fascinating information about the Viking houses in Hedeby can be found on our media guide, which can be downloaded to your mobile phone via QR-code. The points of interest on the audio tour are marked on the plan overleaf.



Welterbe Haithabu - Danewerk

World heritage Hedeby-Danevirke
Immerse yourself in the world of the oldest trading centre in Scandinavia with the unique defensive system "Danevirke"



The settlement section

The arrangement of the structures in the reconstructed settlement section is determined on the one hand by the course of the stream which originally flowed in a west-east direction across the terrain, and on the other hand by the roadway which ran north-south. A characteristic feature is the alignment of the houses with their gable ends facing this main street-front. The roadway running parallel to the bank of the Haddebyer Noor, an inlet of the Schlei fjord, and stretching further northwards and southwards, had smaller pathways branching off it. This is suggested by the path which leads to the reconstructed harbour structure.

The pathways in the areas of the settlement close to the water's edge had various types of timber reinforcement. Chosen here are the types of surface characteristic for the pathways of the 9th century AD. The houses, which are situated on elevated plots, additionally had a higher floor level inside to prevent rain and dirty water from getting in. Fences made of sturdy oak planks or simple wickerwork marked the plot boundaries.

Unlike in later buildings, where the house framework rested on wooden sills, the load-bearing posts were still dug into the ground in the Viking period. While this made the houses more stable and less susceptible to wind, it also meant that they did not last as long because the timbers rotted more quickly. In addition, the numerous fires for which evidence has been found at Hedeby contributed to the fact that many buildings only lasted a few years.

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Wooden walkway platforms leading down to the stream were encountered repeatedly during excavations. But what purpose did they serve? Did people do their washing there?

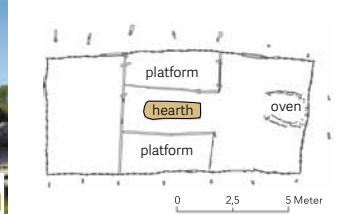
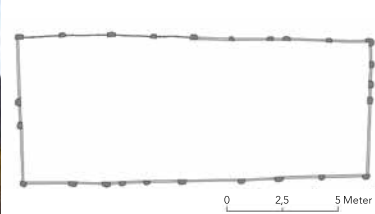
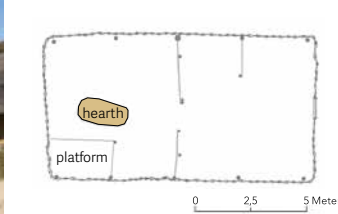
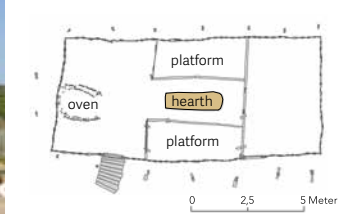
Wells were constructed either in box form with walls cased with boards (box wells), or by digging reused transport vessels into the ground (barrel-lined wells).

In the Viking period a small stream flowed through the settlement here. In the 19th century it was re-routed by local farmers. To protect themselves from flooding the inhabitants of Hedeby had reinforced the banks of the stream. The various types of revetment have been reconstructed here.

The Harbour

In the harbour there were several jetties, which extended far out into the Haddebyer Noor. These harbour facilities mark the end of a long development which began in the early stages with ships being pulled to the water's edge. Later, small landing-stages were built to facilitate access to vessels. Eventually, large jetties enabled trading ships with a deep draught to moor comfortably.

Over the course of time the jetties were lengthened repeatedly due to the insufficient water depth caused by waste disposal in the port area of the Noor and the simultaneous increase in size of trading vessels. Gradually, the individual harbour structures were connected by smaller interlinking ones, thus forming a massive wooden platform. As the extensive find material from the harbour at Hedeby shows, trading business took place on the platform. It is possible that wares were also stored here temporarily. Thus, the harbour facilities not only served as moorings for ships but also as a market place for the trade of goods.



Yew

Yew trees can grow to an age of up to 3,000 years. During the Viking era they were the only conifers available, and the wood they provided was greatly valued. Among other things it was used by the Vikings to make longbows. To remind us of this, yews have been planted in the museum gardens.

House 1 The Comb-maker's House

Built: 874 or shortly after | **Duration of use:** about 10 years | **Size:** c. 66 m² | 12 m x 5.5 m (max.)

Construction: Framed construction with outside buttresses. The walls' load-bearing framework consists of cleft-timber planks, and the wall filling between the planks is of wattle and daub. The rafters rest on horizontal wooden wall plates, which form the upper end of the longitudinal walls. Buttresses work against the thrust of the raftered roof.

Unusual features: The building is divided into three parts with a central dwelling space (hearth as well as lateral platforms as living and sleeping quarters), a living and working part (clay-dome oven) with main entrance (boardwalk access) and a separate (internal wall) crafts or storage room with its own access from outside.

Fittings: The living and working area has a typical kitchen inventory. The workshop is fitted out for bone- and antler-working. The main things made here are combs, gaming pieces, needles and smaller tools.

House 3 The Merchants' House

Built: 852 | **Duration of use:** four or five years | **Size:** c. 79 m² | 12.1 m x 6.5 m (max.)

Construction: Internal framed construction. The load-bearing frame is on the inside of the house and consists of sturdy roundwood, i.e. logs. The wall is made of cleft planks, around which wickerwork is wound. This wickerwork (wattle) has daub spread over it.

Unusual features: This is the only reconstructed house where roundwood has been used for the framework. In order to save wood, tree trunks were usually split in Hedeby. The most important timber was oak due to it being the hardest and most resistant. In the roof frame of this house, however, timbers of birch, beech, alder and ash have also been used – as they did indeed on occasion find use in house construction in Hedeby in the 9th century.

Fittings: It is possible that several merchants possessed regular houses in Hedeby which they used in the trading season. The room at the back of this house is fitted out as the living and sleeping quarters for the respective residents while goods are stored in the front part.

House 5 The Hall

Built: 10th century | **Duration of use:** unknown | **Size:** c. 108 m² | 16.1 m x 6.7 m (max.)

Construction: Interrupted sill construction. The load-bearing frame of the house is provided by posts comprising half-logs which are dug into the ground. Between the posts there are sills (except to the North West). Upon these rests the wall filling which consists of horizontal or vertical cleft planks. This large building thereby shows many "modern" constructional elements which are to be found in later Scandinavian stave churches.

Unusual features: House 5 is the only building that has been re-erected exactly in its original location. All the other houses originally stood elsewhere within the settlement. These were chosen for reconstruction because of their good preservation and were put up where other buildings once stood.

Furnishings: The builder of the house seems to have been wealthy as he was able to afford building a house with wooden walls instead of wickerwork and daub. Perhaps he was a prosperous merchant. The building is furnished with tables and benches and is used as a sort of community centre.

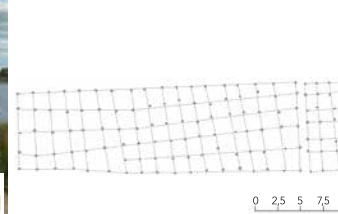
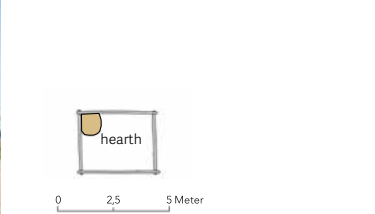
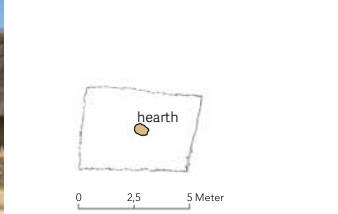
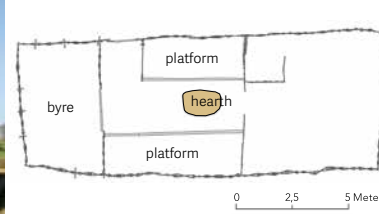
House 7 The Inn

Built: 874 or shortly after | **Duration of use:** about 10 years | **Size:** c. 66 m² | 12 m x 5.5 m (max.)

Construction: Framed construction with outside buttresses. House 7 is an alternative reconstruction of House 1, the floor plan being a mirror image. The walls' load-bearing framework posts consist of cleft-timber planks, and the wall filling between the planks is of wattle and daub.

Unusual features: Archaeologists are mainly acquainted with what remains of a house surviving in the ground. Hence, the reliability of any reconstruction diminishes in the direction of the roof. This house, however, is an exception: the wattle walls and the triangular gable remained intact, thus providing certainty about the wall-height (ca. 2 m) and the pitch of the roof (40°) in the reconstruction. However, the roof reconstruction shows only one of several construction possibilities.

Fittings and furnishings: Many travellers came to Hedeby from afar and possibly stayed in inns. The hearth and oven in this building permitted the preparation of meals for a large number of people. Fish played also a large part in the diet of Hedeby's inhabitants. In the small room to the east you can see the reconstruction of a fisherman's equipment.



House 2 The Cloth Merchant's House

Built: 833 | **Duration of use:** burnt down after one year | **Size:** c. 101 m² | 16.3 m x 6.2 m (max.)

Construction: Framed construction with load-bearing walls. The wall consists of alternating wide, load-bearing cleft planks and narrower posts which reinforce the wickerwork walls. The house has been reconstructed with a traditional purlin roof, where the roof's load rests on the ridge and on the two wall plates on the longitudinal walls.

Unusual features: Connected openly with the central living space there is a lower-lying cattle byre section. Squared timbers inserted horizontally into the upright posts of the byre to prevent the posts from sinking into the ground could indicate that there was an intermediate ceiling here. Another distinguishing feature is a small area sectioned-off by oak planks, in which wares or provisions were presumably stored.

Fittings: Early medieval textiles were mainly made of wool. The working of wool, from the coarse shorn or plucked stage up to that of the woven cloth, took place in nearly every household. In summer much of the work was carried out in the open. To weave indoors, the vertical loom had to be positioned so that enough light could reach the workplace through the open door.

House 4 The Craftman's House

Built: 882 | **Duration of use:** unknown | **Size:** c. 19 m² | 5.2 m x 3.6 m (max.)

Construction: Palisade construction. The walls consist of cleft planks of various lengths which have been so driven into the ground that the top edge, upon which the roof is placed, is level. Here, in contrast to the other types of construction, the roof is borne equally by all the timbers.

Unusual features: Next to the door, a small window has been cut into one of the wall planks, which corresponds exactly in size and shape to a window found in Hedeby. Evidence of small windows which were cut into the wickerwork of the walls (Houses 1, 2 and 7) has also been found in 9th century Hedeby. House 5 shows windows which are conceivable for later types of constructions.

Fittings and furnishing: Wood was a material used for many different things in Hedeby. Not only plates, cups and bowls were made from it but also pieces of furniture like chests and tubs. In this house one can see various raw materials and tools alongside the wooden products.

House 6 The Shoemaker's House

Built: The 880s | **Duration of use:** unknown | **Size:** c. 8 m² | 3.2 m x 2.6 m (max.)

Construction: Block-house construction. The walls of this house consist of squared timbers stacked up horizontally upon one another, with their notched ends interlocking at the corners. The narrow gaps which arise between the beams are filled with moss.

Unusual features: This log cabin is unusual for Hedeby because straight-growing conifers were normally the preferred material for log buildings. However, because pine, fir and spruce were not native in this area in the Viking period, the beams for this house had to be painstakingly hewn from oak.

Furnishings: Major parts of the leather finds in Haithabu were shoes in different variants. Two different methods of production are known, each with different patterns. Numerous production wastes, as well as finds of wooden shoe lasts, indicate a local production of footwear.

8 The Jetty

Built: Winter 885/886 | **Duration of use:** about 130 years (with repairs and extensions) | **Size:** c. 398 m² | 41 m x 9.7 m (max.)

Construction: Multi-rowed pile trestle bridge.

The trestle piles (bridge piles) are made from sturdy tree trunk quarters (quarter logs), with five to six of them in a row forming a trestle / truss. The truss piles support truss beams (cross beams) which are equally sturdy. The upper structure is formed by pole-like longitudinal beams upon which lie the covering surface planks. These planks are connected and secured to one another by strips of wood attached by nails and running the length of the jetty.

Unusual features: Whereas the trusses on the landward side of the jetty comprised only five piles, the substructure from the seventh truss onwards was widened systematically by adding a further pile. The section towards the Noor is a later addition to the structure which lengthened it by 8.5 m in the direction of the Noor. At some time between 990 and 1010 a royal longship sank at the bridgehead of the jetty following a fire on board (Hedeby Shipwreck 1 – on exhibition in Hedeby Viking Museum).

Glossary

Purlin roof: A type of roof construction where the purlins (in the case of these houses: the ridge pole and the wall plates) bear the weight of the roof.

Posts: Timbers dug vertically into the soil.

Wall plate: A horizontal timber placed along the top of the longitudinal walls.

Interrupted sill: A wooden sill beam lying between two posts upon which the wall filling rests.

Rafters: Main sloping beams of the roof truss which bear the roof cladding (roof battens and covering, e.g. thatch).

Rafter roof: A type of roof construction without a ridge pole but with pairs of rafters bearing each other's weight. The rafters are joined to each other at the top (at the ridge) and are secured at their other ends. In the case of Houses 1 and 7 they are positioned on the wall plates, whereby the buttresses prevent the walls from being forced apart. House 5 shows a fully developed rafter roof where the rafters are joined at the foot to the tie beam to form a rigid triangle preventing outer spread.



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Landesmuseen SH

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Das Projekt wurde durch die Europäische Union kofinanziert