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### Vikings now welcomed as visitors



Not too fierce looking ... Saab and other Scandinavian brands have become cultural icons.

Teena Lyons  
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WITH their trademark raids and brutal plundering, the Vikings were once not the most welcome of visitors. But in their more recent wave of sorties on foreign shores, the descendants of a people famed for drinking from the skulls of their enemies are now received enthusiastically.

"Modern Vikings", who number just 20 million, or 0.3 per cent of the world's population, now produce 3 per cent of world exports. Companies such as Ikea, Lego, Absolut, Volvo and Saab have all become cultural icons - sometimes against the odds.

"History would support the view that cross-border shopping is a notorious graveyard for many companies," said Richard Hyman, of retail analysts Verdict Research. "One of the biggest pitfalls is that companies arrogantly assume they can take their precious brand into another market and everyone will welcome it.

"Ironically, that is just what the Scandinavians have done again and again, but it has been a huge success," he said. When Ikea opened in the UK, they dressed the room sets in their stores with Swedish books. Mr Hyman said: "Can you imagine the reaction if an American, or British, retailer did that abroad?"

What differentiates the Scandinavians, he believes, is their highly regarded talent for design. "It embodies everything we like about their lifestyle, which is seen to be attractive, positive and inspirational," he said.

However, according to a new book on the Scandinavian approach to business, there is a lot more to it than that. "It is all about head, heart, guts and the desire to take a few risks," said Steve Strid, co-author of *The Viking Manifesto*, which says Scandinavian brands thrive on breaking the rules. Absolut vodka, for example, was launched with a tiny marketing budget. Absolut ignored the competition and adopted a clear bottle without a paper label - against the advice of leading consultants from the US and Europe. Yet within two decades of its launch it became the world's third-best selling spirit brand.

Mr Strid said one reason for the success of these companies was a different corporate culture and a different attitude to money. Scandinavian children are taught about working as a team from an early age and very few people mention money as a motivating force.

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