



Family adventure: David, Fiona and baby Harvey take to the road



Above: Denmark's oldest town, Ribe, is a cosy spot to hole up for a few days; right, the impressive Great Belt Bridge, linking Denmark with Sweden



Our Viking adventure... (with six-week-old Harvey)

'Do my six-week-old son's eyes need to be open for his passport photos?" I had asked at my local Garda station, and they didn't know.

When I rang the passport office, they didn't seem to know either. An official hummed and hawed on the line, and eventually answered: "Closed eyes should be okay. We don't expect too much of infants."

With that, my wife Fiona and I, and our baby boy Harvey, prepared for a 2,000-mile road trip to Sweden.

We would drive through Britain and Denmark, cross the Irish and the North Seas, and stop along the way, as the two-week journey dictated. The only fixed times were those of the ferry sailings. Everything else was negotiable.

We docked in Holyhead on a Saturday morning.

With our next sailing leaving Harwich on the east coast of England on the following Monday evening, we set off knowing we

With his wife and baby in tow, **David Young** set off on an adventure across seas and overland through Britain, Denmark and Sweden



Jet-set: The beach at Bastad, Sweden's answer to the Riviera. Despite the prices, David felt it was well worth a visit

could enjoy the sights, not whizz by them. And so we dawdled along the north Wales coast, taking in Penrhyn, Colwyn and Kimmel bays.

Moving inland to England, we entered Cheshire countryside. The Tudor houses, farmland and villages were what we expected them to be — utterly English and appealing.

It's no surprise the Premier League footballers from nearby Liverpool and Manchester scramble to buy homes here.

Harvey loved the calmness, too, snoozing as we motored.

With every hamlet as quaint as the next, we made an afternoon stop in Nantwich. Here we tucked into a pub lunch, and let Harvey stretch his legs in his carry cot.

Taking our time, we pulled out a map and chose our first stopover — St Albans City, north of London. We'd make it by early evening, and

we'd also be close to our next port.

An historic market town, St Albans is a haven for high-priced property. Tree-lined and peaceful, and quite the walker's paradise, it presented the first real opportunity to get Harvey into his stroller and go exploring.

And there's plenty to see, chiefly the huge cathedral, locally known as the 'Abbey', which is second in length only to Winchester.

Refreshed after a two-night stop, we made the 90-mile trip to Harwich, ready for the 17-hour crossing to Esbjerg in western Denmark.

We were excited and a little anxious about how Harvey might be on such a long crossing. But we shouldn't have been. The gentle summer cruise, with the backdrop of boat-engine hum, proved one giant lullaby for him and us.

Waking late, we ate breakfast

NEED TO KNOW

Getting there

Irish Ferries (0818 300 400; irishferries.com) and Stena Link (01-204 7777; stenaline.co.uk) sail four times daily from Dublin Port to Holyhead. They both offer 'swift' (just under two hours) and 'cruise' (just over three hours) options.

Irish Ferries' return trip for two adults and an infant in a saloon car costs approximately €388.

DFDS Seaways (dfdsseaways.co.uk) are the kingpins on the Harwich to Esbjerg route. Sailing up to four times weekly from the UK, the overnight sailing arrives in Denmark at lunchtime the following day.

A return trip for the same family will cost about €1,066.

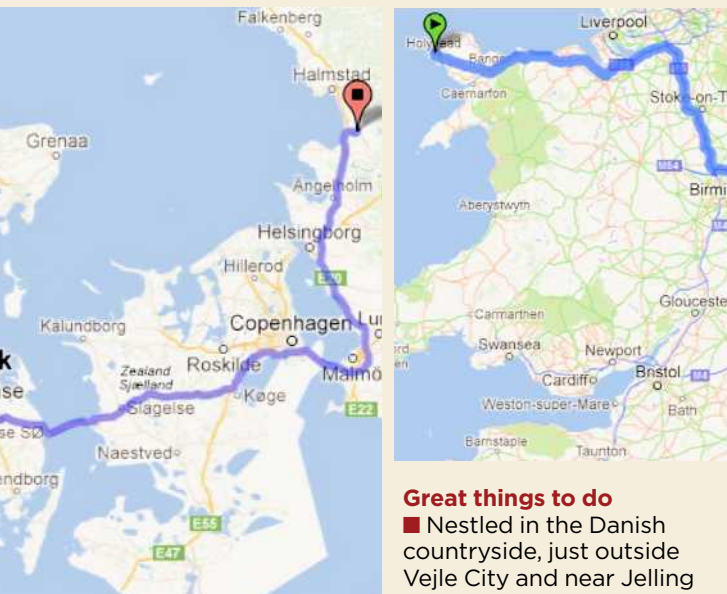
Staying there

In Denmark, each town hosts



its own website. Just put 'visit' before the place name. For example, Ribe is on visittribe.dk.

On there, you'll find B&Bs, which are all priced at 450 DKK (Danish Krone; €60 for two people; children go free). In Laholm, Sweden,



Sabyholms Gard Manor is run by Cattie and Knut Sletten-gren (sabyholmsgard.se). Both speak perfect English (0046 705 688 848).

Accommodation for a couple (children go free) costs 800 SEK (Swedish Kronor) per night — about €96.

Great things to do

■ Nestled in the Danish countryside, just outside Vejle City and near Jelling town, look for Hopballe Molle Restaurant. Treat yourself to the buffet-style lunch as they serve up wonderful Danish cuisine of ground meats, pickled fish and open sandwiches (smorrebrod).

■ In Laholm, early autumn visits are perfect for forest lane strolls and a visit to the

local dams around Sabyholms Gard to spot the wildlife. Ask for directions to the nearby wine cellar in Bonnarp, for a little tasting.

■ Fancy the wilder side of the outdoors? Try your hand at clay-pigeon shooting or even hunting, if you're feeling courageous enough.

As for winter, well, there's nothing for it but to grab a pair of skis, and go cross-country.

and watched the Wadden Sea from our cabin window. We tuned into the ship's captain, as he told us about how this intertidal zone is Denmark's newest national park, made up of flats and wetlands that stretch from north of Esbjerg all the way to northwestern continental Europe.

Arriving a little better oriented, we headed south to the country's oldest town, Ribe. Defined by its cobbled streets, wooden-beamed buildings, cafés, restaurants and shops, it's one cosy spot to hole up in for a couple of days.

Be warned, though — the parking system is very subtle. There are no yellow lines, just tiny blue 'P' signs. Just make sure you park in the direction of its arrow.

I didn't. And as a result, I met a very dedicated traffic warden. She had stood beside my car for half a morning, waiting for me to appear, and when I did, she duly handed me a fine for 510 Danish Kronor (almost €70).

I could only say sorry and shake my sleepy head. At which point she smiled, ripped up the docket and told me it was my lucky day.

Feeling charmed, we left Ribe

for the fjord city of Vejle, and its wooded hinterland. Only 50 miles away, it would be our last stop before driving on to Sweden, saving Copenhagen for the return leg.

With a modest population of about 50,000, Vejle has somehow crafted a whole world from its natural assets. You can beachcomb, explore deer and water parks, go boating or fishing, or even visit the nearby micro-breweries.

The standout trait of Vejle is its attitude to visitors. The city tourist office was locking its doors when I knocked. One hour later, and mellowed with courtesy cups of coffee, our new friend Lisbeth had booked us a B&B.

And just in case there were any hiccups, she gave us her mobile number and a neat orientation for our short stay.

There, it dawned on Fiona and I that the Danish were just as accommodating on the road. No one hooted or flashed their headlights, or waved finger gestures at us as we got the odd junction wrong, or sat too long at a green light.

And it was the same all 240 miles of the way to Laholm, our next destination, halfway between Malmo

and Gothenburg. It made crossing the immense spans of the Great Belt Bridge between the Danish islands of Funen and Zealand, and then the Oresund Bridge linking Copenhagen and Sweden all the more fun.

The second bridge runs to almost five miles, the longest of its kind in Europe. We drove it with our eyes watering and our mouths open, trying to absorb the incredible feats of engineering.

Outside Laholm, we found traditional lodgings on a pig farm. A very fancy one, mind you. Apart from farming, Cattie and Knut of Sabyholms Gard maintain a manor with origins dating back to the 1800s.

Here we felt we'd been gifted our very own prairie. Breakfast was a treat, too; served in a nearby banquet-style building, it was a candlelit affair.

It's self-catering for the rest of your meals, so you can plan a day that takes in as many miles of the nearby Mellbystrand beach or Lagan river as you like.

Also, you can go a little further and join the Stockholm jet-set down in Bastad — Sweden's answer to

the Riviera. Here, you'll find your eating-out budget stretched — a plate of bar food can easily set you back €20. It's well worth a visit, though.

On our return, we braved



Above: The water park at visitor-friendly Vejle

Copenhagen. It wasn't its sheer scale that made it daunting. The city has finely tuned drivers, all on their best behaviour.

In truth, it was the colossal number of cyclists, in almost perpetual motion. Looking to 2015, the Danes want their capital to be the world's foremost bike-friendly metropolis. So, anything on two wheels gets priority.

We thought we'd take advantage of Harvey's early-morning starts and see the place before rush hour. The traffic was light, letting us dart around and snatch eye-fuls of its palaces, parks and wide thoroughfares.

But on more than a dozen occasions, we just avoided collecting eager cyclists in our windows. A word to the wise — watch your mirrors!

Would Fiona and I do it all again? Absolutely. Harvey may have kept his eyes shut for his passport shot, but they certainly opened during that fortnight. Now every time we say "good morning, little boy" in our best Scandinavian lilt, he smiles from ear to ear.

There must be a little Viking in him. ☐