

RIBE

Lauren Steventon explores an ancient Danish town steeped in Viking history and finds a place rich with medieval sights, avant-garde art and a thriving café society

Why go? Denmark's oldest town has a history stretching back to AD 700 when it was settled by the Vikings, and its prime position near the Wadden Sea drew traders and craftspeople from across Europe. As its economy grew, so did the town, until Ribe became one of the most important places in Denmark for everyone from merchants to monks. Their legacy is a beautiful city with an impressive cathedral, winding cobbled streets and original medieval houses that remain untouched by time.

What to do Ribe Cathedral dominates the skyline for miles around and has been an important seat of Christianity in Denmark since the middle of the 13th century, so this is the best place to start exploring the town's history (ribe-domkirke.dk). Enjoy the views from the 52 metre-high tower, or take a look inside the building where monuments honour some of Ribe's illustrious past inhabitants, which include several medieval princes. Surprisingly for such an ancient cathedral, the decoration behind the altar is the work of avant-garde artist Carl-Henning Pedersen. As you leave the cathedral, head towards the harbour where the local market stalls sell food and crafts every Wednesday. You'll be wandering down Overdammen, Ribe's main street, full of small shops and boutiques including Quedens Gaard, an 18th-century merchant house that now sells gifts. If you prefer a bit of Norse history then a trip to Ribe Viking Centre, a short drive out of town, is not to be missed (ribevikingecenter.dk). The buildings have been reconstructed from archeological evidence and each summer they are populated by 'Vikings' who take on traditional roles in historical village life. Back in Ribe itself, across the bridge from the harbour at Odins Plads (Odin's Place), you will find Ribe Vikinger, a fascinating Viking museum (ribesvikinger.dk). On your way back into town, stop by to see the Danish art and sculpture in the Ribe Kunstmuseum on Sct Nicolaj Gade (ribekunstmuseum.dk), before heading through the gardens on Sct Catherinæ Plads

towards Sct Catharinæ church (sct-catharinae.dk). This was the home of the Black Friars and is one of the best-preserved abbeys in Denmark, with wonderfully tranquil cloisters where concerts are held in the summer. From here, it's a short walk along the cobbled streets back towards the cathedral. On the way, look out for the plaques commemorating famous townspeople, from Maren Spliid, persecuted as a witch in the 17th century, to Jacob Riis, who went on to become a famous New York journalist and social reformer.

Where to stay The self-catering apartments at Ribe Byferie are an easy 10-minute walk into the centre of town and have plenty of facilities for all the family, from bicycles and canoes to chess and computer games (00 45 79 88 79 88, ribe-byferie.dk). Hotel Dagmar on Overdammen is very central and the fanciest place in town (00 45 75 42 00 33, hoteldagmar.dk). Go even further back in time in the charming rooms of Weiss Stue, a half-timbered house dating back to 1600 – one of the oldest buildings in Denmark's oldest town (00 45 75 42 07 00, weis-stue.dk).

Where to eat and drink The café in Quedens Gaard is a great pick-me-up stop after some gentle wandering (00 45 75 41 10 50, quedensgaard.dk). The menu offers a wide choice of local fish delicacies as well as familiar options such as burgers or omelettes. For something a bit fancier, and with a harbourside view, the fine dining at former merchants' shed Kolvig should definitely be on your list (00 45 75 41 04 88, kolvig.dk). Try the amazing meringue pancake. On the other side of the water at Restaurant Sælhunden (00 45 75 42 0 46; saelhunden.dk) the local flatfish, *bakskuld*, is the perfect accompaniment for a Danish beer, enjoyed either inside in the cosy rooms, or outside by the water.

Time running out? Take a trip with the night watchman during the summer months. His 45-minute tour is full of colourful anecdotes.

Trip tip Pick up a RibeCard from the Tourist Information Centre for 20 per cent off entrance fees to attractions in Ribe.

Travel information

Currency is the Danish Krone. Ribe is one hour ahead of GMT and a 1 hour, 30 minute flight from London.

Getting there

Ryanair (ryanair.com) flies to Billund twice daily from Stansted and three times a week from Edinburgh. Billund is a 55-minute drive from Ribe.

Cimber Sterling (cimber.com) flies daily from Gatwick to Billund.

Resources

Visit Ribe (visitribe.dk) has extensive resources for planning your trip, ideas for activities and transport information.

Further reading

The Vikings in History by F Donald Logan (Routledge, £20.99). An account of the Vikings' critical role in shaping society across Scandinavia and northern Europe.

AVERAGE DAILY TEMPERATURES AND RAINFALL

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Min °C	0	0	1	4	8	11	14	14	11	8	4	0
Max °C	3	4	6	10	15	17	20	21	17	12	7	4
mm	2	2	1	1	1	2	3	4	3	3	2	2