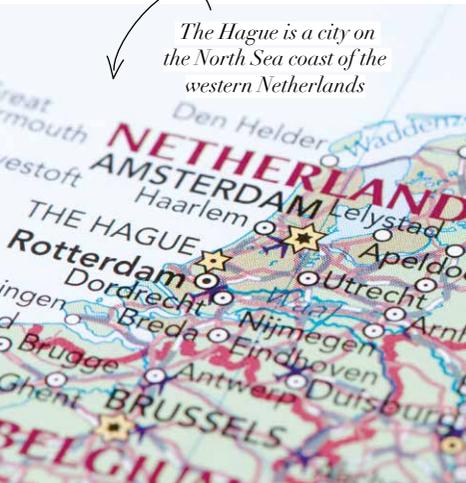




Views from Scheveningen beach



The Hague is a city on the North Sea coast of the western Netherlands



Postcard from... **THE HAGUE**



Rowena Carr-Allinson HEADS TO THE WESTERN NETHERLANDS

The beach? In Holland? Really?" This is the reaction I get when I explain that for the last couple of years I've been heading North to the beach, unlike the rest of the world who heads South. To be fair, we do both, but my love for the Dutch shores is growing – so much so that this year we stayed for two weeks.

Even better, to get there, instead of driving the 'long way around' we hop on a Stena Line ferry at Harwich for an overnight adventure. The kids (Lennox, four, and Tess, eight months) love the excitement of the late-night departure, checking into a cosy cabin and waking up on the other side.

Yes, the weather can be iffy, but we've been lucky and there is much to love about the Dutch seaside: the 'Chocomel' chocolate milk, the chips, the kid-friendly beach clubs, Dutch kroketten pancakes, and the fact everyone speaks great English, not to mention the soft sand.

My mother is from The Hague – or *Den Haag* – so that's where I tend to head, more specifically its beachside resort of Scheveningen. Impossible to pronounce for most, it's a haven of raw herring, kite-surfers and beach clubs. The architecture of the town isn't much to look at, but the locals have made up for it by building beach shacks aplenty with great décor, affordable food and drinks – and a relaxed, laidback atmosphere. At Hart Beach, one of our favourites, there's even a surf camp for kids from

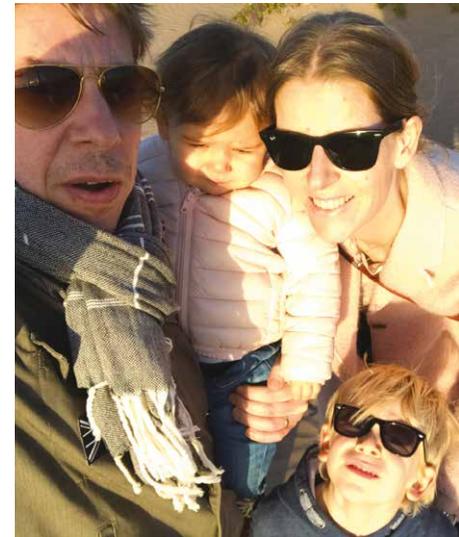
the age of six to take surfing lessons (hartbeach.nl). What more could you ask for?

Hotels and rentals can be expensive in Holland, so we opted to house swap (lovehomeswap.com). The perfect solution for families, not only is it free (our Dutch counterparts stay in our place for a week while we occupy their home), it's ideal for kids as the houses come preloaded with toys, a garden and all the local knowledge you need. Between us, we manage to organise babysitters, activities and share experiences and tips – like staying with friends, but without them! It's our third year running, and this time we're returning to the same house a few minutes' drive from the beach, where I know my daughter will sleep well in the nursery, my son will enjoy the garden and I can walk to the local Albert Heijn supermarket. Easy!

In addition to long, lazy days at the beach, we also venture further afield into The Hague by tramway, where the city is packed with great shopping and historic sights that even the kids will enjoy, like the 16th century Noordeinde Palace where the king is based, and the 13th century Ridderzaal Knights' Hall in the Binnenhof. Not your cup of tea? There's another family friendly must do there: Madurodam, a park with all the famous Dutch landmarks and cities in miniature, so you can see all the country has to offer in one day! Perfect for tired little feet. **11**



Checking into a cosy cabin courtesy of Stena Line



There's plenty to do and see in The Hague



Hart Beach boasts a surf camp for kids

PHOTOGRAPHY: ISTOCK, SHUTTERSTOCK