

Blue note

Sailing across oceans can be a risky business. Staying safe is all about preparation, preparation and more preparation, as **Jess Lloyd-Mostyn** tells us

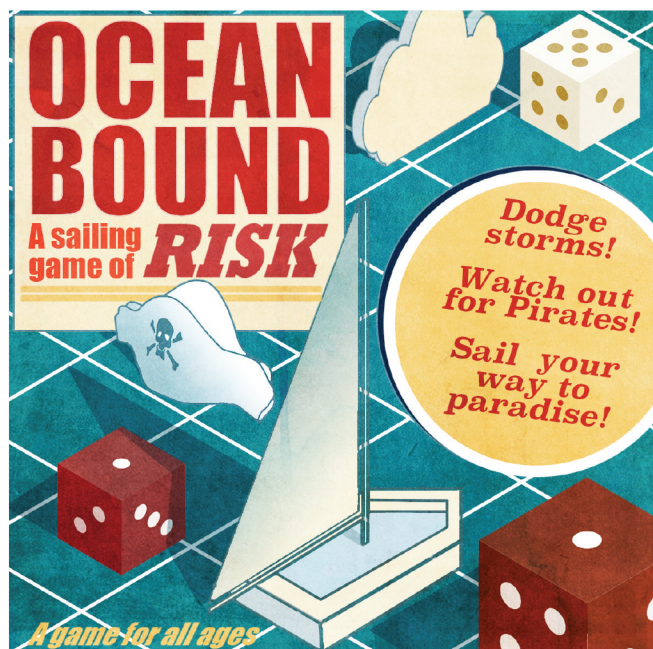
When embarking out on cruising life you will inevitably come across a certain amount of nervous questioning about your plans. Stepping from the safety of the land and onto the wildness of the sea tends to be perceived, quite rightly, as waving goodbye to a sense of what is normal.

The fact of the matter is that we all live with varying levels of risk every day of our lives – it's simply that there are many forms of risk for both yourself and your children that are accepted as reasonable. Getting into a car and driving down a motorway; flying as a family across the Atlantic; cramming into an overcrowded bus in Central America – these things are considered par for the course, part of the adventure that flavours the richness of travel.

Liveboard sailing is much the same, it's just that our acceptable common incidences of risk involve situations that landlubbers don't experience in the quite the same way. And, of course, you need to love and not fear the water.

Storms, for example, always tend to grip the imagination of any non-sailor. How do we cope in them? What are the worst ones we've faced? Do we ever get scared? Strong weather on land, with lashing rain and howling winds, means that it's time to draw the curtains and curl up with a hot comforting meal. It is not the time to suggest that you all go for a nice drive and a picnic. On the water it means much the same; at anchor or in a marina you hunker down, turn on a movie, read a good book and lay low, the only difference being that you will have checked your mooring lines, that your headsail is securely tied up and that you have enough chain down. If you're unfortunate enough to be out in adverse weather then, with today's forecasting, the chances are that you were anticipating it and have made suitable provisions for it. Cruisers are not racers; we are not generally pushing ourselves or our boats to the limits by any means.

As a fleet we tend to sail for comfort and experiential enjoyment – none of which go hand in hand with



'Once hurricanes, tsunamis and squalls are dealt with, the next threat to yachtsmen is piracy'

bad weather. It stresses your gear, it stresses your crew and makes for a fairly unpleasant time. So we tend to do as much as possible to avoid it.

Once hurricanes, tsunamis and squalls are dealt with, the next menacing threat to our safety that occurs to the non-yachtsman is piracy. Have we ever been chased? Felt endangered by rascals? Or met any cutlass-waving, eye patch-sporting, fellows? In fact, the pirates that awaited us were so definite in the mind of one of our friends that, when told of our seafaring plans, he insisted loudly that we were both surely going to die and that he did NOT want any phone calls demanding ransom. Yes, piracy is very real, very un-amusing in its non-Disney-gilded form and not to be taken lightly. However, like adverse weather, it is well tracked and documented. It too doesn't sound like the sort

of thing that a family sailing yacht particularly wishes to tangle with, so again, we are quite happy to steer clear of it. We don't pick Somalia as a destination, we don't dawdle in the shallows off the east coast of Nicaragua and we don't hop onto the VHF in the Malacca strait to let all and sundry know where we are. It just wouldn't be a smart move. Our only run in with anyone who seemed remotely foreboding turned out to be the Panamanian coastguard checking our papers, smiling, while brandishing their government issued weapons.

As for throwing children into the mix of our sailing lives, there is no more risk for them in this environment than there is for land kids, it's just different kit used to alleviate any perils. Lifejackets, harnesses, lee cloths, tethers and netting are equipment needed, in the same way buggies, cots and car seats are on land. Of course we try to get them comfortable with playing and swimming in the water far earlier than their land-living counterparts.

Part of embracing life as a sailing family means embracing all the things that will make it easier on them and if that leads to taking on extra crew, sailing shorter passages or just reefing earlier in order to give them and us a better time, then why not? Because, in truth, parenting is always a risky business, whether you live in a house or a sailboat. ✦



JESS LLOYD-MOSTYN

Jess and James left the UK in 2011 in their Crossbow 42 and have sailed halfway round the world, growing their crew en route. Follow their journey at water-log.com

ILLUSTRATION: ANNEE JEWITT-HARRIS