

Taking the plunge

Ten years ago, who could have foreseen I would be voyaging the world with a young family aboard? What I've learned is that, for all its challenges, sailing the globe with young children is incredibly rewarding and surprisingly doable.

Back in 2010, I had never even set foot on a sailboat. I was living with my boyfriend in London, working for an architectural practice. All it took was a trip down to Cornwall to change our lives forever. During a wander along a seaside cliff path, I looked out over the water and murmured that it would be such a great idea to buy a boat and go off sailing. Somehow or other, we did manage to do just that.

We researched and viewed and eventually found exactly the boat we wanted. We also trained and practiced and convinced ourselves that we understood a thing or two about sailing. Less than a year after first even toying with the thought of it, we set sail from the U.K. During the first year, we learned so much and covered a lot of ground. We sailed the English Channel and the Bay of Biscay, hopped down along the coast of Western Europe to Morocco and the Canary Islands, crossed the Atlantic Ocean and then spent a year circling the Caribbean.

And then we decided to change the plan entirely.

We'd never said it categorically, but my partner, James, and I had intended to live and cruise on our boat and sail around the world in "a couple of years." And we had both assumed that upon our return from our boating adventures we would do all the normal things like go back to

work, get married and start a family. But another notion had been seeded in us that first year at sea and, without realizing, had begun germinating at the back of both our brains: "What happens if we don't stop?" The two things weren't mutually exclusive; we could still start a family while sailing around the world.

A daughter arrives

Our daughter, Rocket, was born in Mexico in 2013. But strangely we weren't alone. The marina that we proudly returned to with our baby girl was a veritable social whirl of birthday parties, poolside barbecues, dock gatherings and potlucks all aimed at families. The cruising community there threw us a baby shower, the marina manager became a doting extra auntie, and we soon learned about several other families on yachts who'd just had or were expecting babies.

That first year of cruising had made our already strong partnership transform into a solid and supportive team. We'd had to rely on each other's strength and judgment in order to cover all those ocean miles, and this new challenge was no different.



What we had almost accidentally stumbled across was a way for us to both be with our baby all of the time, thanks to living on the boat. The yacht was remarkably baby-proof and suddenly had a dual purpose, as it was now equal parts vehicle and family home.

Fortunately, we were finding that we were having a lot of good days. In fact, it all worked so well that we never even considered that the beginning of our family life might signal the end of our travels. We left the Pacific Coast when Rocket was 8 months old and she sailed across all of the South Pacific with us, covering more than 7,000 miles. We took on an extra crewmember for ocean passages in order to have enough hands on board for watches. But the everyday life — dawdling at anchor and exploring beaches, villages and towns inland — was much the same. Except, of course, that we were

A voyager describes the problems and rewards of voyaging with a family

Story and photos by
Jess Lloyd-Mostyn



Above, Adamastor at anchor in Indonesia. Left, Jess and James on the day they left the U.K. to begin voyaging.

now greeted with the expansive smiles and exceptionally warm welcomes that babies elicit.

The crew expands again

That South Pacific season was full of beaches, reefs and snorkelling. We saw whales, sharks and rays, and cruised countless glorious atolls. It was full of major life milestones for our family crew too. We had our longest passage at sea, sailing 28 days nonstop from Mexico to the Marquesas; Rocket had her first birthday in Bora Bora; we even got married in Fiji. And then we expanded the crew once more, this time in New Zealand with the arrival of our son, Indigo. Tucked safely below the cyclone belt, we used all of New Zealand as our watery kindergarten. It boasts some easy cruising grounds, scattered with little uninhabited islands and secluded bays.

There was another voice to be heard now, as we had someone else actively engaging with our cruising. Any sailing trip meant explaining to Rocket what we were doing and why we were doing



Jess at the helm of Adamastor with a young Rocket in a baby carrier.

it, all without it becoming an endless list of do's and don'ts. Indigo, in turn, was a lot more physical at a younger age than his sister had been, not content to cozy up while strapped to me at the helm. So we adopted harnesses and tethers for both of them whenever they were in the cockpit underway. This new practice was something that we hoped would come easily to Rocket, given that it wasn't a rule that solely applied to her. Plus, she now had a playmate, so if the two little ones were content to be downstairs and keep each other occupied during a passage, it could make things on deck much simpler for us.

Nevertheless, we managed to steer a way through the murky waters of sailing with two little crew, so it wasn't long before we started feeling the call of the winds and sea beckoning us out to further challenges. By the time cyclone season was over, we were on the move again, sailing our most remote and uncommon route so far. We left New Zealand and cruised through Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, the outer atolls

Strategies for family life on board

- Well-fitting life jackets and/or harnesses for everyone on board, appropriate to your kind of sailing, are essential. It helps if you allow your little ones to be involved in choosing.
- A playpen or baby pod can be useful to keep your baby safe down below when both parents are needed on deck. A baby sling or soft-structured carrier is great for times when they have to be on deck with you but you need to keep your hands free.
- Invest in the highest-quality life-line netting available with knots at every junction rather than glue, which can degrade in the sun.
- Give cloth nappies (diapers) a go; they're much better for the environment and mean you always have a fresh supply on board.
- A clamp-on high chair is useful for keeping them secure at sea, as well as for meal times.
- Keeping small-fry warm and dry on any sailing journey is the first step to making them feel comfortable and happy at sea. Choose good-quality, well-fitting wets and waterproofs designed for sailing — the benefits will pay off.
- Ask other boat families what has worked for them. There is a huge community of sailing families out there, even Facebook groups like "Kids 4 Sail" (facebook.com/groups/Kids4Sail/).
- There's a great book all about living aboard with children called *Voyaging with Kids*, written by parents from three different cruising families (voyagingwithkids.com). Also, there is the classic *Kids in the Cockpit* by Jill Schinas (jilldickinschinas.com/books/kids-in-the-cockpit).
- Full-time parenting without the surrounding noise of well-meaning friends and family may make you feel that traditional parenting practices are no longer relevant to your circumstances. From our position as attachment parents, we really recommend *Unconditional Parenting* by Alfie Kohn (alfiekohn.org/UP) as well as Dr. Sears' *The Baby Book* (askdrsears.com) as great resources.
- A growing family doesn't mean you have to outgrow your boat. You can still meet the demands of higher consumption in your family on a smaller vessel by installing extra solar panels, adding a non-power-hungry form of self-steering like a Hydrovane (hydrovane.com), or a portable petrol-powered watermaker like a Rainman (rainmandesal.com) without the need for getting a generator to keep the creature comforts that make everyone on board happy.
- Don't think that you have to stop sailing. Adapt your plans to what feels comfortable for the stage you and your family are at.

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of Papua New Guinea and then on to Indonesia. It was a stretch that required entirely new techniques of navigation for us, using satellite imagery combined with a GPS, as these weren't the sorts of places for which there are accurate cruising guides.

We also had to trade for food.

We'd offer items like rice, sugar, flour, fish hooks, matches, soap, tinned fish, crackers, secondhand clothes, books and medicines. In exchange we would receive papayas, pineapples, coconuts, bananas, oranges, limes, plantains, soursop, star fruit, fish, squid, crayfish, chillies, watercress, cabbage, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, peppers, nuts and



The newest crewmember

From there we staged a journey back to our native U.K., a trip that we try to make every two years. Like our previous pauses, this location in Indonesia is unaffected by tropical storms, so the yacht would sit quite safely while we visited the rest of the family back home. And on this particular trip, the crew list would be added to yet again as our little



Above, a boatful of babies: a playdate on Adamastor while voyaging in Mexico. Left, Rocket and Indigo in their wetsuits. Below, James and Indigo in the cockpit.



more. There were countless funny negotiations in broken English about whether both parties felt satisfied with the swap, if we'd got the amounts right. The kids got used to people canoeing up to our boat and presenting various items.

All too soon, we arrived into the towns and cities of Indonesia and were thrown back to the more normal way of getting groceries. We were also dealing with entirely different weather systems, monsoon patterns and infamously changeable equatorial conditions. Big seas, inconsistent winds and sudden onset squalls may not have been our chosen order from this vast country's menu, but it's what we were given, so we had to find a way of coping with it in order to sail on to our next planned long stop in Lombok.

girl, Autumn, was born while we were in London.

There are some telltale signs that you're a "kid boat": the nappies (diapers) drying on the line, the pint-sized life jackets sitting in the dinghy and the netting around the guardrails. It's also so much easier for cruising families to

Products that work for us

- **Life jackets:** We have several different PFDs for the kids from brands like RFD, West Marine, Salus and Plastimo. They're all very similar, just check weight limitations and that infant ones have an extra-large collar support for their head.
- **Harnesses:** We really like Baltic harnesses for use with very small children (baltic.se/en). Edelrid's Fraggles (edelrid.de/en) climbing harnesses are great once they're a bit bigger.
- **Guardrail netting:** We use black, UV-treated, knotted nylon netting by Gourock (gourock.com), designed for batting cages. It withstands the sun far better than standard marine netting.
- **Playpen and high chair:** phil&teds' "Traveller" playpen/travel crib and the "Lobster" portable high chair (phil-and-teds.com).
- **Baby carrier:** Again, we have several on board such as Baby Tula, Ergobaby and even simple bits of cloth from Guatemala. The main thing is that it should be comfortable to wear for baby and parent.
- **Baby sleep pod:** Sleepyhead deluxe and grand bed pods (sleepyheadofsweden.com).
- **Cloth nappies:** gDiapers cloth and biodegradable disposable nappies (gdiapers.com/).
- **Sailing clothing:** Nipper Skipper (nipperskipper.co.uk) is a great source for waterproof, swim and UV wear for little crew. Also Didriksons (didriksons.com/en) designs kids' foul-weather gear that has a special "extend size" system, giving them an extra long life for growing children.

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Left, voyaging with kids often leads to a warm welcome at landfall. Below, James and Indigo swimming while local kids in a canoe paddle nearby.

communicate, share and broadcast their lifestyles online. If you type “baby on boat” into Google, you’ll find a huge number of sailing blogs (including ours) that document how these families are making it work for them, as well as sharing information and practical recommendations for products, systems or philosophies that help them do so. The reasons behind “Why wait? Why not go sailing now?” vary immensely, and it’s even possible to continue to run a business, rent a property or work for half of the year while on the move.

Then there is the issue of what to do if your children are school age. A boat is a highly complex, rich and stimulating environment for a child, and there are many schooling options available to cruisers’ offspring. Widespread Internet access in even the most remote islands allows for distance or correspondence learning, with the ability to email tests and assessments for the relevant school credits. Quite often, the parents choose for the kids to go into the local school in whatever country they drop the hook in for a time, which allows for immersion learning, meeting other children and swiftly mastering a new language. Or the parents may take on the role of directing their education themselves. You can choose a more instinctive curriculum generated by the circumstances of the journey itself.

Previously, sailing as a couple, we would have happily done longer hops, all-nighters and pushed through worse weather in order to eat up some miles and get to a specific destination, but family cruising isn’t just about us anymore. We became acutely aware that, while our family voyage was something



that we had chosen, our children were born into this situation; so, we try to continually check in with the aspects of cruising that they enjoy and cater to them as much as possible. So, if they want to linger at the shoreline for another hour, Rocket delicately poking the tiny shells, Indigo examining the stones they find while Autumn happily pats the wet sand, then so be it.

We also sail far more for comfort, reefing far sooner, heeling less and assessing the sea state through toddler eyes as well as our own. These days we have to consider the kids’ moods, rhythms, stamina and preferences, and take our cues from them. So the day-to-day passages have got shorter, and we make more use of our autopilot and Hydrovane. And anchorages themselves are now sought out to be that bit flatter and calmer, if only to help avoid toys rolling around on the table.

Just because they’re still too little to

hoist the mainsail or stand a watch at the helm doesn’t mean that children can’t get involved. Watching for the mainsail luffing, helping catch a fish, answering questions about the figures on the instruments or identifying a bird can all help younger kids to join in.

Total engagement

Certainly it’s more of a challenge, as we have to explain and discuss each move to an increasingly thought-provoking audience. Yet this engagement with our kids and the holistic nature of our family life is so far proving to be fulfilling and satisfying for all of us. It’s the idea of everyone on board taking pleasure from what we’re doing that has become the paramount goal of this journey — rather than circumnavigation as we had originally intended.

Sailing full time while expanding our family has meant that we are all always together, 24 hours a day, while travelling and maintaining the boat. There’s been no maternity leave or childcare, no babysitters or grandparents to hand. Our approach for surviving has been to relax into it, embracing the nontraditional parenting that it allows us to explore, and simply not sweating the small stuff. It’s rewarding and gratifying to share this kind of adventure together, as well as being just plain fun.

Our plan had been to cruise for just a couple of years, so the thought that we’d still be cruising the world now — with three young children in tow — is a shift in lifestyle that we couldn’t have predicted. With three young sailors to think about, we’re suddenly outnumbered and don’t always have enough hands for everyone. When it works, it seems to work really, really well, which is of course balanced out by the times that it goes spectacularly wrong!

So, I guess once we embraced the idea of growing our crew en route, we said goodbye to being “normal” for good. Nevermind that; we’re learning, we’re trying and it’s keeping us happy. ■

Jess and James left the U.K. in 2011 aboard Adamastor and are still sailing. They’ve traveled to 36 countries, across two oceans and over 26,000 miles so far, with their three children born en route. You can follow their journey at www.water-log.com.