



Sailing *With* small fry

Words and photos by **Jess Lloyd-Mostyn**

A couple's two-year cruise turned into an extended family adventure when they became parents along the way – more than once. And as they discovered – boating with babies isn't an impossible dream.



Setting sail from our native England we headed south into Europe, crossed the Atlantic and spent a year cruising around the Caribbean. It was in Panama, its anchorages bulging with boats aiming towards the legendary canal, that we met a number of sailing families.

They had older children, younger kids, some with only one child on board, some with three or four, in everything from spacious, modern catamarans to a tiny, 28-foot, gaff-rigged fishing boat.

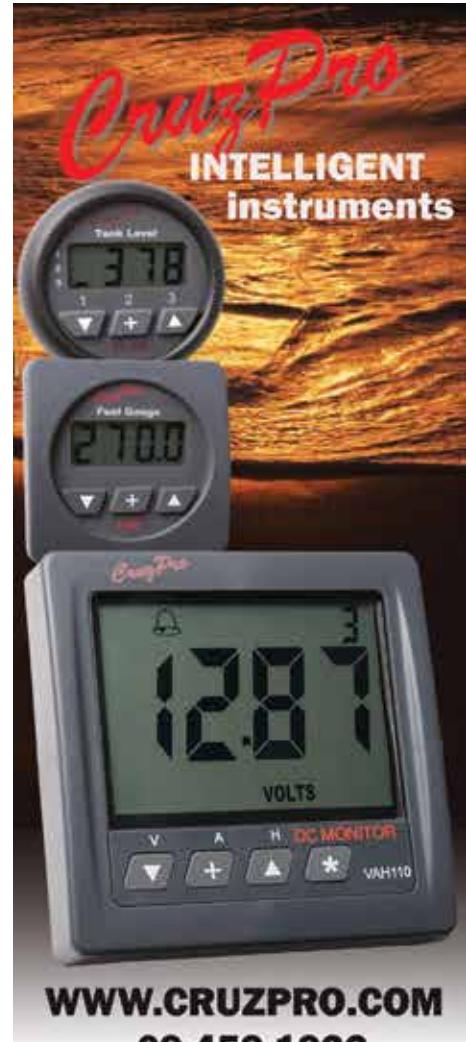
Some were circumnavigating, others were just seasonal sailors – but all seemed to be relishing the quality family time the freedom of cruising allows. Within the families was a wide variety of approaches to home-schooling as well, whether using a set curriculum from a home institution or a more improvised free-range kind of learning.

And the children themselves were universally forthcoming and friendly; happily playing with other youngsters of all ages or communicating openly with adults with such ease that it gave an idyllic appeal to the sailing-as-a-family concept.

We thought we'd only be able to sustain our sailing as a brief sojourn from the 'real world' of nine-to-five jobs in London. Later, we'd start a family along conventional lines. Stumbling across a way of both being around full-time to take this significant leap into parenthood had a powerful attraction.

And so we tentatively talked about trying for a baby, timed to coincide with hurricane season naturally, as we reasoned that a newborn on board would result in some sailing down-time.

By the time we transited the Panama Canal I was already in my second trimester. The sailing life had helped us grow accustomed to expecting the unexpected and the arrival of our baby girl, Rocket, in Mexico three weeks early was no exception. The course of our journey changed immediately.



**WWW.CRUZPRO.COM
09 459 1922**

**Accurate fuel readings on
any shape tank**



Limited

Time

Offer ends

31 March 2017

**Fuel level
and consumption gauge**

High and low level alarms

**Trip fuel used, ideal for
joint ownership boats**

Round or square bezel

**Works with standard US
and European senders**

NMEA 0183 or alarm output

Transfer pump control

“Don’t suck the fun from the sailing experience.”



Bath time – the basin is more than adequate for the job, but if all else fails a large bowl will do.

Transitioning into sailing-with-an-infant went smoothly, at least to begin with. The boat was already a fairly baby-proofed environment: no sharp edges, sockets, or moveable furniture to cause potential hazards.

In fact the small distances from wall to cupboard door to bench seating made it very easy for her to cruise around, hanging on to various handholds, when she became a toddler.

Once she found her feet we were quick to cover our guardrails in netting to allow her the independence to explore and scramble about the deck without worrying that a false step would tip her into the water.

Our South Pacific travels continued when she was eight months old. We got into a rhythm of taking turns at either the helm or with the baby but also chose to make things easier by installing a Hydrovane self-steering unit. All of our 11,000 pre-baby sailing miles had been hand-steered so this new addition gave us the luxury of time away from the wheel.

We also enlisted some extra crew for the 26-day ocean crossing from Mexico to the Marquesas as a concession to sailing with an infant. Similarly, while in French Polynesia, we took a chance with a young guy who had just sailed over from the States. We didn't feel the real need for full-time crew as we would be tackling shorter distances.

We were also unsure about someone new encroaching on our family dynamic so we tentatively agreed to see how it would go and have him sail with us to the next island group for a week or so.

He had an instant affinity with our daughter and contributed a tireless energy and enthusiasm for deck work. The arrangement





The best strategy is incorporating the new arrivals into your lifestyle as fully as possible. Compromises are required.

worked so well that he remained on board with our family for more than five months.

As well as sharing the everyday work of sailing he would play with Rocket if we wanted to go for a quick snorkel, or allow me some baby-free time on the helm and he even encouraged our little one to start swimming.

After nearly four years at sea we had a second child in New Zealand – a boy called Indigo. It was another simple pregnancy and he was born at home when we were house-sitting for friends.

Our first maternity experience had given us the confidence to seek out the support of an un-medicalised birth and the midwife we found was brilliant. But as a floating family of four, we suddenly had our hands full.

Where previously we'd take turns with the baby, we now had a walking, talking and inquisitive child to account for as well. It was no longer as simple as safely installing a child in her carrier, playpen or highchair where she could play with some toys or doze off.

Any sailing manoeuvre meant explaining to Rocket what we were doing and why, along with important principles and safety instructions, all without it becoming an endless list of do's and don'ts. We didn't want suck all the fun from her sailing experience.

Indigo, in turn, was a lot more physical at a younger age than his sister had been, not content to cosy up while strapped to me at the helm. So we adopted the wearing of harnesses and tethers for both of them whenever they were in the cockpit and the boat was underway.

This new practice was something that we hoped would come easily given that Rocket had a baby brother to consider as it wasn't a rule applied solely to her. Equally, if she felt too

Products that work

LIFEJACKETS – we have several different PFDs for the kids from brands like RFD, WestMarine, Salus and Plastimo. They're all very similar, just check weight limitations and that infant ones have an extra-large collar support for the head.

HARNESSES – we really like Baltic harnesses for using on very small children (<http://www.baltic.se/en>). Edelrid's Fraggle (www.edelrid.de/en/) climbing harnesses are great once they're a bit bigger.

GUARDRAIL NETTING – we use knotted nylon black UV treated netting by Gourock (www.gourock.com/), designed for batwing cages. It withstands the sun far better than standard marine netting.

PLAYPEN AND HIGHCHAIR – Phil & Ted's 'Traveller' playpen / travel crib and the 'Lobster' portable highchair (www.philandteds.com/)

BABY CARRIER – again, we have several onboard such as Tula, Ergo 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 (www.sleepyheadwebshop.com/en/).

NAPPIES – gDiapers cloth and biodegradable disposable nappies (www.gdiapers.com/).

SAILING CLOTHING – Nipper Skipper (www.nipperskipper.co.uk/) is a great source for waterproof, swim and UV wear for little crew. Also Didrikson (www.didriksons.com/en-xx/) design kids' foul weather gear that has a special extend size system, giving them an extra-long life for growing children.

restricted by wearing the harness, she had the choice of reading in the cabin below, where she had no need for straps or webbing.

Plus, she now had a playmate, so if they were content to be downstairs and keep each other occupied during a passage, it could make things on deck much simpler for us.

Now that the kids are older, both talking and walking, we continue to live with undefined plans. Previously, sailing as a couple, we would have happily done longer hops, all-nighters and pushed through bad weather to eat up some miles and get to a specific destination.



The sooner you begin to train the crew, the better. You can never have too many helmsmen.

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. 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.

We live mostly at anchor so our trips ashore have become a well-practiced dance of getting the kids in and out of lifejackets, smothered in sunscreen and hats, doused in bug-repellent and



On-board strategies

- A properly-fitting lifejacket and/or harness 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 are 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 lifeline netting available with knots at every junction rather than glue as this can degrade in the sun.
- Give cloth nappies 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, as 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 (www.facebook.com/groups/Kids4Sail/).
- There's a great new book all about it called *Voyaging with Kids*, written by parents from three different cruising families (www.voyagingwithkids.com/). Also there is the classic *Kids in the Cockpit* by Jill Schinas (www.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.





with wetsuits to hand in case they want to linger in the cool Kiwi waters. And we seek out flatter and calmer anchorages, if only to keep toys from rolling around on the table.

Sailing full-time while expanding our family means that we're all always together, 24 hours a day, while travelling and maintaining the boat. There's been no maternity leave, childcare or kindergarten, no babysitters or grandparents to hand.

Our strategy for coping has been to relax into it, embracing the non-traditional 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.

Having said all that, you might be surprised at how quietly domestic our daily life on board is. We still have to make three meals, wash up afterwards and respond to the needs and desires of our little crew.

As we're not in our accustomed tropical climate I struggle with the regularity and volume of laundry produced by a family of four. Making time to hand-wash the cloth nappies of our babies – though tricky at times – has certainly proved better value than using non-biodegradable disposables, and it's better for the environment. And keeping things shipshape remains vitally important to keep the boat safe and functioning.

We're acutely aware that while our family voyage is something we've chosen, our children were only born into this situation. So we continually try to check in with the aspects of cruising that they both enjoy and cater to that as much as possible.

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 aspiring towards circumnavigation as we had originally intended.

So, if Rocket wants to linger at the shoreline for another hour, delicately poking the tiny shells and examining the stones she finds there, then so be it. 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. ■



From our position as attachment parents we really recommend *Unconditional Parenting* by Alfie Kohn (www.alfiekohn.org/books/up.htm) as well as Dr Sears' *The Baby Book* (www.askdrsears.com/) as a great resource.

- 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 (www.hydrovane.com/) or a portable petrol-powered watermaker, like a Rainman (www.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.

NZ'S LARGEST
SELECTION
OF INFLATABLE
STANDUP
PADDLE BOARDS



red paddleco

...but just having the
biggest selection of the
best brands doesn't
make you the best.

It's having paddle savvy people
that makes the real difference.

See us first.



THE PADDLEBOARD STORE

20 MELROSE ST
NEWMARKET
TEL: 09 520 3366
WWW.SUPCENTRE.CO.NZ