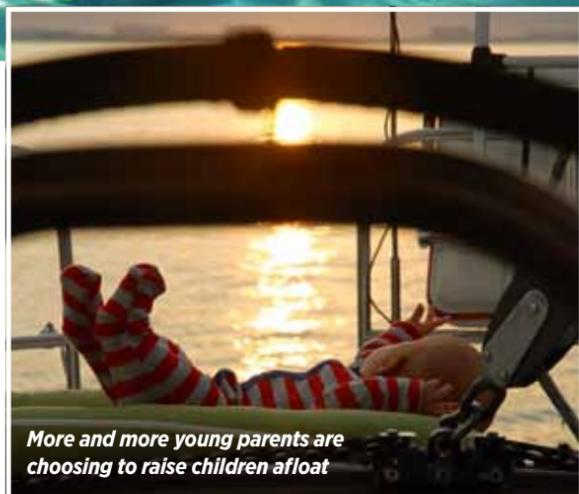




Can you think of a better place to learn about the world?

From cradle to wave

Surely a boat is no place to raise children? Actually, it's more popular than ever, says liveaboard mum Jess Lloyd-Mostyn



More and more young parents are choosing to raise children afloat

PHOTO ABOVE: SHANNON BARBARA

When our families in the UK heard that we were expecting our first baby in Mexico while sailing around the world, they were incredulous. Is it so surprising? While adapting to our new roles as liveaboard parents, we learned that we were one of six floating families in our little town in Banderas Bay, on Mexico's Pacific coast, with a baby born that year. Three were to first-time parents, five of the families were planning a Pacific crossing and we all felt our new arrivals enhanced our sailing experience: we would keep cruising. Is there something in the water, or are liveaboard families increasingly common? Perhaps starting a family afloat is why some couples go to sea? On our travels we've met parents with children ranging from infants

to teenagers. Without exception the kids are noticeably confident, bright, and forthcoming, and this greatly influenced our decision to have children afloat. They're totally at ease on board, clambering over the deck like monkeys, reclining at the bow like figureheads as we sail into an anchorage, or standing in a dinghy, oblivious to swell and spray. Also, children are a universal ice-breaker. From the first signs of a bump to travelling with an adolescent there is an extra element to the conversation with officials when clearing into a new country, or when you're deciphering the menu at a restaurant or trying to find what you need in a market. Kids tend to be fearless and without embarrassment, which can actually smooth over a lot of cross-cultural awkwardness. A big smile can open doors anywhere.

Distance learning
The issue of school is actually quite straightforward. Perhaps the kids can go to the local school if you're dropping your hook for a while? They'll meet local children and could even learn to speak new languages. Widespread internet access, in even the remotest islands, makes distance learning an effective option, emailing tests and assessments for the relevant credits. Some parents choose to direct their children's education themselves using set learning materials from an institution at home, or by their own tutoring. This enables parents to choose a curriculum inspired by their travels. If you're in Tahiti, why not learn about Captain Cook, French colonial foreign policy, local sharks and rays, and the French language? A yacht is a stimulating learning environment, with complex systems,



PHOTO: SHANNON BARBARA

A yacht is an amazing learning environment, and the internet, available almost everywhere, makes distance learning possible



'Kid boats' are easy to spot, and always manage to find each other for floating playgroups

design, weather and wind power creating an incredibly rich backdrop to schooling. Also, you get to be full-time parents, totally engaging with your youngsters' learning and development. Indeed it's the thought of overcrowded classrooms where teachers may waste valuable lesson time disciplining disruptive students that makes this even more appealing



Many cruisers we meet wonder why they waited for the nest to empty before setting sail

'Kid boats!'
I'm often asked 'How does your child socialise?' My reply is 'Kid boats!' They're easy to spot: nappies drying on the netted lifelines, teeny lifejackets in the tender. It's a phrase we first heard in the beautiful San Blas archipelago, in the Caribbean off Panama. At Christmas, one of the islands announced over the radio net that it was full to bursting. The reason? A gathering for no fewer than 22 kid boats – a veritable mob. And that's just one anchorage, in one island group. It's ubiquitous. When we got back to the marina in Banderas Bay with our new baby girl, it was a whirl of birthday parties, poolside barbecues, dock gatherings and pot-lucks – all aimed at families. In our experience, sailing around the world is no longer a retirement dream. We know young families who run businesses, rent properties, and work while on the move. Perhaps

this boating baby boom, with younger cruisers starting families afloat, is because it's so easy now to communicate and share – and not just with families back home. Search online for 'baby on boat' and you'll find dozens of sailing blogs (including ours) sharing hints and tips for raising children at sea.

Safety
This is the biggest worry for anyone sailing with a baby. Every family's take on this will differ, but for us sailing is a calculated risk, like motorway driving. We have never attempted any passage, long or short, without boat and crew being as prepared as possible. Every plan has one, two or three contingencies, in case of bad weather, boat problems or unforeseen issues. So, apart from some extra kit, lifejacket, harness, playpen, hammock, netting and so on, having a baby on board hasn't really affected our approach to safety. There are more and more youthful cruisers, but having babies and children on a boat is nothing new. We've met people who were born aboard and have chosen to raise their children at sea too. These 'anchor babies', now grown, have a love of the sea instilled in them and want to share the benefits of their salty childhood. Remember, their parents raised them long before GPS, accurate forecasting, digital charting, internet



PHOTO: BRITANNY MEYERS

There's risk in everything, ashore or afloat, but planning and measures like netting make it manageable

and satellite communication made adventurous voyages that much easier, for sailors like us who are learning as we go.

Early start
You'd think that some child-free cruisers would resent their secret anchorages or favourite marinas becoming inundated with kid boats, but to date, all the senior cruisers we've met seem genuinely pleased by the influx of new blood to the sailing community. We've lost count of how many times we've been told 'We wish we'd started when we were your age!' They miss their families too, so a little time with us is like being with their own children and grandchildren. Now that we're a kid boat and we've adjusted our sailing strategies to suit, we're confident that a life afloat is working well for our young family. Our daughter has her first ocean crossing under her belt and has even learned to crawl and walk despite fairly bouncy sea conditions. We can't wait to see how she grows and we're overjoyed that neither of us misses a moment of that journey. Time to put up that netting then, folks... ▲

Jess Lloyd-Mostyn

Jess and James Lloyd-Mostyn with baby Rocket aboard Adamastor, their Crossbow 40. They left the UK in 2011 and are now in the Pacific – expecting baby No.2! Follow their adventures at www.water-log.com