

TRAVELLING WITH KIDS





babies without borders

RAISING A FAMILY AT SEA

BY JESSICA LLOYD-MOSTYN

Like any couple on the brink of starting a family James and I talked openly about children but couldn't really comprehend how it would work on our boat. It felt as though there was a set, rule-book about having kids normally, which seemed to involve buying an immense amount of gear. But where was the manual for expectant parents on a yacht? How do you baby-proof and what gear is really necessary in so small a space? What do you do once they're crawling, walking or potty-training? And what happens when they reach school age or you have teenagers on board?

Marvellously, the thing that calmed our parental nerves and made us see the ease with which you can sail, liveaboard and even world cruise with babies was meeting other boating families. 'Boat kids' are a great advertisement for the benefits of sailing with children. However, the advantages are not necessarily to the sailing itself, but to the way of life as a

whole. Cruising children are generally friendly, conversational, undaunted by interactions with other adults and relatively hardy. They look you in the eye when they speak and scramble up the mast, onto the boom or jump off the boat with the ease and coolness of one who has been doing so their whole lives.

A boat baby, however, seemed like a more overwhelming prospect so we began with baby steps. When our daughter was born we had the boat in a marina just to get used to the new arrival in a more controlled way. The usual kit of a cot, a buggy and a carseat weren't relevant so we focussed on how to handle sleeping, feeding, carrying and changing. Surprisingly, all of these are fairly simple with a newborn onboard. Our cabin has a wall-to-wall bed so was perfect for co-sleeping with no worry of her falling out. I breastfed her, so no bottles to sterilize or formula to buy. A sling or soft-structured carrier was the easiest way of getting her on or off the boat and for helping to lull her to sleep as we walked the docks. We chose to use cloth nappies as we're environmentally conscious and didn't like the huge contribution to landfill that standard disposables mean plus, in the marina, we had plenty of water for laundry.

If it all sounds straightforward and idyllic it's because it truly was. We began to think that we'd completely got the hang of being boat parents. But two things changed that: the boat moving and the baby moving. Resuming our lives at anchor but including an infant meant that every trip ashore needed a strategy. We had to have a bag packed full of nappies, wipes,



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extra bits of clothing as well as all the things the adults needed for the outing. This was when we started using a baby lifejacket, as anchorages are not necessarily still. Even when your journey ashore is calm the wind can kick up, giving you a wet and bumpy ride back.

Then there are passages in the yacht itself. We had to get used to being at the helm with the baby strapped to us in the carrier, learn how to change nappies underway and find a safe place for her to nap in, all while taking into account the heel of the boat and lumpiness of the sea. However, all of that seems simple in retrospect once your baby becomes mobile. No longer can you turn your head away and expect the child to be in the same place when you look back. A husband and wife can be an exceptionally capable sailing team. Throw a crawling baby into the mix and the chap suddenly becomes a single-hander whilst the woman is on damage-control; struggling to stop their infant from falling and ensuring those curious little hands don't get where they shouldn't.

But we, like so many naive new parents before us, had decided that starting a family was not going to quash or limit our sailing ambitions. In fact our first passage as a family was the 26-day, 2,850 mile crossing of the Pacific Ocean. It was then that our daughter learned to crawl which meant that I saw a lot less sea and a lot more of the cabin than before. However, we made one major concession and enlisted an extra member of crew. It was a smart decision and one that we've found is a good compromise for those who choose not to give up their larger

sailing goals. Since arriving in French Polynesia we've been fortunate enough to pick up casual crew to lend an extra hand which makes up for my energies being needed elsewhere.

Yet the payoff for the effort is a huge gain that we are acutely aware of. Our daughter has had two utterly engaged and attentive full-time parents since the moment she was born. My husband has witnessed every milestone, first steps and first words, and is an invaluable supportive teammate for me as we adjust to our new existence as parents. A boat is a highly complex, rich and stimulating environment for a child and we can see our little one learning, growing and thriving in such a setting. She gets plucked from our arms spontaneously by welcoming strangers in every country we visit and is regularly adopted by admiring older children on other boats. None of it fazes her in the slightest and she visibly relishes these interactions.

Older sailing couples without kids or whose children have started families of their own have also become part of our lives. As they too are world cruising they know it's hard being so far from family, friends and loved ones. Phonecalls, emails and skype chats all help but being offered a baby to squeeze when your own grandchildren are thousands of miles away can be a great substitute. Likewise, James and I get surrogate parents to ask advice from and even the odd bit of child-minding into the bargain. Yachting friends at our marina even threw us a baby shower and it was a great way for everyone to swap stories about when they first had kids.



Just how long and how far we'll be sailing as a family we don't know but the other children in our current cruising fleet encourage us. Once they can walk, talk and have a greater level of independence boat kids can begin to truly love their lives at sea and appreciate the magic that the water can offer. In rough conditions or if the parents simply need a break then you can resort to distractions: a movie, a book or a game. But there's also the opportunity to actively include your children with the everyday business of sailing. Just because they're still too little to hoist the mainsail or stand a watch at the helm doesn't mean that they 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. We've known children as young as six that steer competently under engine and this trust exhibited by their parents goes a long way to helping their abilities grow. As they get older so their roles and responsibilities can evolve and the knowledge that they're contributing more to life aboard gives a great sense of satisfaction.

Personally, we've found that sailing as a family so far has been hugely fulfilling. We've ended up needing a lot less gear on board than we expected. Our one major change to the boat has been the addition of 'baby netting' all along our guardrails, pushpit and bow. This allows our baby the freedom to roam without needing a parent hovering over her. Plus it saves items thrown out of the cockpit and ensures you won't lose a fish that you land! A boat is already a remarkably baby-proof environment when you consider it. There are rounded edges to

things, drawers are fitted with features that stop them flying out at sea, and there are no live electrics or other dangers at toddler-height as they'd be a liability out on the water. We had one switch low down, our stove gas solenoid, which we moved higher up as the pretty red light that came on when she played with it made it irresistible. In addition there are convenient grab rails and handles in lots of places, which I'm sure helps the beginner walker no end.

It's true that the reality of sailing with a baby has made us approach our cruising plans differently. We don't wish to always sail with extra crew so we'll probably have a year or two of coastal rather than ocean sailing. But as long as all three of us are enjoying it we can keep a happy balance of staying true to our carefree cruising couple past, while being full-time parents as well.

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Jessica Lloyd-Mostyn (32) and husband James (44) left their native England in 2011 aboard Adamastor, a Crossbow 42, intending to sail around the world in a couple of years. After crossing the Atlantic and enjoying several months in the Caribbean they reached Panama, where they decided to take longer over the trip and also to start a family. Their daughter, Rocket, now over a year and a half old, was born in Mexico and logged her first sea miles on their Pacific crossing in March of 2014. They married in Fiji and are currently in New Zealand, where they are expecting their second child this July. Now, over 18,000 miles and 32 countries since they set off you can follow their progress at www.water-log.com.



Products that work for us

- **Lifejacket and harness:**
West Marine's infant neoprene PFD and their child's safety harness
<http://www.westmarine.com>
- **Guardrail netting:**
Knotted nylon black UV treated netting by Gourock
<http://www.gourock.com>
- **Playpen and highchair:**
Phil & Ted's 'Traveller' playpen / travel crib and the 'Lobster' portable highchair
<http://philandteds.com/rw>
- **Baby carrier:**
Tula baby carrier
<http://www.tulababycarriers.com>
- **Baby sleep pod:**
Enfant Terrible's 'Sleepyhead' bed pod / bed guard
<http://www.enfant-terrible.se>
- **Cloth nappies:**
gDiapers cloth and biodegradable disposable nappies
<http://www.gnappies.com>

Hints for life on board with a baby

- Get a good fitting baby lifejacket, appropriate to your kind of sailing.
- Make sure that your baby carrier or sling is comfortable to wear.
- A playpen or baby pod can be useful to keep your baby safe when both parents are needed on deck.
- Invest in the highest quality 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.
- When your baby starts solids a clip-on high chair is useful for keeping them secure at sea as well as for meal times.
- Once they're walking a harness and tether can give the freedom of the deck and cockpit in safety.
- Ask other boat families what has worked for them.
- Don't think that you have to stop sailing, adapt your plans to what feels comfortable for the stage you and your baby are at.

Photo credits

1. Everyone loves sunset at anchor, even the littlest crew member. *Jessica Lloyd-Mostyn*
2. At school whilst on board. *Kate Melville*
3. A cozy nap spot at anchor. *Jessica Lloyd-Mostyn*
4. Dinghy kids. *Sascha Smith*
5. Laundry time is every day with a baby on board. *Jessica Lloyd-Mostyn*
6. An infant pfd or lifejacket is a must. *Jessica Lloyd-Mostyn*
7. A turn at the helm for the youngest on board. *Kate Melville*
8. Same milestones, different context. Rocket takes her first steps on deck. *Jessica Lloyd-Mostyn*
9. Nappies on the line as the baby lounges at anchor. *Jessica Lloyd-Mostyn*
10. Boat kids like monkeys in the rigging. *Kate Melville*
11. Family snorkel time. *Shannon Barbara*
12. Under sail as a family. *Kate Melville*
13. Boat kids at the bow. *Shannon Barbara*