



Baby on a boat

Jessica Loyd-Mostyn and husband James, had their first baby aboard a yacht, anchored in Mexico during hurricane season.

I had a picture in my head of what our life would look like as we prepared to have a baby. In this image I'd be starting maternity leave from a stable job, spending weekends decorating the nursery with my husband, buying adorable onesies and chic maternity clothes from the shops in town while seeing my family doctor for regular check-ups. The reality was that our pre-baby To-Do list included spending three months sailing over 2500 miles to where we planned to give birth, preparing our floating home for the onset of storms and hurricanes, dealing with a medical system in a language we'd only just started learning and being an ocean away from our families.

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When our families mentioned to others that we were expecting our first baby while sailing around the world, the news was met with shock, awe and interest. Yet, we learned that we were one of no less than six international sailing families with a baby born in 2013 alone, just in that one little town in Mexico. Was there something in the water? Or is it becoming increasingly common for 'liveaboards' to sail with children in tow? Perhaps the option of starting a family while sailing is even the reason that some couples are choosing to put to sea. Interestingly, as well as us Brits, these other families came from America, the Netherlands, Canada and New Zealand. Yet all of us were considering our new arrivals as enhancing our sailing experience, and all planned to continue cruising.

Now that we have officially joined the ranks of 'kid boat' there are some tell-tale signs that we look out for in other yachts that indicate you have little ones on board - nappies drying on the line or the pint-sized life jackets sitting in the dinghy. But the classic sign is the netting around the guardrails or life-lines. The very fact that this is a standard, stock item in every decent chandlery around the world should be a clear guide to the current prevalence of young sailing families.

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 crib, a stroller and a carseat weren't going to be work onboard, so we focussed simply on strategies for how to handle sleeping, feeding, carrying and changing. Surprisingly, all of these are fairly simple with a newborn. 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 that meant there were never any bottles to sterilise 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 lull her to sleep as we walked the docks. We also chose to use cloth nappies as we're environmentally conscious and didn't like the huge contribution to landfill that standard disposables would mean. Plus, whilst 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. As savvy sailors we'd managed to time our new arrival for hurricane season. But, once the seasons changed there was no need to stay in the marina, plus we couldn't afford the high season rates so we had to start cruising again. 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, snacks and 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, which is daunting with a baby. Then there were passages in the yacht itself. We had to get used to being at the helm with her strapped to us in the carrier, learn how to change nappies underway and find a safe place for her to doze in, all while taking into account the heel of the boat and lumpiness of the sea.

However, all of that seems simple 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 naïve new parents before us, had decided that having a baby 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 from Mexico to the Marquesas in French Polynesia. It was then that our 8 month old 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 on their larger sailing goals. After arriving in French Polynesia we were fortunate enough to pick up casual crew again to lend an extra hand during our passages across the South Pacific. It worked well for us as it gave extra sailing support to James, and made up for my energies being needed elsewhere.

It also provided a much-needed relief for the work onboard as, in truth, sailing with an infant is definitely hard. Having started out as a sailing couple means that you can't help but compare the situation now to the carefree, easier cruising days we had begun with. Yet the payoff for the effort is a huge gain that we are acutely aware of. Our daughter has had two 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 present and supportive teammate for me as we adjust to being parents. Touching base with family and friends back home makes us extremely conscious of how unusual that is for a father and has meant that we've avoided that imbalance that we were worried was an inevitable part of early parenthood.

The issue of safety is one I'd suppose is most on the mind of anyone wondering why we choose to sail with a baby, rather than put it off until she's older. Every family's take on this will differ, no doubt. Our thought is that all sailing is a form of measured and calculated risk, as is driving on the motorway. We never attempt any passage, no matter how big or small, without both the boat and the crew being as ready and prepared as possible. This means that for every plan we make, we generally have one, two or three other options up our sleeves in case of inclement weather, significant boat problems or other potential unforeseen issues. Although we now have some additional equipment because of sailing with an infant, it hasn't actually meant a huge alteration to our safety approach in general as we pride ourselves on being cautious sailors anyway.

Our one major change to the boat has been the addition of the '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.

The issue of what to do when your children reach school age is much more straightforward than might be assumed. A boat is a highly complex, rich and stimulating environment for a child and the schooling



options available to cruiser's offspring seem relatively simple. Widespread internet access in even the most remote islands allows for distance or correspondence learning to be an effective method of teaching, 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 town, whatever country they drop the hook in for a time, which allows them to have immersion learning, meet other children and swiftly become more adept at a new language than their parents. Or, depending on the age of the children, the parents may well have taken on the role of directing their education themselves. This enables the shrewd parent to choose a more instinctive curriculum generated by the circumstances of the journey itself: learning about the French language, Captain Cook, European foreign policy or even local species of reef sharks and manta rays when sailing in Tahiti for example.

Few could argue against what an interesting setting a yacht has the potential to be for learning, with its complexity of functions and design creating an incredibly rich backdrop to any schooling. Plus living on board enables you to be totally engage with your youngsters' teaching and development. The contrast in education that the children can receive when compared to over-crowded classrooms on land where teachers may waste valuable lesson time on disciplining disruptive students is another factor that's prompted many parents to make this choice.

'But what about socialising your child?' you might worry, if you're taking the route of home-schooling aboard. The first time we heard the phrase 'kid boat' was when sailing the beautiful San Blas islands. At Christmas time, it was announced over the local radio net that one of these islands was full, with absolutely no room for even one more vessel to squeeze into the anchorage. The reason? No fewer than 22 'kid boats' having met, grouped together, and organised themselves a huge Christmas gathering. A veritable mob of a flotilla had been formed. And that's just one anchorage, in one island group, a sure sign that such bonds are being made all over the place.

The marina that we proudly returned to with our baby girl was a veritable social whirl of birthday parties, poolside barbeques, dock gatherings and pot-lucks mostly aimed at families. These activities help the burgeoning friendships between the older children on board and it's quite common for little groups of them from a number of different boats to become inseparable pals. It appears that the crucial age at which the sailing life doesn't fully satisfy is around 15 years old, when the children's social ties are of such importance that even the long-term boat-schooled longs for the shared interactions of full-time high-school education in addition to their life afloat.



So what if you're not a member of this sailing kindergarten? Are your secret anchorages or favourite marinas due to be inundated by screaming children? All the older generation cruisers that we've met seem to be genuinely pleased by the recent influx of young blood into the sailing community. We've lost count of the number of occasions on which we've been told "we wish we'd started this when we were your age". Older sailing couples without kids or whose children have already grown up and started families of their own are also part of

our circle. They too have people back home that they're missing, and a little time with us is like a snatch of time with their own children and grandchildren as it's hard being so far from loved ones. Phonecalls, emails and skype chats all help, but being offered a real live baby to squeeze when your own grandchildren are

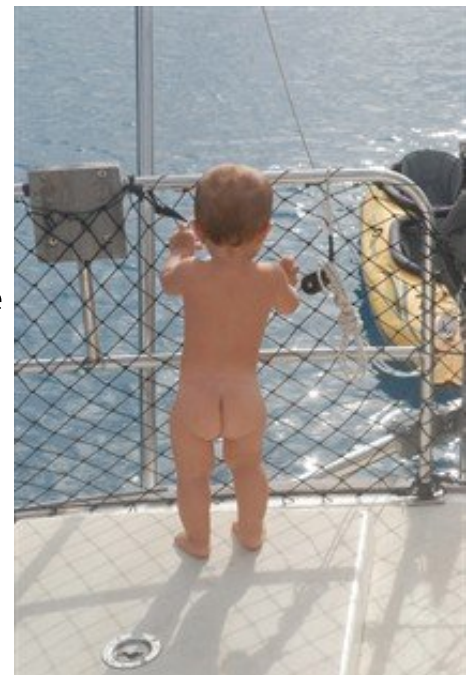
thousands of miles away can be a great substitute. Likewise, James and I get surrogate parents to ask advice from and even the odd bit of child-minding into the bargain. Yachting friends at our marina even threw us a baby shower and it was a great way for everyone to swap stories about when they first had kids.

Personally, we've found that sailing as a family so far has been hugely fulfilling. We've also ended up needing a lot less additional gear on board than we expected. 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 the trust in them 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.

It's true that the realities of sailing with a baby can be tough at times and it's made us adjust our sailing strategies and approach our cruising plans differently, thinking in terms of what will work best and be most comfortable for all of us. Our daughter now has her first ocean crossing under her belt and has even learned to walk despite fairly bouncy sea conditions. 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 we're enjoying it we can keep a happy balance of staying true to our cruising couple past, while being full-time parents as well.

Having tested the water and taken the plunge with having children aboard our new addition has redefined the way our boat is viewed by others. In fact, the cruising with kids way of life is so suiting us that we're even planning to have our second boat baby here in New Zealand. Just how long and how far we'll be sailing as a family we don't know but we're confident that a life afloat is working well for our young family and the other children in our cruising fleet encourage us that there are even more enjoyable times ahead. We can't wait to see how our littlest crew grow and love that by doing it this way neither one of us misses a moment of that journey.

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 summer. Now, over 18,000 miles and 32 countries since they set off you can follow their progress at www.water-log.com (<http://water-log.com/>)



All photos credited to Jessica Lloyd-Mostyn