



A cozy nap spot at anchor

# Water babies

There's an influx of children cruising the world, and it's both new and old

by Jessica Lloyd-Mostyn

**W**hen our families in the UK mentioned to others in conversation that we were expecting our first baby in Mexico while sailing around the world on our boat, the news was met with shock, awe and interest. Yet, while adapting to our new roles as parents afloat, we learned that we were one of no less than six international families with a baby born in 2013 on boats just in our little town alone in Banderas Bay, on the Pacific coast. It seems that the boating baby boom has started.

We sailing families in Banderas Bay were choosing a brief period of Mexican infancy for our little ones as foreigners. Coming from the U.S.,

the UK, the Netherlands, Canada and New Zealand, all of us were generally far from home in the land of mariachis and fish tacos. Yet all of us were considering our new arrivals as enhancing our sailing experience, all planning to continue cruising rather than pregnancy sending us back to reality as landlubbers. In fact, of the six new boat babies born, three were to first-time parents and five of the families were considering the Pacific crossing that year.

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.

So far on our travels we've come

into contact with families sailing with the whole spectrum of childhood represented: from infants to teenagers. The kids have all been, without exception, noticeably confident, bright and forthcoming, which had quite a great influence on us deciding that it was a good idea to have our own children aboard. They generally possess a manner of complete ease, clambering all over the deck like a troop of mast monkeys, reclining prone at the bow resembling a figurehead when the boat pulls into an anchorage, or standing strong and tall in a dinghy, impervious to the swell and spray.

Children are a universal icebreaker, from the first signs of a baby bump to traveling with an adolescent, there is suddenly an extra element to the conversation with officials when clear-

ing into a new country, when you're deciphering the menu at a restaurant or while 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. Plus, a big smile from a child can open doors anywhere.

The issue of what to do when cruising children reach school age is much more straightforward than might be assumed. In fact, the schooling options available to cruisers' offspring seem to be able to be negotiated with

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; either by administering the remote learning materials from an institution back home or by tutoring. This enables the savvy parent to choose a more instinctive curriculum generated by the circumstances of the journey itself: learning about Captain Cook, French colonial foreign policy, local breeds of reef shark and manta ray or the French language when sailing in Tahiti for example.



Being at the helm can be a family affair, photo @Shannon Barbara

a similar simplicity to their social interactions. Widespread Internet access in even the most remote islands allows for distance or correspondence learning to be an effective method of teaching, as you have the ability to email off tests and assessments for the relevant credits.

Kids can go into the local school in whatever town, or country you drop your hook for a time, which allows them to have immersion learning, meet other children and swiftly become more adept at a new language

Few could argue against what a stimulating learning environment a yacht has the potential to be, with its complexity of functions and design creating an incredibly rich backdrop to any schooling. Living on board enables you to be full-time parents, totally engaging with your youngsters' teaching and development. The contrast in education that the children can receive when compared to over-crowded classrooms where teachers may end up wasting valuable lesson time on disciplining disruptive students is another factor that has prompted many parents to attempt raising their families this way.



Children on a boat can drive you bananas

The logical next query is, "But what about socializing your child?" The key phrase here is "kid boat" and was a term that we learned when sailing the 350-odd beautiful islands in the San Blas, off the Caribbean coast of Panama. At Christmas time, one particular group of these islands was announced over the local radio net to be full to bursting, with absolutely no room for one more vessel to squeeze into the anchorage. The reason? No fewer than 22 kid boats having met, grouped together and organized



Jessica and Rocket in French Polynesia



A clamp-on high chair is perfect on a boat

themselves a 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 in Mexico with our baby girl was a social whirl of birthday parties, poolside barbecues, dock gatherings and potlucks, all aimed at families.

Now that we have joined the ranks of the kid boats, we're quick to notice

the tell-tale signs that there are little ones aboard—nappies drying on the line, pint-sized life jackets sitting in the dinghy. But the classic indicator is the netting around the guardrails or lifelines. 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 sailing families.

In general there are a lot more people taking to the seas these days, and living aboard a sailing yacht no longer needs to be a dream saved up for one's retirement. The reasons behind, "Why wait? Why not go sailing now?" vary immensely and it's even possible for many young families to continue to run their business, rent a property, or work for half of the year while on the move.

Actually, it's hard to discern how much of this increase is due to a rise in younger cruisers choosing to start their families while living afloat or if it's simply a matter of these people being far more able to communicate, share and broadcast their lifestyle 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.

Then there is also the issue of safety, which I would suppose is the thing 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 have some additional equipment because of sailing with an infant—lifejacket, harness, playpen, hammock, netting, etc—it hasn't meant a huge alteration to our safety approach.

There can be no denying that there are more and more youthful cruis-



Baby gear on board, we have a playpen we can use for her on passage

## 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 state you and your baby are at.**

## Products that work for us:

ers, and at the same time it's worth acknowledging that having babies and children on a sailboat is nothing new. We've met people who were born aboard who have now also chosen to raise the next generation at sea as well. These "anchor babies," now grown, seem to have had the love of the sea instilled in them and want to recreate that salty childhood that they experienced. And that's coming from one or two generations back, long before GPS, accurate weather forecasting, digital charting or Internet and satellite communication made our adventurous voyages significantly easier, capable of being handled by sailors who are learning as they go.

So what if you're not a member of this sailing kindergarten? Are your secret anchorages or favorite marinas due to be inundated by kid boats? To date all the cruisers that we've met of the older generation 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." Like us they too have families of their own that they're missing and a little time with us is like a snatch of time with their own children and grandchildren.

Now that we've redefined both how our boat is viewed by others and adjusted our sailing strategies because of our new addition, we're still confident that a life afloat is working well for our young family. Our daughter now has her first ocean crossing under her belt and has even learned to crawl despite fairly bouncy sea conditions. We can't wait to see how she grows and love that by doing it this way neither one of us misses a moment of that journey. We're happy to surrender to that kid boat label. Ok, I guess it's time to put up the netting now. **BWS**

*Jessica and James left England in 2011 aboard Adamastor, a Crossbow 42, intending to sail around the world in*

<b>LIFEJACKET AND HARNESS:</b> West Marine's infant neoprene PFD and their child's safety harness <a href="http://www.westmarine.com">www.westmarine.com</a>
<b>GUARDRAIL NETTING:</b> knotted nylon black UV treated netting by Gourock <a href="http://www.gourock.com">www.gourock.com</a>
<b>PLAYPEN AND HIGHCHAIR:</b> Phil & Ted's 'Traveller' playpen/travel crib and the 'Lobster' portable highchair <a href="http://www.philanteds.com/rw">www.philanteds.com/rw</a>
<b>BABY CARRIER:</b> Tula baby carrier <a href="http://www.tulababy carriers.com">www.tulababy carriers.com</a> or <a href="http://www.babytula.com">www.babytula.com</a>
<b>BABY SLEEP POD:</b> Enfant Terrible's 'Sleepyhead' bed pod/bed guard <a href="http://www.dockatot.com">www.dockatot.com</a> or <a href="http://www.enfant-terrible.se">www.enfant-terrible.se</a>
<b>CLOTH NAPPIES:</b> gDiapers cloth and biodegradable disposable nappies <a href="http://www.gnappies.com/">www.gnappies.com/</a> or <a href="http://www.gdiapers.com">www.gdiapers.com</a>

*a couple of years. After crossing the Atlantic and enjoying several months in the Caribbean they reached Panama, where they decided to extend their trip and also to start a family. Their daughter, Rocket, was born in Mexico and logged her first sea miles on their Pacific crossing in*

*March of 2014. They got married in Fiji and are currently in New Zealand where they are expecting their second child this July. Now, over three and a half years, 18,000 miles and 32 countries since they set off, you can follow their progress at [www.water-log.com](http://www.water-log.com).*



A turn at the helm for the youngest on board, photo @Kate Melville



Family snorkel time photo@Shannon Barbara

Dinghy kids photo@Sascha Smith

