

Jess Lloyd-Mostyn

Making the leap of buying a boat and setting off around the world is always a big deal. Jess reflects on how she came to the decision and how it has affected her and her family

Before we bought our boat I was actually pretty normal. It's now over 11 years since we pushed off from the dock at Falmouth and pointed our bow southwest and beyond. And, if you'd asked me even a year prior to that if I was likely to be doing what we have been happily doing for over a decade I would've thought it was crazy.

Buying a boat is, in itself, a leap of faith. It's a commitment to learning how to operate it, a hope of enjoyment and a promise to try. Choosing a liveaboard boat is another kind of leap as it's opting for an entire lifestyle rather than just looking at a sailboat as a hobby, vehicle or toy. It's the choice of making your home on the water. The next leap is deciding to actually go somewhere. Whether it's just hopping across the Channel or plying the world's oceans, moving your boat while living on it, does, I'll admit, take guts.

All three of these wildly optimistic and daring leaps came out of nowhere. Neither of us were from sailing families. Both of us had fulfilling and stimulating jobs in architecture, working in London, happily living a normal city life. You can just imagine how bonkers everyone thought we were when, after a wistful moment on the Cornish cliffs, we decided that we were going to buy a sailboat and sail round the world.

Day by day, mile by mile, the confidence in this left field decision has grown and flourished. We suddenly found ourselves able to carve out and design something else creative; a whole way of living for ourselves, which was utterly different from how we had expected the progression of our lives to go. We were always learning new things and meeting new people and questioning everything that we'd taken for granted as the standard and ordinary choices before. Suddenly the normal version of us that we'd detached ourselves from seemed strangely lacklustre and plain.

Buoyed by this revelatory novel kind of existence we decided to start a family and ended up having our three kids all as part of our cruising voyages; one in Mexico, one in New Zealand and one on a flying visit back to the UK. Home births and home-schooling became regular phrases in our bizarre vocabulary and the boat took on its most



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important role as being the only family home we've ever had. Our kids are boat kids. They are children who love climbing and testing their balance; who watch the water's surface to warn us of a sudden wake; they can happily scramble along the shoreline, following snails or collecting seaglass and shells. They have swum with turtles, snorkelled with giant mantas, paddleboarded with dolphins and sailed alongside whales. They know the anatomy of crabs and squid. Their passports are littered with stamps, they're familiar with words in different languages and are used to having and making friends all over the world. They are almost always together, a little tribe, a small monkey troop, navigating the conflicts and challenges of being both a team and an individual, working with each others' ages, strengths and abilities.

And this is what normal looks like for them, which is never lost on me, how their extraordinary start looks nothing like our childhoods did. For a long time they assumed everyone they knew or met also had a boat and it took a while to dawn on them that it's actually rather unusual. And, as they get older, they see the differences in how our friends and family back in the UK live, compared to how they do. Our trips back are full of jubilant reunions and endless play with cousins but we try to coordinate our moves for holidays and weekends, as they know that these kids have their own other foreign vocabulary of uniforms and homework, early starts and school nights, sensible haircuts and socks.

In turn we're well-aware that we've become the weird auntie and uncle, that rather eccentric boat family that becomes the source of gossip for other people. Sometimes I think our parents consider we've adopted an anti-conventionalist stance, that we're somehow actively trying to rebel or seek out ways not to conform. But that's not really it.

Swimming against the tide is always a challenge but it can sometimes take you to unexpected places, down paths you never could have foreseen, embracing the unknowns and what-ifs about life. A boat can allow you to visit all sorts of places and afford you the freedom to question everything that you previously took to be true. And the future ahead is simply to navigate, steer and enjoy the journey.



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Jess and James left the UK in 2011 in their Crossbow 42 and have sailed halfway round the world, growing their crew en route. Follow their journey at water-log.com

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