





All at Sea

Blue water cruising can be idyllic but what happens when kids come along? Jess Lloyd-Mostyn explains



“And what’s your occupation?” The man at Heathrow Airport looks away from his screen and enquiringly into my face as I hesitate over my answer. For a moment my mind is blank, and I turn to look at my husband and family. It is, of course, a simple question. It’s just that my answer may not be quite the response he’s after:

“We’re adventurers”.

Back in 2010 I had never even set foot on a sailboat. I was working for an architectural practice in London, living with my boyfriend and enjoying the pleasures of city-paced existence. Things were good and we were happy so it’s strange to think that all it took was a trip down to Cornwall to change our lives forever. Yet it was during a wander along a seaside cliff path that I looked out over the water and murmured that it would be such a great idea to buy a boat and go off sailing.

It’s funny how quickly a wild suggestion can become a reality. Because, somehow or other, we did

manage to do just that. We researched and viewed and eventually found exactly the boat we wanted. We also trained and practiced and convinced ourselves that we understood a thing or two about sailing. Less than a year after first even toying with the thought of it, we set sail from the UK. During the first year we learned so much and covered a lot of ground. We sailed the English Channel and the Bay of Biscay; hopped down along the coast of Western Europe to Morocco and the Canary Islands; crossed the Atlantic ocean and then spent a year circling the Caribbean.

And then we decided to change the

ABOVE
(left) Alan and Jess on the day they left England; (right) A dreamy blue water anchorage at Nuku-Hiva

plan entirely.

We’d never said it categorically but my partner, James, and I had intended to live and cruise on our boat and sail around the world in “a couple of years”. And we had both assumed that upon our return from our boating adventures we would do all the normal things like go back to work, get married and start a family. But another notion had been seeded in us that first year at sea and, without realising, it had begun germinating at the back of both our brains. “What happens if we don’t stop?”. The two things weren’t mutually exclusive: we could still start a family while sailing round the world.

The old landlubber picture in my head of what our life would look like as we prepared to have a baby included maternity leave, decorating the nursery, buying adorable little onesies and seeing my family doctor for regular check-ups. The reality was that my pre-baby to do list included spending three months travelling over two and a half thousand miles from Panama to Banderas Bay, navigating a foreign medical system to find a birth centre in a language we were only just learning all while preparing our home for the onset of





storms and hurricanes.

Our daughter, Rocket, was born in Mexico in 2013. But strangely we weren't alone. The marina that we proudly returned to with our baby girl was a veritable social whirl of birthday parties, poolside barbecues, dock gatherings and pot-lucks all aimed at families. The cruising community there threw us a baby shower, the marina manager became a doting extra auntie, and we soon learned about several other families on yachts who'd just had or were expecting babies in the same year.

We were new parents, on the other side of the world from our family and home culture, adjusting to yet

another aspect of this new lifestyle for ourselves with complete freedom to do so. There was no baby "gear" needed for us: no cot, carseat or buggy. What we had almost accidentally stumbled across was a way for us to both be with our baby all of the time, thanks to living on the boat. The yacht was remarkably baby-proof and suddenly had a dual purpose as it was now equal parts vehicle and family home.

That first year of cruising had made our already strong partnership transform into a solid and supportive team. We'd had to rely on each other's strength and judgement in order to cover all those ocean miles and this new challenge was no different. The fluid nature of the daily boating rhythms meant that we could take turns with the baby, allowing each other enough time to take naps and breaks and anything else we needed to stay happy and balanced.

Fortunately, we were finding that we were having a lot of good days. In fact, it all worked so well, that we never even considered that the beginning of our family life might signal the end of our travels. We left the Pacific coast when Rocket was 8 months old and she sailed across all of the South Pacific with us, covering over 7,000 miles. We took on an extra crew-member for ocean passages in order to have enough hands on board for watches. But the everyday life, dawdling at anchor and exploring beaches, villages and towns inland, was much the same. Except of course that we were now greeted with the expansive smiles and exceptionally warm welcomes that babies elicit.

That South Pacific season was full of beaches, reefs and snorkelling. We saw whales, sharks and rays and cruised countless glorious atolls. It was full of major life milestones for our family crew too. We had our longest passage at sea, sailing 28 days non-stop from Mexico to the Marquesas; Rocket had her first birthday in Bora-Bora; we even got married in Fiji. And then we expanded the crew once more, this time in New Zealand with the arrival of our son, Indigo.

After four years at sea, tucked safely below the cyclone belt, we used →



Strategies for life on board as a family:

- A good fitting lifejacket and / or harness for everyone on board appropriate to your kind of sailing are essential. It helps if you allow your little ones to be involved in choosing.
- A playpen or baby pod can be useful to keep your baby safe down below when both parents are needed on deck. A baby sling or soft-structured carrier are great for times when they have to be on deck with you but you need to keep your hands free.
- Invest in the highest quality lifeline 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.
- A clamp-on high chair is useful for keeping them secure at sea as well as for meal times.
- Keeping small fry warm and dry on any sailing journey is the first step to making them feel comfortable and happy at sea. Choose good quality, well-fitting wets and waterproofs designed for sailing, as the benefits will pay off.
- Ask other boat families what has worked for them. There is a huge community of sailing families out there, even Facebook groups like "Kids 4 Sail" (facebook.com/groups/Kids4Sail/).
- There's a great book all about it called "Voyaging with kids", written by parents from three different cruising families (voyagingwithkids.com). Also there is the classic "Kids in the cockpit" by Jill Schinas (jilldickinschinas.com).
- Full-time parenting without the surrounding noise of well-meaning friends and family may make you feel that traditional parenting practices are no longer relevant to your circumstances. From our position as attachment parents we really recommend "Unconditional parenting" by Alfie Kohn (alfiekohn.org) as well as Dr Sears's "The Baby Book" (askdrsears.com) as a great resource.
- A growing family doesn't mean you have to outgrow your boat. You can still meet the demands of higher consumption in your family on a smaller vessel by installing extra solar panels, adding a non-power hungry form of self-steering, like a Hydrovane (hydrovane.com) or a portable petrol powered watermaker, like a Rainman (rainmandesal.com), without the need for getting a generator to keep the creature comforts that make everyone on board happy.
- Don't think that you have to stop sailing. Adapt your plans to what feels comfortable.



Products that work for us

- Lifejackets:
- We have several different pfds for the kids from brands like RFD, WestMarine, Salus and Plastimo. They're all very similar, just check weight limitations and that infant ones have an extra large collar support for their head.
- Harnesses:
- We really like Baltic harnesses for using on very small children (baltic.se). Edelrid's Fraggel (edelrid.de) climbing harnesses are great once they're a bit bigger.
- Guardrail netting:
- We use knotted nylon black UV treated netting by Gourock (gourock.com), designed for batting cages. It withstands the sun far better than standard marine netting.
- Playpen and highchair:
- Phil & Ted's 'Traveller' playpen / travel crib and the 'Lobster' portable highchair (philandteds.com)
- Baby carrier:
- Again, we have several onboard such as Tula, Ergo and even simple bits of cloth from Guatemala. The main thing is that it should be comfortable to wear for baby and parent.
- Baby sleep pod:
- Sleepyhead deluxe and grand bed pods (sleepyheadwebshop.com).
- Cloth nappies:
- gDiapers cloth and biodegradable disposable nappies (gdiapers.com).
- Sailing clothing:
- Nipper Skipper (nipperskipper.co.uk) is a great source for waterproof, swim and UV wear for little crew. Also Didrikson (didriksons.com) design kids foul weather gear that has a special extend size system, giving them an extra long life for growing children.



all of New Zealand as our watery kindergarten. The Hauraki Gulf and the Bay of Islands are easy cruising grounds: close enough to the hustle and infrastructure of the city to cater for all a family's needs but also scattered with little uninhabited islands and secluded bays.

There was another voice to be heard now as we had someone else actively engaging with our cruising. Any sailing trip meant explaining to Rocket what we were doing and why we were doing it, all without it becoming an endless list of do's and don'ts. The short hops, day-sailing and changing anchorages frequently in the islands helped us all to get into a routine. We live mostly at anchor

so our trips ashore became a well-practiced sequence of getting the tiddlers in and out of lifejackets, smothered in sunscreen and hats, doused in bug repellent and with wetsuits to hand.

Indigo, in turn, was a lot more physical at a younger age than his sister had been, not content to cosy up while strapped to me at the helm. So we adopted harnesses and tethers for both of them whenever they were in the cockpit underway. This new practice was something that we hoped would come easily to Rocket given that it wasn't a rule that solely applied to her. Plus, she now had a playmate, so if the two little ones were content to be downstairs and

keep each other occupied during a passage, it could make things on deck much simpler for us. Sounds logical but most of us know that young children don't necessarily think about things in those terms.

Nevertheless, we managed to steer a way through the murky waters of sailing with two little crew, so it wasn't long before we started feeling the call of the winds and sea beckoning us out to further challenges. By the time cyclone season was over we were on the move again, sailing our most remote and uncommon route so far. We left New Zealand and cruised through Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, the outer atolls of Papua New Guinea and then onto Indonesia. It was a stretch that required entirely new techniques of navigation for us, using satellite imagery combined with a GPS, as these weren't the sorts of places that there are accurate cruising guides for.

We also had to trade for food. We'd offer items like rice, sugar, flour, fish-hooks, matches, soap, tinned fish, crackers, second-hand clothes, books and medicines. In exchange we would receive papayas, pineapples, coconuts, bananas, oranges, limes, plantain, soursop, starfruit, fish, squid, crayfish, chillies, watercress, cabbage, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, peppers, nuts and more. There were countless funny negotiations in broken English about whether both parties felt satisfied with the swap, if we'd got the amounts right. The kids got used to people canoeing up to our boat and presenting various items.

All too soon we arrived into the towns and cities of Indonesia and were thrown back to the more normal way of getting groceries. We were also dealing with entirely different weather systems, monsoon patterns and infamously changeable equatorial conditions. Big seas, inconsistent winds and sudden onset squalls may not have been our chosen order from this vast country's menu but it's what we were given so we had to find a way of coping with it in order to sail on to our next planned long stop in Lombok.

From there we staged a journey back to our native UK, a trip that we →

ABOVE
(L-R) Rocket at the bow; Rocket's harness set up; Nappies on the line as baby Rocket takes a well earned break



'Sailing full-time while expanding our family has meant that we are all always together'

try to make every two years. Like our previous pauses, this location in Indonesia is unaffected by tropical storms so the yacht would sit quite safely while we visited the rest of the family back home. And on this particular trip the crew list would be added to yet again as our little girl, Autumn, was born while we were in London.

With three young sailors to think about, we're suddenly outnumbered and don't always have enough hands for everyone. It's now that we appreciate the teamwork demonstrated by the older two, as they continually surprise us with how helpful they are with their baby

sister. When it works it seems to work really, really well, which is of course balanced out by the times that it goes spectacularly wrong! Does any parent relish the times their baby is teething, fussy, grumpy or unsettled? Or how about young children shouting, whingeing or fighting? No. But, like any good sailors, we're learning, we're trying and it's keeping us happy.

There are some tell-tale signs that you're a 'kid boat': the nappies drying on the line, the pint-sized life jackets sitting in the dinghy and the netting around the guardrails. It's also so much easier for cruising families to communicate, share and broadcast their lifestyles 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. The reasons behind 'why wait? why not go sailing now' vary immensely and it's even possible to continue to run a business, rent a property, or work for half of the year while on the move.

Certainly it's more of a challenge, as we have to explain and discuss each move to an increasingly thought-provoking audience. Yet this engagement with our kids, and the holistic nature of our family life, is so far proving to be fulfilling and

ABOVE
(left) A tranquil spot off Lombok, Indonesia; (right) Indigo rides the boom

BELOW
Adamastor at anchor off Lombok

satisfying for all of us. It's the idea of everyone on board taking pleasure from what we're doing that has become the paramount goal of this journey – rather than circumnavigation as we had originally intended.

Sailing full-time while expanding our family has meant that we are all always together, 24 hours a day, while travelling and maintaining the boat. There's been no maternity leave, childcare, no babysitters or grandparents to hand. Our approach for surviving has been to relax into it, embracing the non-traditional parenting that it allows us to explore, and simply not sweating the small stuff. It's rewarding and gratifying to share this kind of adventure together as well as being just plain fun.

So, instead of saying all that to the man at Heathrow, instead of pouring out the story of all these amazing experiences from the years at sea, I chose to simply smile at him and say "I'm a stay-at-home mum".

Which, incidentally, is also the truth.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jess and James left the UK in 2011 aboard "Adamastor" and are still sailing. Their travels have taken them to 36 countries, across 2 oceans and over 26,000 miles so far, with their three children born en route. You can follow their journey at www.water-log.com.

