



CHARTER 2019

HANDS-ON SAILOR

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS *and* TECHNIQUES

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① KIDS ON BOARD

Taking a vacation under sail with pint-size crewmembers? Ensure a good time is had by all by following these tips. BY BRIANNA RANDALL

SEAMANSHIP

Mom, come look at the beautifuls!” our 4-year-old son, Talon, called. I smiled at his unintended use of the plural. Since we were anchored off a deserted island in the Bahamas, there were indeed many lovely sights to behold.

Putting the lid on a pot of simmering chicken and rice, I headed to the bow of the 40-foot catamaran to see what he was excited about: the first stars peeking out of the periwinkle sky just opposite the fiery glow left behind by the sun. Mirroring the silver twilight, the shallow water of the Exuma Cays rippled toward the horizon in endless shades of turquoise.

We had chartered a brand-new Bali 4.1 from Dream Yacht Charter in association with its partner Navtours. It was our first night out, and we had the “beautifuls” completely to ourselves. We’d chosen to anchor off Big Sail Rock in the remote northern end of the Exuma chain.

My brother-in-law, Brent, handed me a rum cocktail as



Going on a family charter? Consider adding to your crew. Having another kid aboard to play with made the trip more fun for both Talon, 4, and Willow, 7.

our crew of three kids and four adults enjoyed the fading sunset. Following our first rule of thumb for chartering with young kids, we had brought along friends. Our almost 1-year-old daughter,

Lyra, tottered around the inset seating area on the bow holding my husband’s hand, while our friend Kevin supervised Willow, his 7-year-old, and Talon as they took turns swinging like monkeys from

the jib sheet.

TOTS INTOW

My husband and I are avid sailors and, as one friend jokes, “island connoisseurs.” We’ve sailed over 10,000 miles across

oceans, rivers and lakes, often as crew aboard others' yachts. Once we had kids, we began chartering to more easily access the tropical settings we crave.

Sailing has become my favorite way to bond as a family—no television, no traffic, and no to-dos to distract us from each other. Just the sound of the surf, the delight in discovering different beaches each day, and the intrinsic rhythm of waking with the sun and falling asleep under the stars. As a family, we've cruised in the British Virgin Islands, Southern California, the Bahamas and the Kingdom of Tonga.

But that's not to say it's all rainbows when young kids are

aboard. Quite the opposite, in fact. Children—especially young ones—make sailing adventures more complicated. Yet once we're out on the water, the work feels well worth the rewards. Our kids thrive while cruising. Their capabilities grow exponentially as we explore new shorelines. Meanwhile, my husband and I continue to learn what works and what doesn't while chartering with children in tow. Here are a few tips we've learned along the way.

1. KIDS AS CAPTAINS

We made sure the kids were invested in the Exumas vacation from the get-go by including them as we planned our weeklong itinerary. They loved learning how to read the charts, and pointed out their favorite pictures in guidebooks. Talon decided to start a list of the fish and birds we saw while underway.

On day two, we raised the sails to head south from Big Sail Rock to the Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park. With life jackets on and sun hats secured, Willow and Talon took turns "steering" once the autopilot was set. My husband, Rob, showed them how to read the compass and how to use the binoculars to check out islands or other boats.

When they got bored of the captain's station, the children went below to play a make-believe game where they were stingrays in search of fish.

2: JUMP RIGHT IN

We made it to Shroud Cay by midafternoon, anchoring 50 yards offshore with miles of shallow water and white sand in all directions. I could see why NASA astronaut Scott Kelly said that the swirling blues and greens around the Exumas was his favorite view from space. Swimming back to the boat, I passed Kevin paddling his daughter over in the kayak we'd rented along with the catamaran. Willow was draped crosswise over the middle, hanging her mask-and-snorkel-clad head in the water. I heard her exclaiming in delight,



Fishing became a favorite activity for everyone aboard, and resulted in some excellent meals (top). The kids enjoyed dinghy and swimming excursions (above).

calling out a water-burbled account of what she saw. "Dad, there's a giant blue-yellow fish! Ooh, and pretty striped ones!"

I couldn't wait to show Talon the marvels beneath the surface. We'd learned from a previous charter to make sure he practiced wearing his goggles and life jacket in our city's indoor pool before we left for our sailing trip. This helped him feel more comfortable in the water since he hadn't been swimming all winter.

3. PROVISION LIKE A KID

The next day we took the dinghy and kayak up a mangrove-fringed cut to the other side of Shroud Cay, navigating the saltwater "river" as the tide came in. I sat in

the kayak with Talon, riding the wake of the dinghy as it towed us, an adventure in itself. Renting the kayak as an add-on during the charter was well worth it because the kids could even paddle it themselves.

When we reached the beach facing the outer reef, the adults jumped into the waves to bodysurf, then took turns jogging or walking to stretch our legs. The kids entertained themselves by commandeering washed-up plastic jugs to build castles, dams and creeks. While I was glad they were having fun, it was depressing to see the trash littering the high-tide line. We made sure to bring what we could back with us to the boat for proper disposal.

Back on our catamaran that



The abundant beaches and sandbars of the Bahamas' Exuma Cays provided plenty of places for kids to explore (top). Rent a kayak or an SUP if you're chartering with a crowd (above).

afternoon, I mixed up some sundowner snacks and cocktails. From past experience, we'd learned to provision with special nonalcoholic drinks (sparkling apple juice and ginger ale) and the kids' favorite treats (crackers, gummy bears and dried mangos) so happy hour was something everyone looked forward to. In fact, we doubled the total amount of snacks we thought we might need since easy-to-grab food for the children is helpful while underway or adventuring ashore.

4. PACKING LESS IS MORE

We set out for Allen's Cay the following morning in search of the island's famed subspecies

of Bahamian rock iguanas. I plopped the baby into the high-chair next to Talon and Willow, distracting her with fruit and cheese while I took a turn at the helm. The collapsible, 1-pound seat clamped onto the dining table turned out to be the best item I'd packed. Lyra was a fast crawler, and loved climbing and standing as she learned to walk—it was a relief to have somewhere safe to contain her while underway.

With the sun hot overhead, the kids opted to listen to audiobooks and draw fish in the shade of the cabin while we sailed. Rather than bulky toys, we'd brought activities such as a deck of cards, coloring books, and a Frisbee for the beach. We also packed

fishing gear, which was popular with the whole crew once outside the Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park's boundaries. The youngsters helped reel in the line while trolling, and decided that the barracuda and a "ginormous" grouper were the most interesting quarry we'd caught. At anchor, they enjoyed casting off the stern or tossing in cracker crumbs to watch fish rise.

As I steered us around the corner into Allen's Cay's anchorage, we all oobed at the scene: A half-moon beach ringed a calm aquamarine bay just big enough for a few sailboats. Green foliage gave way to coral headlands on either end of the mile-long cay. One tall palm waved from the center of the beach.

While the guys went spearfishing in search of dinner, I headed to shore with the rest of the crew to chase the resident reptiles. The 3-foot-long iguanas were surprisingly nimble as they whirled their dinosaurlike bodies across the sand. To cool off, we waded in the shallows in search of a unique shell to add to our growing collection. On the way back to the boat, I noticed that the neighboring catamaran had an inflatable raft tied off its stern. I made a mental note to bring a floating toy the next time we chartered.

After dinner that evening, Talon and Willow disappeared into their respective berths after a whispering session. They emerged giggling, sporting layers of their parents' clothes. "I'm Dad!" squealed Talon from beneath Rob's salt-crusted hat. Willow paraded around in her dad's snorkel and mask, a pair of shorts hanging upside down on her head, socks on each hand.

"Finally! All those extra clothes I packed are coming in handy," Kevin joked.

Buoyed by our laughter, the kids scurried into new costumes, adding in some dance moves and singing into microphones made of impromptu performance.

Afterward we all headed

DURING THE TRIP

- Rent an extra "dinghy" such as a stand-up paddleboard or kayak for the kids to paddle, and consider bringing an inflatable toy they can use at anchor.
- Let them "captain" by steering the boat, and using the compass and binoculars.
- Keep a running list of all the fish and birds they see during the trip.
- Start a shell collection on board for the week (returning it to the sea at the end).
- Try to keep sailing time to two- or three-hour chunks to give the crew plenty of time to play while at anchor. Break up longer sailing days by picking up a mooring or anchoring for lunch so everyone can swim or run around on the beach.
- Consider creating a scavenger hunt, whether it lasts the whole week or for an afternoon ashore.

to the bow to stargaze. Talon found the Big Dipper; Willow pointed out Orion. Then they created their own patterns in the stars, tracing stingrays and mermaids among the wash of lights a universe away.

The final night of our charter, we played Rose and Thorn during dinner so everyone could share their favorite and not-so-favorite parts of the trip.

"My best rose was when Uncle Brent brought me a sea star from the bottom so I could touch it," Talon exclaimed.

"I liked all the cool nooks and crannies on this boat for climbing and hiding," Willow said. "And chasing the iguanas!"

Rob said his "rose" was watching Talon learn to paddle the kayak all by himself. Kevin's was sharing in his daughter's amazement as she snorkeled for the first time.

No one, it turned out, could think of a single thorn.

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BEFORE YOU GO

- Invite friends—for everyone!
- Include the kids when planning your itinerary.
- Look at photos and videos of the places you'll visit and animals you might see.
- Help them practice wearing life jackets, goggles, and snorkel and mask at a local pool. Make sure to bring these items with you because charter companies don't usually have kid-size gear.
- Add nonalcoholic happy hour drinks plus plenty of snacks and special treats to your provisioning list.
- If you have a baby or toddler, bring a collapsible highchair or small tent/playpen. Some parents also bring a tether or harness to keep young kids safe while underway.
- Less is more in terms of packing clothing for kids, especially for the tropics: sun-protective swimwear (one outfit), dry daywear (two outfits), and cozy nightwear (two outfits).
- Bring a lot of waterproof sunscreen, two sun hats per kid (since one might blow away), and bug repellent.
- Avoid bulky or easy-to-lose toys, and instead pack activities such as audiobooks, a coloring book, fishing gear and/or a Frisbee.