



FAMILY AFLOAT

FIONA HARPER meets a family of four whose home is a yacht that has taken them across the South Pacific Ocean

Family life for Christina and Peter Palmer has always revolved around the sea and the freedom of an ocean-going lifestyle. They've been cruising for more than 20 years, first as a young couple who met in the Caribbean, then later as a family sailing throughout the South Pacific. Their two children, Cameron, 16, and Tara, 13, have grown up at sea, gaining a unique insight

into different cultures and an acute understanding of the privileges they enjoy living a nomadic, yet safe and secure lifestyle.

This jetset family are all avid outdoor enthusiasts who also love kite surfing, scuba diving and surfing. With an 80ft yacht as their floating home, they spent much of 2020 sitting out the COVID-19 pandemic in New

Zealand, apart from four months in Fiji when a COVID-safe 'blue zone' opened to cruising yachts. While their lifestyle may sound indulgent, there is a lot more to the sailing life than simply dropping the anchor and breaking out the lifeboards. "In 26 years of travelling with kids, the upshot has always far outweighed any downsides," says Christina, who was born in Germany. >

Clockwise from top: Tara plotting position, Meeting the locals at Fulaga in Fiji, Cameron kayaking off Fulaga Island in Fiji



One of the disadvantages is that Tara suffers from crankiness, with various remedies trialed to counteract the debilitating effects. Christina says they've recently found a solution which has made an enormous difference to Tara's enjoyment of long ocean passages. But the family has made other compromises to enjoy a nomadic life. "When the kids were really little the biggest challenge was not having grandparents around to give us that occasional break," Christina says. "We left Central America with an 11-month-old, and while I might not have caught much sleep on long ocean passages, I got to spend months and months with my little family experiencing stunning and remote parts of the world."

While many children experienced home schooling for the first time during the pandemic, Cameron and Tara's entire education has been through remote learning via a correspondence school. "Utilising correspondence school means the kids get their own teachers and

learning materials, while I oversee in the capacity of supervisor," Christina says. "Their schooling is entirely online-based, which luckily isn't an issue in 2021 when Wi-Fi is available just about anywhere. The only area we ever had an issue was in the Lau Group in Fiji, however in those situations our kids pre-work and catch up after we are back in Wi-Fi range. Teachers are very understanding though and appreciate what incredible experiences our kids get to have, which is an education in itself. Our kids are usually keen to get schoolwork done and 'out of the way' first thing in the morning before it gets too hot and that gives them the opportunity to enjoy all that this lifestyle has to offer for the rest of the day. It's not uncommon for

our son to wake us at 6:30am to turn the Wi-Fi on so that he can get his schoolwork done and go kiting, surfing or freediving by lunchtime."

With a growing community of families adopting a floating lifestyle, finding other children to socialise with has also become easier. "There is an ever-increasing fleet of boats with kids, so even when there's no swell or wind the kids will all get together and hang out, just like we used to when we were their age," Christina says. "The difference is they don't have to be driven anywhere, they just take the dinghy and get to do it in a tropical paradise. Does it get any better than that? While the teenage years can be a challenging time, I think this is probably the best time yet,

travelling and sailing with the kids, as they are now able to participate in just about everything this life has to offer. Whether it's kiteboarding, surfing, free diving, hiking — the kids have really gotten into all those things themselves now, which makes it so much fun to share those passions with them. What's even more incredible is watching them walk past their devices because they would rather get outside. I feel that this opens them to a different kind of perspective on the world and life itself."

As well as the opportunity to spend quality family time together, another advantage is experiencing foreign cultures and becoming fully immersed in the communities they visit. With Cameron and Tara expected to stand watch and contribute to all aspects of running the

yacht, they have developed skills far beyond what can be learnt in a classroom.

"They learn to 'navigate' the ins and outs of travelling in foreign countries, to budget, how to get food, and that it's not as simple as parking your car and strolling into the supermarket and having everything available," Christina says. "They help select, carry and pack away the food, and to prepare meals, not by recipe but by whatever is available. They learn how to gather and catch their own food. They learn to conserve on a boat — whether that's water, electricity or supplies — as well as hands on things like how to maintain a boat, an engine, how to sail and to navigate."

"They also get to experience different cultures and understand how lucky

we really are. Clean drinking water and sanitation aren't a given for everyone. We usually bring clothing items, schoolbooks etc to the Pacific Islands and make it a point for our kids to experience the gift of giving, while getting to see, first-hand, how little some need to be happy."

Growing up in an alternative lifestyle has given the Palmers the opportunity to not only learn and grow together as a family but to set the children up in life with a well-rounded appreciation for the world they inhabit.

"I look at my kids and believe they are more grounded and easy-going because of how they've grown up," Christina says. "They don't get flustered by the unknown, they make friends and connections easily and have practical and enquiring minds."

With just a few more years before the kids start branching out on their own, the Palmers plan on sailing the Pacific Islands together for as long as they can. "Cameron is already trying to get work in the marine industry," she says. "There's a good chance that in a few years' time he may be anchored on his own boat in the same anchorage!" ☺

Follow the Palmer family's adventures at camarasailing.com, at [@camasailing](https://www.instagram.com/camasailing) on Instagram or on YouTube at [@camasailing](https://www.youtube.com/c/camasailing)

Clockwise from main image: Tara launching the kite to go kiteboarding, fishing in Fiji, sailing in Fiji's Lau group

