

CROSSING THE ATLANTIC

Before you go off on a holiday, the normal thing to do would be to plan how and when, right? But have you ever wondered what would happen if you decided to just leave everything and go off and do what you've always really wanted to do? Well, due to unforeseen circumstances, that's exactly what my family and I were able to do.

I was working in a large multinational company as a cost accountant when, due to cutbacks, I found myself without a job. Having discussed it thoroughly with my family, we decided to just take off on a 35-foot yacht we had bought the year before for our holidays. It just so happened that at the same time the annual Atlantic rally was setting sail for the Caribbean. We decided to be impulsive and give it a try. The rally takes approximately a month, and for at least a month before we set sail there were lots of details to take care of. Since I had no job, we made up our minds to make the most of this opportunity and take a whole year off. But first, we had to consider our kids' education, because they would miss a school year. Luckily, my wife, who is a teacher, undertook their education.

Many would think our greatest concerns would be the winning of the race. However, this wasn't the case. We were worried about illnesses, especially with regard to the children. The demands of sailing would be enough without having to take care of a sick child. That's why we took a well-equipped first aid kit with us. We read and collected as much information as we could to prepare ourselves for this long trip, and, as we'd only been as far as Cherbourg before, we knew we were only amateurs when it came to transatlantic voyages.

On joining the rally, to our amazement, we discovered we were one of the smallest boats, and that very few people had children on board. The most dangerous part of the voyage was the actual Atlantic crossing itself – from the Canary Islands to the Bahamas – and for that we took on an experienced seaman. That part takes 28 days, so on the 14th day you're exactly halfway, which means it's gonna take two weeks to reach land whichever direction you choose to sail in. This was a rather frightening idea, especially as our radio didn't have long range facilities, which basically left it ineffectual. However, we completed the crossing without mishap. But I must say on reaching the Bahamas we ran into some pretty bad weather, which meant life jackets and frayed nerves. The entrance to Georgetown harbour, being only 30 feet wide, is not the easiest place to manoeuvre a boat when you have to battle against huge waves.

The end of the rally was celebrated with lots of festivities in which we joined wholeheartedly. We were thrilled to have completed our mission. We had done what we had set out to do. After a week or so, we leisurely sailed on to Florida, having the luxury to appreciate the marine life. And we were even accompanied by a group of dolphins part of the way. The children were impressed even more by them than by Disney World which we visited on reaching Miami. I must say it took us some time to settle down after our little adventure.