



Grand-prix cruising

Could top pro sailor **Ian Walker** cope with life in the slow lane? He took time out from a TP52 regatta to go on a family cruising holiday around Mallorca with The Moorings.

When I told my old International 14 crew that I was going to go on a cruising holiday with the family he laughed and said I would never be able to do it. I have a bit of a reputation for living life at 100 miles an hour – I couldn't even cruise out and back from a race, let alone for a whole week!

But deep down I have wanted to go cruising for a while. So with the kids now aged three and six – and, crucially, able to swim – I took the plunge and suggested a cruising holiday to my wife, Lisa. The idea wasn't thrown out of court so I set about making it work: if this was going to lead to a lifetime of happy sailing holidays the first trip had to be relaxing and, above all, incident-free. We both felt it would be fun to go with another family so we needed a boat with enough space and comfort for two couples and four children aged six and under.

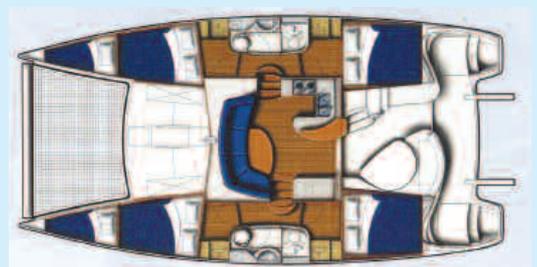
Choices, choices

We wanted sunny weather and light winds, while the fact that we only had one week ruled out a

long-haul flight. We settled on Majorca as it tied in with a TP52 regatta I was competing in – the fact I knew the waters off Palma pretty well helped sway me, as did the availability of flights from Southampton and Bournemouth.

We probably could have arranged a private charter, but for our first cruising holiday we wanted the security and experience of a large charter firm. The Moorings have a base in the main marina in Palma, good choice of boats and a very good reputation.

As I liked the idea of a boat that didn't heel over and scare all the non-sailors we went straight for a cat. I have never sailed one before but I figured it couldn't be that different to any other boat. I knew that if the holiday was going to be a success we would need a bit of comfort so the 40ft Moorings 4000 seemed to fit the bill – each family of four would effectively have a hull to themselves with two double cabins and a heads/shower. The brochure said it slept 10 so that sounded about right for eight of us.



With Palma marina only 10 minutes from the airport there was little to worry about in the way of logistics. Everything was done to make our lives easy – the yacht comes supplied with fuel, water, linen, towels, snorkelling equipment and of course a tender and outboard. As an optional extra you could also order supplies to save the need for a big shop on arrival. We took advantage of this and also ordered extra safety netting to stop the kids from slipping through the guardrails. With hindsight this was an expensive (£102) and unnecessary extra as we didn't let the kids out of the cockpit without an adult, but it did provide some peace of mind as two of the four children couldn't swim. Our boat was only one year old and it was immaculately clean and in good working order.

Skipper's briefing

All I can say is that I'm glad I took notes! Herve from The Moorings talked me through the key things I needed to use – he also showed me all the things that were likely to go wrong. The key issues were fuel, engine, water supply, waste disposal, power/battery charging, GPS, autohelm, anchoring and of course the sails. Even dealing with the checklist was quite daunting and I was beginning to realise that being the only person who had the faintest idea about sailing onboard was going to make things tricky – I was beginning to wish a few of the lads who sail the TP52 with me were coming too! I was glad to see there were some paper charts and a few books on anchorages and places to visit. Herve was very helpful so we also tapped his brain for all the best places; he was relaxed, knowledgeable and didn't mind stupid questions.

Under way

Once we had made a passage plan and bought a few more supplies (including the evening's takeaway curry!) we set off. At least we tried to. My first test was getting the 40ft cat out of the



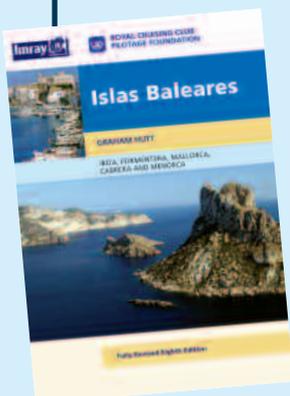
Left and below A week spent jumping in and out of the tender and swimming from the back of the yacht saw the children's water confidence grow.



PHOTOS IAN WALKER

Charter FAQs

Right Get a good pilotage book do a little planning before you arrive.



42ft space it had been parallel parked in on a lee shore against the concrete dock. I was more nervous doing this with lots of people watching than any start in the America's Cup. This was the first time I realised how good catamarans were – in a monohull I would have had no hope but with an engine and propeller in each hull manoeuvring in tight spaces was no sweat. Herve's top tip of not using the rudder and just using the twin engines was a godsend.

We only motored four miles to a little anchorage called Las Illetas between Palma and Puerta Portals. I soon realised that I had no idea what the etiquette was for anchoring: I decided that as a catamaran we would draw less so the best thing to do was motor inside everyone else and take the best spot near the shore – this strategy seemed to work quite well and only lead to one heated exchange in the week!

It wasn't a great night's sleep as I spent the first half of the night wondering if the anchor would hold and the second half was noisy as the land breeze swung us round and the swell slapped continually under the back of the hulls, right where our cabin was – I would have to find more sheltered anchorages with no swell in future. We couldn't go far the next day as I still had a TP52 race to do so we motored round to Puerta Portals and the family spent the day on the beach whilst I finished the MedCup regatta. We spent the night off Puerto Portals, which meant we could enjoy a nice meal in the marina.

Under sail

Leaving at 0945hrs on day three I had planned a nice gentle crossing over to Cala Pi, nine miles across the Bay of Palma, before the sea breeze picked up. I hadn't bargained for a south-easterly

Do you have to be qualified to charter a boat? With The Moorings you have to fill out a sailing experience resume online – no formal certification is required

Biggest disappointment? Not going to Isla Cabrera and not seeing any dolphins.

Best bit of the holiday? Motoring at sunset with the kids asleep and a glass of Rioja in hand.

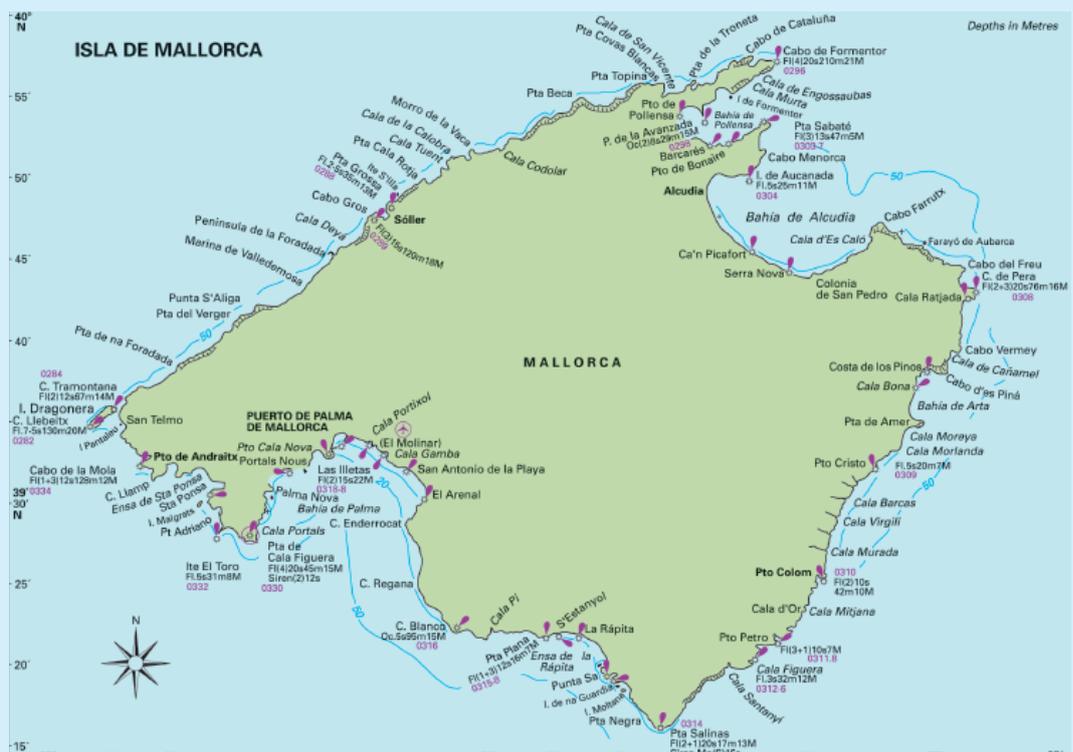
Worst bit of the holiday? Clearing blocked toilets.

Most useful things to take? Lots of games for the young ones and an iPod

Biggest lesson learnt? Most cruising boats are probably on autopilot (we certainly were most of the time) so don't get too near them. Most of them seem to be naked too – especially the Germans!

Other top tips:

- Plan your trip before you arrive – you will need to book permits for nature reserves and marina berths if you need them. Marinas don't like catamarans as they take up too much space.
- The nicest anchorages may not be best in high season as everyone else will be there. It's always worth finding a good anchorage overnight.
- Put depth marks on your anchor chain so you know how much you've let out.
- Keep the water topped up and use it sparingly as you get through it fast (we used 900 litres!)
- You are supposed to tell The Moorings if you are going to sail or motor at night.
- Book a nice hotel for the night you get back as your wife will need it even if you don't.
- Buy the Imray pilotage book *Islas Baleares* by Graham Hutt – it is essential reading.

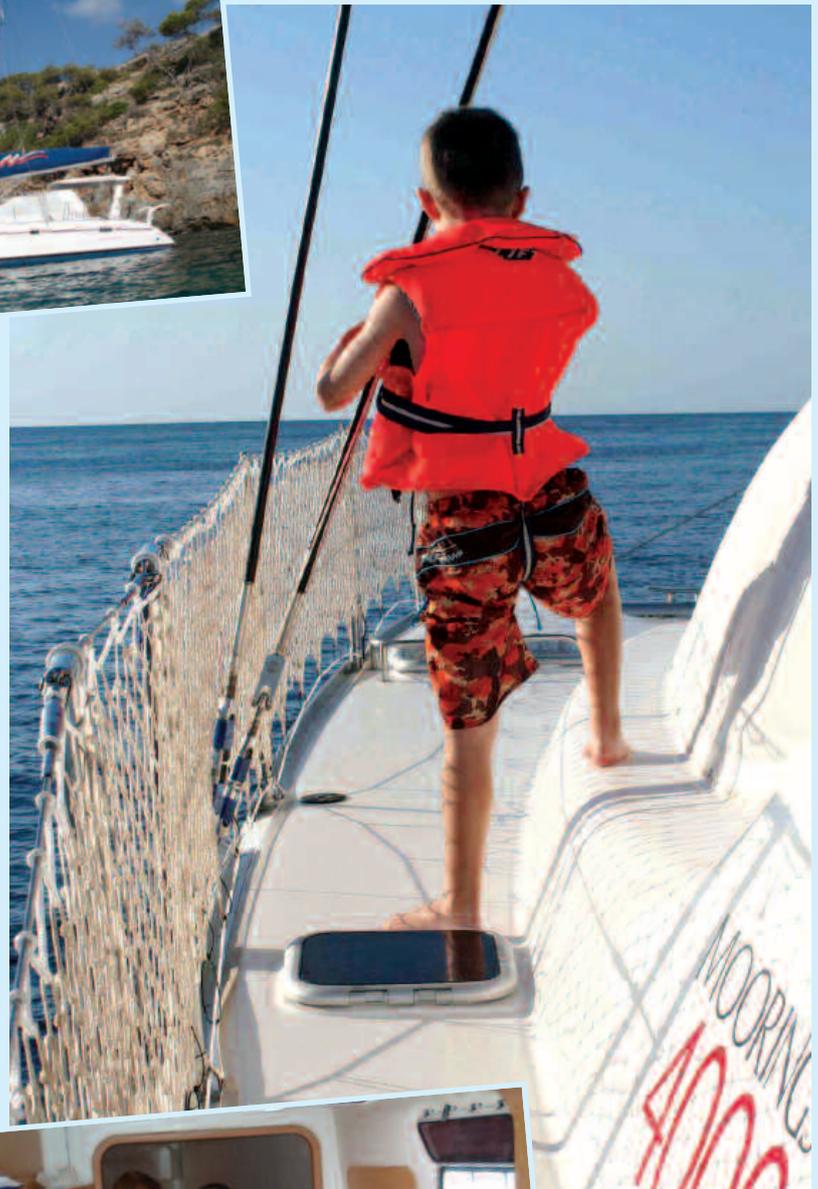


gradient wind that made things a bit lumpy. Still we got the sails up and just about laid the cliffs of the Capo Blanco, which mark the eastern edge of the bay. It became very quickly apparent that this boat did not want to go upwind and I made a mental note to not even try again. We managed to sail okay at 50 degrees true with a full mainsail and a half unfurled jib, sitting at about 7 knots to make good progress. It was an awkward motion in the seaway and we had two bouts of seasickness in the first hour – not good as it was only 15 knots of wind. I started praying for lighter or northerly (offshore) winds.

We made Cala Pi by lunchtime and found it was a beautiful narrow inlet. The Imray Pilotage book explained that you had to anchor in the middle of the channel and then tie your stern to the cliff face. Worried about damaging the tender in the swell, I decided to do this by swimming, which – apart from the sea urchin spines in my foot – proved very successful. I was glad to be at anchor even if it was nerve-wracking being only half a length from a cliff wall. The lovely beach for the kids made us decide to stay all day and as the wind swung north we even got some sleep.

On day four our original plan was to go to the island of Cabrera, five miles offshore but to anchor there you need a special permit. There are only 50 permits a day issued and, despite having tried to obtain a permit months in advance, ours was never confirmed. We decided to stay closer to the main island which, whilst it was disappointing to miss out Cabrera, proved to be a good decision as we made good time motor-sailing towards a huge golden sand beach called Playa Trench. This was a great spot and for the first time we were really able to start relaxing. Fellow dad Rob was mastering the electric windlass, I was getting more confident every day and the girls and the kids had perfect sun, flat water and a lovely beach to enjoy. The only problem was that we were running out of water. We headed to a fishing village called Puerto Colonia where 400 litres (could we really have used that much so quickly?) cost us €4. We enjoyed a nice meal and headed back to sea to find a more sheltered anchorage. Cala Entugores was the perfect spot – it was nerve wracking navigating there by night especially as it was only two metres deep – but this was good news as it meant only catamarans could sensibly get in there: I was beginning to think like a cat sailor. We had our best night's sleep yet with no boats around to hit and a dead calm sea.

The next day we turned the south-eastern corner of Majorca, past the picturesque Punta Salinas lighthouse, and started to motor into a headwind up the east coast where we'd planned a rendezvous with some friends at Cala Mondrago. Cala Mondrago was a heavenly place – a beautiful cove with two nice beaches and not too many anchored boats. We popped to Porto Petro and picked up a visitor mooring to go for supper – this



Above Optional extra safety netting on the guardwires is available.

Below Bimini and lazyjacks at the ready – a far cry from Ian's usual vessel of choice: a TP52.



was to be the furthest away from Palma that we went. Not wanting to leave ourselves any long passages in case of adverse weather I decided to make some miles back to Cala Entugores where we knew we would sleep well.

Another day, another short sail and another fantastic beach: the wonderful Playa des Carbo – again too shallow for keelboats so there was lots of space. In Puerta de la Rapita we took advantage of the local



PHOTOS IAN WALKER

The family view

Jack Mulligan (6): I want to be a Sea Scout so we can sail to the beach.

Jodie Mulligan (4): I liked sailing to the seaside best.

Lisa Mulligan: The catamaran was fabulous and we'd love to go cruising together again; obviously while Jack is training with the Sea Scouts we'll need Ian to skipper! Exploring by car holds no appeal now.

Rob Mulligan: I'd have loved to have done more sailing, but it would have been a struggle with the kids. It's best to keep distances between anchorages relatively short with small children on board, but they loved it, I never once heard them complain of being bored. The catamaran's greatest asset was the trampoline up front between the hulls, which kept the kids bouncing for hours, and their confidence in the water grew daily.



sailing club where we had our best meal of the trip.

By now realising that the kids were only interested in the beach and the sailing was the most boring bit of the day for them I decided to take advantage of the millpond-like conditions and motor 22 miles across the Bay of Palma to Cala

Portals – a lovely anchorage on the west coast of the bay. What I failed to appreciate was how popular this spot would be so close to Palma. Added to the fact that it was one o'clock in the morning when we got there and we'd had a couple of glasses of red wine this was to prove the ultimate test in my precision anchoring. The next day the anchorage became very busy by lunchtime so we were glad to make a leisurely sail downwind back to Palma, arriving back mid-afternoon.

The verdict

First and foremost we had an excellent holiday. I would definitely go with The Moorings again but would probably do a bit more homework before arrival next time. The location, the conditions and the boat were fantastic, even if the sailing was a bit sedate when you are used to racing TP52s. The catamaran was great for getting closer to the beach than everyone else and being able to moor in space. It was remarkably manoeuvrable but a bit awkward to anchor (needing a strop between the two hulls). Having a hull for each family was an excellent set up and it was perfect to sunbathe and swim from. It was great to be able to explore coves that were hard to get to by car and to have a fridge full of beer, freshwater shower and all the bits that come along with young children just a few boat lengths off the beach. Some of the best spots got a bit busy but it was high season and never a real problem – we could always up-anchor and find a neighbouring beach.

Going with only one sailor onboard was not ideal as there is a lot to think about – it did get easier as everybody learnt to help and if the kids were older it would be easier still (I think). One week is not really long enough as you actually only get six days sailing, which means three days out and three back re-tracing your steps. With two weeks we could have sailed all around the island and never returned to the same spot twice.

The kids had a fantastic time and the young ones went from being scared of standing on a jetty to being happy to jump in and out of the rubber dinghy. This is great experience for them – six-year-old Jack Mulligan even wants to join the sea scouts now! ■

Right Ian gets a little help from the crew with the nav – well, he is only a Volvo Ocean Race skipper now.

Further information:

Bareboat charters with The Moorings are available in the Mediterranean, Caribbean, and worldwide. For more information visit www.moorings.co.uk or call 0844 4636875



PHOTOS IAN WALKER