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Photo by CHIN CHENG YEANG

Star

Supplement

The Star's Homes Supplement is a monthly issue not to be missed by advertisers who want to highlight furnitures, furnishings, household products, appliances, kitchen cabinets and accessories, garden and outdoor products, roofing materials and interior decoration ideas and much more. Featuring beautiful pages of stories and pictures all about homes this monthly supplement that falls on the fourth Wednesday of each month is a hotbed of ideas for the discerning homeowner.

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Shouting at the ocean

A German couple who have spent the last two years sailing around the world stopped over in Penang to have a baby. They tell SIOU YUEN CHING how they plan to finish their journey with daughter Maya on board.

NATHALIE Müller and Michael Wnuk are obviously not your everyday, excited new parents: They actually planned to have a baby while sailing around the world on an 11m yacht.

"No, this was not an accident," said Müller, lovingly stroking her belly during an interview earlier in the year before the birth of their daughter. "In fact, we want to have two children," she added, smiling.

A doctor by profession, Müller, 32, was already into the final trimester of her pregnancy when she and her husband arrived at the Batu Uban marina on the eastern side of Penang three months ago.

"We decided to dock in Penang because it is an island with modern facilities," said

Wnuk, 41, a graphic designer. "Most importantly, we didn't have to travel far to the hospital (the Penang Adventist Hospital) from the marina when Nathalie went into labour."

Baby Maya was born safely on June 3. Two weeks later, mum and dad sailed off to Langkawi with Maya and, we presume, a whole lot of diapers aboard. The mind boggles at first-time parents braving the oceans deep on a relatively small vessel ... why are they doing this?

Müller explained they had always dreamt of sailing together with their children: "Being on a yacht, we will have a lot of free time for our children."

"On our journey so far, we got to know

some couples who were sailing with their kids and the children really had a lot of fun on board and visiting places," she said.

What of illnesses, seasickness, we asked via e-mail after they had been out at sea with Maya for a while?

Although they are extremely vigilant with an infant on board, the couple are not overly concerned about such matters, it seems. Müller said she did not think that the baby would get sick easily while out at sea because children usually catch illnesses from mixing with other children.

"Maya is doing fine and sleeping a lot on the boat since she left the hospital and returned to our floating home. I think she likes the swaying movement of the boat at

sea - it's like being rocked in a cradle," she said, adding that Maya had been given all the normal vaccinations, like Hepatitis B and tuberculosis.

Müller also said that their paediatrician had helped them to prepare an emergency kit for Maya, containing medicine for fevers, colds, colic and some electrolytes for dehydration.

Close encounters of the whale kind

Wnuk set out from Amsterdam alone on the steel sloop *Iron Lady* in August 2000 first; Müller joined him at the Canary Islands two months later.

Sailing across the two great oceans, the Pacific and the Atlantic, the couple dropped anchor at places that caught their fancy, then moved on when the sea called. "Penang is the longest that we have ever stayed on land since we started on our voyage," said Müller.

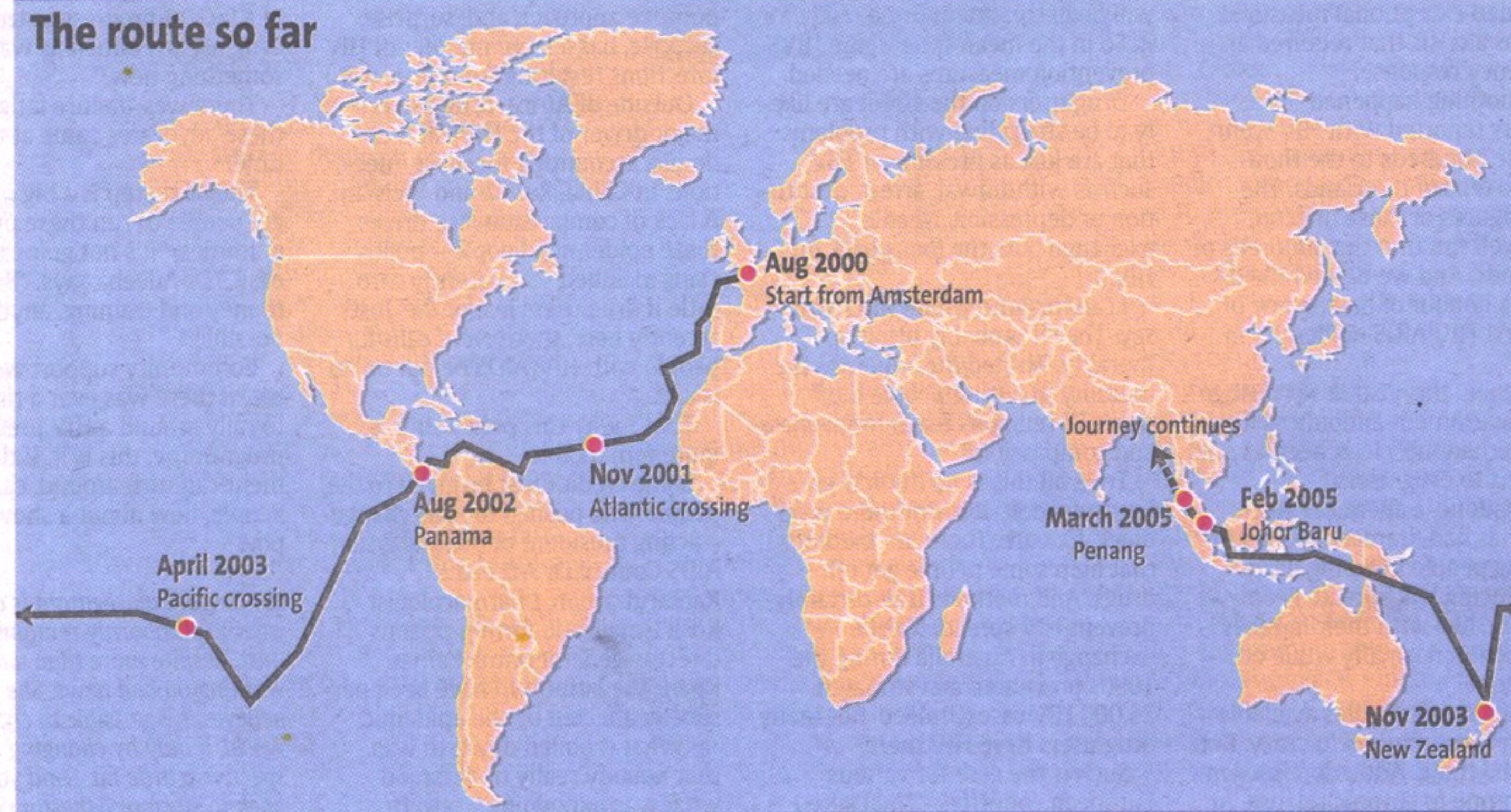
The couple's interest in sailing was nurtured by books about seafaring written by mariners back home in Germany and in Europe. While most people would put such an interest aside until they retired from their normal lives, Wnuk and Müller decided "normal" was boring, and resolved to follow their dream while they were young and healthy.

After purchasing the *Iron Lady* for US\$80,000 (RM304,000) in 1998, the couple took up a sailing course to obtain a sailing licence, which is compulsory for Germans.

"Sailing allows you to meet other people in a different way, unlike normal tourists. One distinct difference is that we get to invite other people over to our own home," said Müller.

Wnuk said sailing had taken them to the far reaches of the earth, where money has no value and the folks have never set eyes on foreigners.

The route so far



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"It is interesting to go to all those villages on the small islands and get to know the people, make music with them and share their food," he said.

"You also learn to cut back on your own needs and adapt to the people's lifestyles as there are no fancy hoteliers and tourist guides catering to your every wish," added Müller.

While the sailing is always exhilarating, Wnuk said an extra frisson of excitement did overwhelm them at the first sight of land after they had been at sea for a particularly long period.

"When we spotted Henderson Island after 18 days on the Pacific Ocean, we felt like little kids on Christmas Day," he reminisced.

That long stretch through the Pacific was one time, Müller recalled, that they questioned their sanity.

"We started shouting at this big ocean. Sometimes, you were proud of yourself but, other times, you had to admit that you were frightened by this big, endless blue sea," she said.

There were other, more concrete fears, like the pregnant whale that attacked their yacht when they were sailing to Africa.

"She drifted into our path, and we rammed her. The shaken whale probably hit us in self-defence, thinking our yacht was another big fish," said Müller.

Fortunately, the encounter only dented some parts of the yacht.

Life afloat

Life onboard, Wnuk said, costs only about US\$50 (RM190) a month.

"It is relatively cheap to stay on a yacht because we don't spend money on luxuries such as entertainment and expensive clothes and restaurants," he said.

"When we run out of fresh food, we just hang a fishing line over the side or, if we're near land, go into the jungle to pluck coconuts. And most of the small islands we stop over on hardly offer opportunities for shopping sprees," quipped Müller.

Once every few months, though, they do need to stock up on groceries.

Despite living frugally, the couple revealed that they have exhausted their savings after sailing for two-and-a-half years.

"Our initial plan was to sail around the world in three years but, somehow, we are taking longer than that – there are just so many interesting islands and places to visit!" said the obviously still enthusiastic Wnuk.

The couple now supplement their

income by contributing articles about and photographs of their journey expedition to a German sailing magazine.

Do they ever get on each other's nerves with nothing but the occasional sea creature as distraction from each other's company?

"Nobody can imagine how a couple feels about spending such a long time alone on the open sea in a tiny boat!" quipped Wnuk.

"It is lucky we have always enjoyed each other's company. Anyway, we had lived together for 10 years before we started sailing," said Müller.

"We also socialise with other sailors we meet along the way, keeping touch through e-mails or radio," said Wnuk.

The hardest part of the adventure, according to Müller, came before the voyage: letting go of her job and life on land.

"I was in a dilemma when I had to leave everything behind in Germany because I was worried whether I would be able to pick up from where I left off when I return," she explained. "It is also not easy being away from family and friends. Luckily, there is the Internet," she added.

"However, when I see my friends working so hard and earning a lot of money but not being absolutely happy, I am glad that we set out on this voyage, which has created many good memories," said Müller.

The onward journey

After Langkawi, the *Iron Lady* travelled to Thailand. Subsequently, said Wnuk, "we will cross the Indian Ocean and be in South Africa for Christmas. Then, we will go north to the Atlantic Ocean and be back in Europe by the end of next year."

Never to set sail again? Hardly. Müller said, although they might not sail around the world again, they would still want to go on shorter, one- to two-year expeditions.

"But first, we must work hard and save enough money to sail together as a family now."

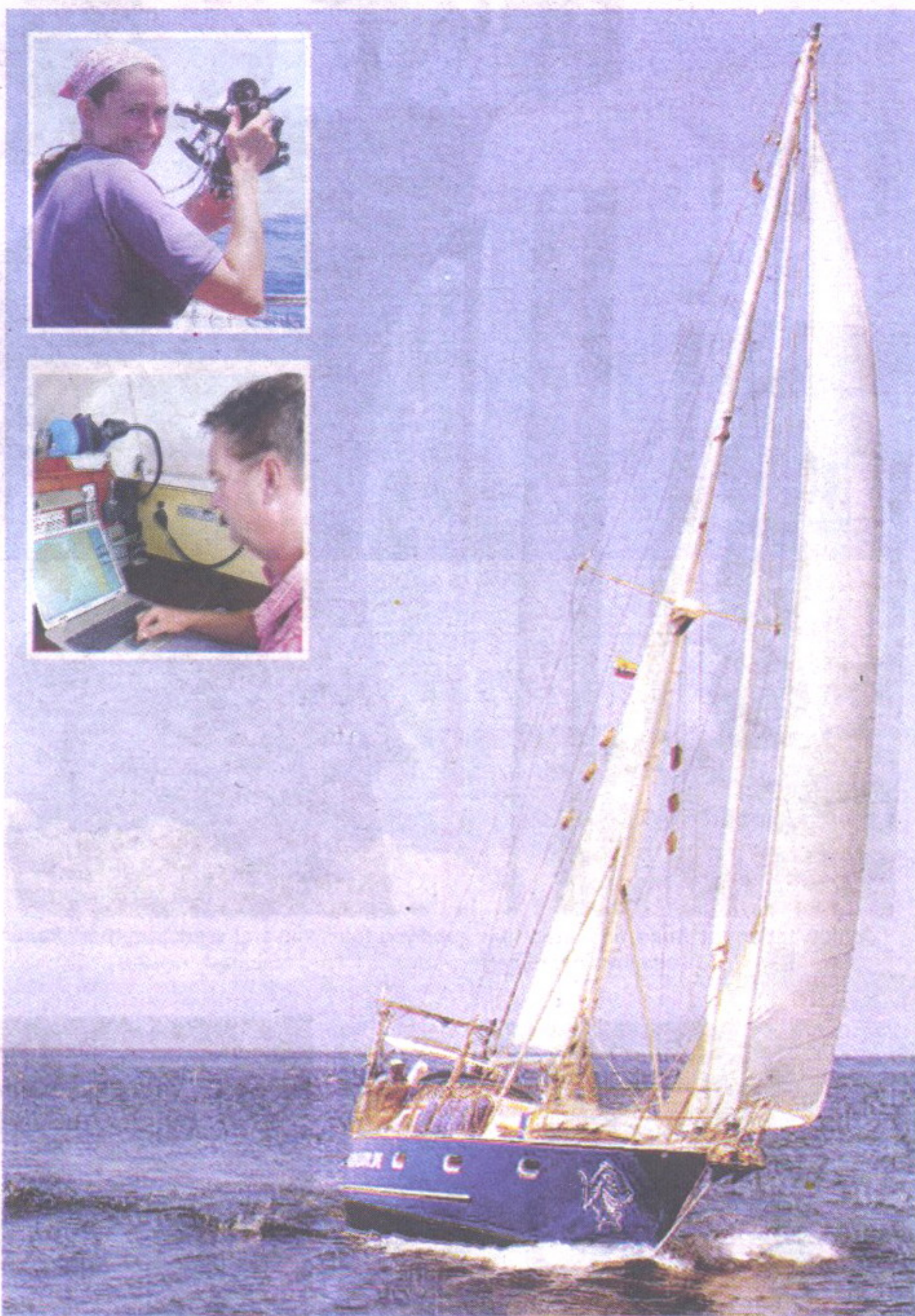
She's planning on studying gynaecology when she returns to Germany next year, she added. Hmm. When it comes to dishing out advice to newbie parents about coping with an infant, this is one gynaecologist who will be able to do so with great conviction!

■ Nathalie Müller and Michael Wnuk love to hear from the world while they're out on the deep blue sea, so e-mail them at info@ironlady.de. They also have a website, ironlady.de, albeit in German.

Uncredited photos supplied by Müller and Wnuk.



And baby makes three.... – Photo by CHIN CHENG YEANG



Above: The elegant *Iron Lady* under sail. – Photo by WAN MOHIZAN WAN HUSSEIN
Inset: Their trusty sextant keeps them on track and e-mail keeps them in touch with the world when they're out on the lonely sea.



Thirsty? Anchor off an island and head into the jungle to pluck coconuts. And there's always the bounty of the sea, too. This is how the couple keep costs down.



Sailing gives Müller and Wnuk the chance to experience many wonderful moments, such as this encounter with a Galapagos tortoise.