

AMBASSADOR OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Living the dream in Hong Kong and French Polynesia, seven-year DB resident Estelle Davies speaks to *Angie Bucu* about getting kids to fall in love with the oceans through education

Have you ever thought that one day you might actually get a chance to have that dream job, you know the one where you get to do all your favourite things every day and teach others at the same time? Well meet Estelle Davies, one of the few people I know who does just that, year round.

As an Ambassador of the Environment for Jean-Michel Cousteau's Ocean Futures Society (OFS), Estelle gets to spend over three months a year in French Polynesia inspiring children to behave responsibly to protect the oceans. The rest of the time, based out of DB, she does much the same thing with local kids. But more of that later.

Roots and wings

Estelle has lived in DB for the past seven years, and in Hong Kong since she was just nine months old. She was transplanted here from Cyprus with her twin sister, Zoe, her older sister Lauren and her (British) parents, when her father signed up with Cathay Pacific Airways.

Though they grew up in Clearwater Bay, Estelle and her sisters completed their education in the UK from age 10. Of the third-culture kid conundrum, Estelle says, "I see children connecting to their parents' culture. If they are Australian they will consider themselves Australian even though they are born here."

Estelle is impressed at how tolerant and culturally aware local children are, particularly those growing up here in DB. "My niece Amelia [a Year 4 student at Discovery Bay International School] tells me all sorts of things about cultural traditions from other countries, which she learns from her friends, at school," she says.

The Cousteau connection

It's clear that growing up as an expat kid hasn't done Estelle any harm, quite the opposite in fact. A marine and environmental science graduate, she returned from the UK to Hong Kong to research Chinese White Dolphins with Dr Samuel Hung, now chairman of the Hong Kong Dolphin Conservation Society. Her love of

marine life and blue environments soon led her to Queensland, Australia for a Master's degree in Tropical Marine Biology, and from there it was a hop, skip and dive to her dream job with OFS in 2005.

Estelle joined OFS's Ambassadors of the Environment marine exploration and adventure programme as a Cousteau naturalist, and what a job title. She found herself travelling the world's oceans, giving talks and lectures to guests on all matters marine, ecological and sustainable – an experience she credits with instilling her desire to educate young people.

In 2005, OFS offered Estelle the opportunity to run the Ambassadors of the Environment programme in French Polynesia aboard the award-winning *M/S Paul Gauguin* cruise ship. Unable to forego the temptation of teaching, snorkelling and diving in some of the most pristine waters in the world, Estelle now spends the months of June, July and August and the Christmas and New Year period, frolicking amongst stingrays, reef



*As an eco-educator, Estelle
Davies splits her time between
DB and French Polynesia*



Estelle with her niece Amelia, who took part in the OFS Ambassadors of the Environment programme last year



Teaching locally with Asia Pacific Adventure



Teaching class on the M/S Paul Gauguin



Providing hands-on experience about marine and island ecosystems

sharks and other animals that live on the coral reef. Oh and did I mention she's teaching children too?

Of Jean-Michel Cousteau, the son of Jacques Cousteau, famous explorer and conservationist, Estelle shares: "Jean-Michel is kind and thoughtful and one of the most inspiring individuals I know. He is a very modest man and his life is dedicated to ocean conservation, especially education. He believes, as do I, that people only protect what they love. So we need to go out and make people fall in love with the ocean, the coral reefs and the animals that live there."

Which is precisely what Estelle does with the kids, aged nine to 17, who sign up for the programme during the seven- or 10-day cruises. The idea is to provide direct, hands-on experience learning about marine and island ecosystems, and the children even get to swim with sharks.

"They learn about the magic of the coral reef," says Estelle. "We teach them what the animals do on the reef, their role on the reef. The children also learn about the ever-present human impact on blue environments both on the coral reefs, and at home – that of plastics."

Spreading the word

When she's not ambassador-ing for Cousteau, Estelle is happy to hunker down in DB, where she lives with her twin, a Cathay pilot. "Family, a place where I can hear the ocean and where frangipanis grow," she says is what's needed in a home, and DB ticks those boxes. She also appreciates the outdoor lifestyle: "I get to do the things I enjoy in nature, like rowing and hiking," she says, "and it's so quiet."

"I'm amazed by the DB people I meet and read about in *Around DB*," Estelle adds. "I think of all the places in the world, of all the things they've done in their travels, and that they choose to live in DB. It makes me think that DB is a good place to live."

PROFILE

Estelle's 'day job' is as client liaison for Hong Kong-wide outdoor skills training and youth adventure company, Asia Pacific Adventure (APA). In the three years she has worked with APA, she has been teaching children to develop a better understanding and appreciation for Hong Kong's spectacular environment and its marine life, and how to live more sustainably.

"We take the children to remote parts of Hong Kong and challenge them to try something new and go beyond their comfort zone," says Estelle. "On camping trips, the children (aged eight to 13) have to be independent and take on various responsibilities, like preparing food and cleaning up," she adds, something many local kids may never do at home.

About environmental activities in DB, Estelle says, "I love that there are

beach clean-ups and that the kids are being educated, that organisations like Plastic Free Seas (PFS) and DB Green are getting involved in the school community and they are being welcomed into schools."

While Estelle has plans to collaborate with DB Green and PFS, her focus for now is APA. "At our beach clean-ups, we get the kids to identify what most of the things they collect are made of, and of course it's plastic," she says.

"We teach them about the impact of plastic, and this approach has them asking how they personally impact the environment."

Estelle suggests that there is a need for more environmental education in Hong Kong: "At APA we get kids out on the water, and teach them about marine ecosystems by seeing and feeling." To appreciate everything and take nothing for granted are messages Estelle hopes to pass on to the children she teaches. **B**

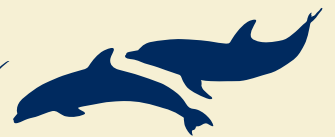
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- Ocean Futures Society, www.oceanfutures.org
- Paul Gauguin Cruises, www.pgcruses.com/ambassadors-environment-youth-program

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