

FREE IN THE SUN ON SUNDAY
SEPTEMBER 9, 2018
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Fabulous

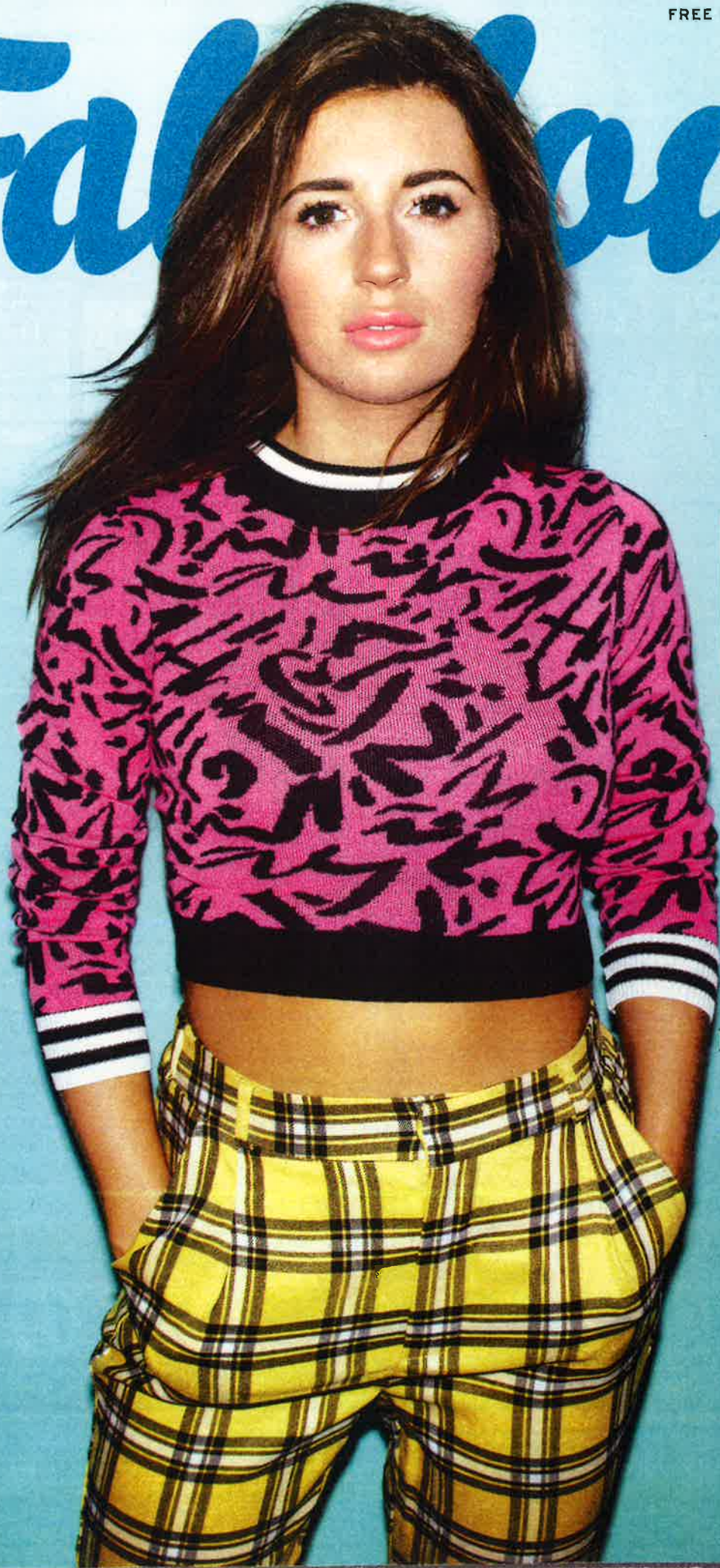
'MY
DIVORCE
WAS THE
MAKING
OF ME'

THE
MAIN
DAN

NEW
SEASON
CO-ORDS
HOW TO
TWIN AND
WIN

FROM THE
TRUTH
ABOUT HER
PARENTS'
MARRIAGE TO
THAT FIRST
TIME WITH
JACK, LOVE
ISLAND'S
DANI DYER
CHECKS IN

PHOTOGRAPHED
FOR FABULOUS BY
DAVID TITLOW



'I TOOK MY FIVE YEAR OLD BACKPACKING ACROSS ASIA'

LAURA PAULEY, 33, A SENIOR COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER, LIVES IN CHICHESTER, WEST SUSSEX, WITH HER PARTNER CHRIS, 30, AND CHILDREN SUMMER, NINE, COOPER, TWO, AND CASEY, THREE MONTHS.

"After tucking my five-year-old daughter into bed, I made sure her backpack was ready for the following day. School was starting in the morning, but instead of books, her bag was filled with suncream, bug spray and extra clothes - because she and I were setting off for the jungles of Thailand.

Almost 10 years ago, in December 2008, I'd been at rock bottom. I'd fallen pregnant and split with my partner, so I had nowhere to live and was forced to quit my job in Manchester to move back in with my parents in Chichester.

But holding Summer in my arms for the first time in June 2009, I felt a new sense of purpose. I loved every second of being a mum, and it was during a holiday in Spain in 2012 that I decided we'd make brilliant travel partners. We were staying in a resort, but I longed to visit Barcelona. I worried that it would be too stressful with a three year old, but we managed to get to the city centre by train and stayed for a few days. It was so spontaneous, and having Summer by my side made it all the more enjoyable. We learned Spanish together and were fearless trying to communicate in a different language - it was something I wouldn't have done alone.

I'd always dreamed of exploring Asia, so I did some research and I knew Summer would love it. For two years I saved every penny for a six-week adventure across China, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. It was tough turning down dinner invites and giving up clothes shopping, leaving just £50 a week after bills, but to keep my spirits up I'd spend my evenings planning our trip.

By the time Summer turned five in 2014, I'd saved £10,000 and booked flights to Hong Kong. Before leaving we had our vaccinations and, with Summer's school teachers' supporting us, I met with them for ideas on how to educate her on the trip, from learning about different currencies and cultures to trying exotic foods and visiting temples and wildlife sanctuaries.

The moment we stepped off the plane after an 11-hour journey, our adventure began. Summer took an instant interest in monks, so on our third day we climbed the 268 steps to see the giant Tian Tan Buddha in Hong Kong. And when we went to Thailand in November, we bathed and fed elephants. Seeing Summer interact with the beautiful animals and learn why it's cruel to force



Clockwise from left: Laura and Summer; on a raft in Thailand; backpacking in Australia as a teen; meeting an elephant



BTW
Five is the most common age at which adults date their earliest holiday memory.*

For a third of adults, our first travel memory involves flying or being at the airport.*

them to give rides or perform in the circus, I realised how important it is to experience things instead of just being told about them in a classroom.

The more jungles and cities we explored, the closer Summer and I grew. We had sleepovers on trains, fed bears, mingled with locals and even spotted a cobra during a canoe ride in Thailand. As we travelled, we practised spelling at bus stops and counted fruits and vegetables at markets to improve Summer's skills. We walked for about 10 hours a day, but she didn't moan once - although she hated the toilets, which were holes in the ground.

There were some scary moments, like when a tuk-tuk driver dumped us in a Bangkok slum after we refused to pretend to be customers in his friend's shop. Surrounded by people sifting through rubbish for food, I was terrified. I picked Summer up and walked as fast as

I could back to the city. Later I found out the area was a hub for the mafia.

By the end of our six weeks, we'd experienced so much, I felt like we'd been gone a lifetime. Back in England, Summer walked through the arrivals gate wearing her cone-shaped Vietnamese hat, with her trusty teddy bear tucked under her arm and a huge bag of sweets for her classmates.

Four months later, I met my partner Chris, an estate manager, in a local pub. We now have two children together. He loved hearing about our trip to Asia so much that we're planning to drive around Europe in a camper van in a few years. We'll need to save up, but the experiences Summer and I had are priceless and I can't wait to do it all over again." **F**