

# Blue note

Making landfall brings mixed feelings to even the most seasoned of sailors, as **Jess Lloyd-Mostyn** explains after many new lands discovered

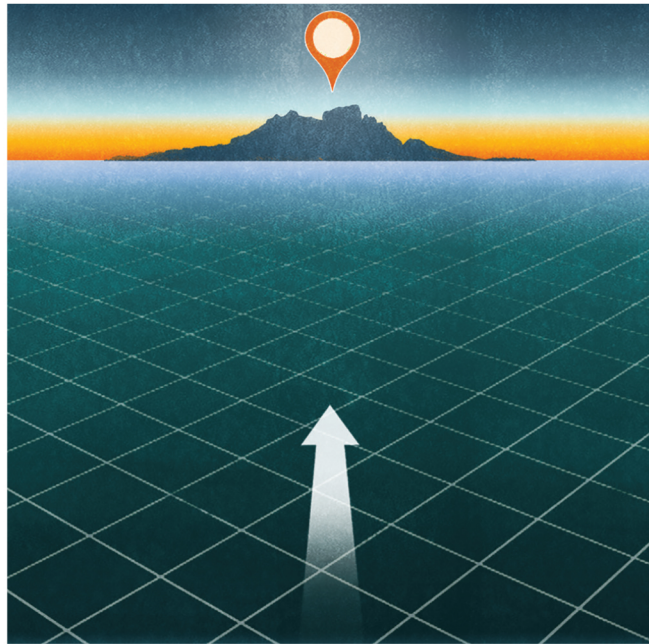
That first sight of new terrain, the initial glimpse of green, a form taking shape above sea-level is significant. Perhaps it is accompanied by birds wheeling overhead and the distinctive pattern of land clouds cresting at the peak of a mountain.

Land signals the end of a journey after days or maybe weeks on the ocean. It is both longed for and somewhat feared in equal measure. Living underway at sea sets up rhythms and routines that come to an abrupt halt once you approach the coast again. Shorelines are full of rocks, wrecks and reefs, nothing but spikey things to avoid and dodge. Winds get fluky; suddenly evaporating or blasting you with a katabatic gusto. Terra firma seems to be littered with impending hazards, leading lights and shipping traffic. Your reliably silent radio suddenly crackles into life, burbling away with a sort of passive eavesdropping. All these elements combined are jarring to the senses, making even the messiest of passages appear, with hindsight, so much simpler and more peaceful than all these new considerations.

But the land is also the prize. It fuels our impulse to get out there and go sailing. To arrive at a new destination having done so purely by harnessing the elements is what gives most of us our appetite and passion for the ocean. Perhaps the voyage was a particularly hard slog and the land is your light at the end of the tunnel. Or maybe it was a journey of great meaning, full of milestones and firsts to be relished and toasted once complete.

Some landfalls seem bigger than others. One poignant one for us, the first we had sailed just as a couple, struck me in a way I had not expected. The first thing that hit me was the smell. It's the sort of scent that suddenly catches on the air and makes you breathe deeper, raising your nose like some sort of tracking animal. Damp, cool, earthy and sweet. Land.

The trip hadn't taken that long. We slipped lines at Vigo, Spain, and were pulling into harbour at Viana do Castelo, Portugal, just eight hours later. I think it had something to do with the time of day. Arriving at dusk, the sun setting over a new skyline, a new port and a



'Arriving at dusk, the sun setting over a new skyline, a new port and a new country to explore'

new country to explore. That smell was intoxicating, though.

Another that stands out in the logbook was sailing into Santiago de Cuba after a good few months playing in the islands of the East Caribbean. The sheer otherness of that land, the colours of the earth and buildings combined with the silhouettes of the trees gave it all an exotic, sun-drenched magic. For similar reasons I remember gazing at the emerald green mountains of Hiva Oa, in French Polynesia.

They suddenly loomed out and up from the blustery water after nearly four weeks at sea like some sort of mirage.

Of course we knew where we were and just what our destination was but, nevertheless, it still seems somehow impossible that these peaks of land jump up to greet you after day after day of endless ocean. It is

your aim, your goal, your reason and your purpose and yet so much of the wonder and allure of the sea has nothing to do with the endpoint whatsoever.

I shall never forget how, after crossing the Atlantic, the robust and reliable tradewinds that had carried us over from Europe brusquely and indifferently abandoned us in the final stretch just 15 miles out from St Lucia. That first tantalizing peek at the landscape lay for hours just outside our reach as we stubbornly trimmed and coaxed the sails like mad, determined not to fall at this last sailing hurdle and end so momentous a passage with burning diesel. The island sat there, winking coquettishly. It was as if someone had placed a mouthwatering tropical fruit platter in front of us but we were too far away to grab a piece and indulge.

"Land ho!" marks the beginning of a flurry of activity. The cruising guide is consulted, the transits, course and bearings discussed for entry, and sail plan adjusted accordingly. You need to ready your mooring lines and fenders, or prep your anchor or hail someone over the VHF. Perhaps you will be performing an engine check, ready for it to roar into life for the endgame moments of your passage.

It also heralds that moment of transformation as we change from cruisers back into landlubbers for a time, the alter ego to our sailing superhero selves. ✦



**JESS LLOYD-MOSTYN**

Jess and James left the UK in 2011 in their Crossbow 42 and have sailed halfway round the world, growing their crew en route. Follow their journey at [water-log.com](http://water-log.com)