

It all comes out in the wash

Blue water cruising has plenty of up sides but, when it comes to laundry, things can get a little bit trying over time as **Jess Lloyd-Mostyn** notes

W e are back in the UK, enjoying the reunions with family and friends

that our brief sojourns from our 'proper' life at sea allow us. And there is one acquaintance that I must admit I am incredibly glad to see again – a washing machine. Not a bucket, not a keen and earnest woman by a river with a washboard, nor a sad cold-water-only coin-operated affair at a marina, but a real washing machine in our own home which is mine to use any time and at any temperature.

Pathetic though that sounds perhaps I should illuminate you further on what the past seven years has meant in terms of this very everyday and banal domestic detail.

Living on a yacht is no different from living in a house in terms of the normal things that get used. Bedding and clothes get dirty and salty and, despite your best efforts to keep things clean or to wear as few clothes as possible in the tropics you will inevitably have to tackle the laundry somehow. And, as you adjust to your new found sailing life, there is a lot of pleasure to be gained from washing things by hand in a bucket on the aft deck, humming to yourself while the sun shines down. But once you're dealing with multiple sets of large bedsheets, seemingly endless children's clothes or the daily constant of cloth nappies, the sheen quickly fades from that occasional scene as it becomes a more frequent chore. The tropics are humid and often you may be faced with weeks on end where things simply don't dry. And I for one would rather be out enjoying the water than stuck elbow-deep in a bucket so we have found all manner of solutions to this particular sailing slog.

On arrival in St. Lucia, after crossing the Atlantic, I was overjoyed to find willing and affordable laundry services at our marina, which even included pick up and delivery of your clothes and bedding by canoe. Aha, here was my answer and the counter to all that toil. But this was the well-sailed route of the Caribbean, would it be possible in all the countries we sailed to, I wondered. Surprisingly, even in the remotest stretches of French Polynesia's Tuamotu archipelago, where land and fresh



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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

water are equally scarce, there were still some resourceful folks offering exactly the same thing, albeit at a slightly higher price. In fact from Portugal to Papua New Guinea, New Zealand to Niue, Mexico to Malaysia we've often been able to source an enterprising local who regularly helps out yachties with their laundry needs.

The downside of this convenience is that it's not always great quality. Generally the machines available only use cold water or there is no machine at all, and you're simply paying for someone else to have the labour of dealing with it all by hand. Sometimes clothes will come back beautifully folded but still rife with stains. Or itchy, having been washed with detergents that irritate the skin. Plus, even if your load is beautifully clean and dry, you could end up ruining the entire effort by

having a wild and bumpy dinghy ride back to the boat, drenching everything in salt water all over again.

Sometimes far-flung villages on tiny atolls would see us spending a morning or even a day getting into the local community and bringing all the washing gear ashore to where the village pump is, or the riverbank. We'd sit and work side by side, while chatting with the native people in a mixture of English and our lousy attempts at local dialect, and find that this unwelcome chore was actually an easy way of being included and accepted. The stark comparison of this pleasant scene with the set up in more-developed countries, where there are strict marina rules about "no washing hanging on deck" and the facilities force you to spend the equivalent of £5 per wash or dry, seems almost barbaric.

And, of course, I know that all of this is not an issue for our many catamaran dwelling friends, who have both water-makers and full-sized washing machines on board. Perhaps I need more of those friends too...

However, for now, I will rejoice in this one bonus of landlubber life. Sure there are no dolphins to be seen out of my window, no turquoise blue infinity pool to dive into, and my permanent barefoot status is continually challenged by these strange things called socks. But I can put up with all that briefly as my laundry basket is empty for once and my sheets are clean, clean, clean!