

# Trash soup

Blue-water cruising provides challenging insights into the results of activities most of humanity takes for granted, say **Jess Lloyd-Mostyn**

Sailing gives you opportunities to experience different cultures, exotic new flavours and languages, and teaches you new ways of thinking and being. Constant education is the most fulfilling aspect of our cruising life. Yet the downside to such wide eyes is that you cannot ignore or avoid the more unpleasant sights.

On our last visit to the UK we were asked about plastic pollution. It's easy to talk about when in London, where we all sort our rubbish, use hessian bags for shopping and have regular recycling collections. It's a lot harder to face when back in South East Asia, in some of the world's most beautiful sailing grounds and dive sites, seeing first-hand the ports choked with plastic bottles and the beaches littered with disposable nappies. It's painful.

As full-time sailors you develop your green credentials pretty swiftly. Our yacht's domestic electricity comes from solar panels and a wind turbine. We don't have a watermaker or freezer; we use a wind vane rather than an autopilot; we conserve our water and power and try to create as little waste as possible. The finite nature of our resources coupled with our experiences on long ocean passages means we're savvy about rubbish management.

But being environmentally conscientious on board is only part of it, as disposing of refuse and recycling once ashore can be tricky. The tiny Pacific island of Niue made glass bottles illegal as a cargo boat from New Zealand recycles their cans, but there's no provision to take bottles. In the archipelago of Bocas Del Toro, Panama, every island was dependent on one mainland rubbish dump that simply filled up and locked its gates forever. There are communities where locals drop the trash in their own backyards and beaches, only to watch the next wave or high tide bring it all back.

When packaging all used to be biodegradable, there would have been no problem. A generation ago all our products were packaged in glass, metal, or paper. Of course, these all take time to break down but it will happen eventually. Nowadays, the throwaway nature



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of plastic packaging and cheap, mass-produced products seems to engender carelessness about what happens once it leaves our hands. But the expendability doesn't change the fact that the plastic itself is made to last forever.

Currently 50% of the plastic waste we produce is buried in landfill and the other 45% is lost in the environment, washing out to sea, whilst only 5% is recovered and recycled. There are an estimated 20,000 pieces of plastic in every square kilometre of ocean but only a small percentage of them float on the surface. The other 80% appear at various depths throughout the water, break down to even smaller size or come to rest on the sea floor. It ends up being eaten by marine animals and seabirds or trapping and tangling them up with fatal results.

The problem is not going away and witnessing the sheer

scale of the garbage in Indonesia has had a sobering effect on our sailing family, so completely at odds with the experience we hope for. It is at once heart-breaking and inspiring that our children will land on a beach in the Komodo national park and suggest collecting all the washed up flip-flops, polystyrene and plastic bottles to make the shoreline beautiful again.

Reducing the amount of plastic waste demands lifestyle adjustments, even for us with our solar panels, wind turbine and general eco attitude. These changes, however, can be relatively small, like using cloth nappies, bamboo toothbrushes, safety razors, reusable bags and coffee cups instead of the plastic equivalent single-use items. The biggest impact will come from reducing the massive amount of plastic litter before it travels over land, and into our oceans.

Pollution takes what is marvellous out of the water. All the things that we love and enjoy about it, sailing, swimming, snorkelling, become somehow less complete and less magical. There's price to the convenience of packing your groceries in the shop's plastic bags, buying the bottle of water while you're out or using a takeaway coffee cup when you're in a hurry – and our oceans are paying it. Unless we all start giving more of a damn, we'll be left with nothing but trash soup.



**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)