

# What's the trade off?

Trade-wind sailing isn't always steady and consistent but it's still fun, says **Jess Lloyd-Mostyn**

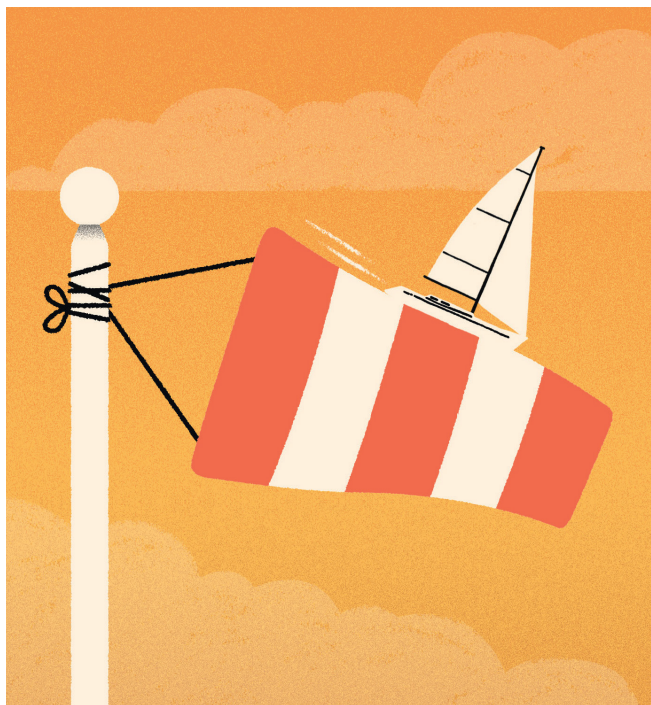
Trade-wind sailing – I can still remember the excitement and anticipation I felt about wanting to experience it. There was something that seemed so grand and significant about the trade winds, given the long historical importance. It was as if I was about to embark on a voyage that had been handed down for generations, like I was becoming part of a shared club of sailing legacy.

And I must admit that there was a real attraction to the concept of steady consistent winds, taking you over oceans with unswerving and reliable strength. There would be none of the flukiness of coastal cruising, no katabatics to contend with and no sudden losing of the wind just when you had got going.

But, before we could step out into the trades and enjoy their magic, we had to wait for them to show up. Like most British sailors, our first dalliance with trade-wind sailing was planned to be an Atlantic crossing, from the Canaries to the Caribbean. There we stood, shoulder to shoulder with other boaters, all eagerly waiting for the daily forecast to be pinned up on the door, checking our weather models and gossiping over how established we considered the winds to be. The timing all hangs on waiting for the hurricane season to fully pass in order to allow the trades to settle. Heading out eastwards at this point maximises the time you get in the Caribbean.

So, like many other keen sailors before us, our impatience to get warm, go tropical, to “head south until the butter melts” somewhat blinded our reading of the forecasts and we stepped out boldly into what we confidently reassured ourselves were well-established trade winds. To be fair to our naivety, we did speed our way across – it was just a faster and more heavily-reefed romp of a sail than we were expecting. With 25-30 knot winds throughout, we completed the 2,800 mile passage in just 21 days.

Likewise our main Pacific crossing years later was also a lot less peaceful than its name had us believe, with most of our journey from Mexico to the Marquesas seeing fairly strong winds. And, to our utter dismay,



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**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)

the trades were not always the dependable conveyor-belt westwards that we had expected. They were often just as fickle as coastal winds, leaving us for days at a time or cheekily changing our course. We had expected we'd be able to leave our sails set for days, maybe even a week at a time. But the reality had us swapping between broad reaches and dead runs on both tacks, tinkering with sail trim for hours on end and even sailing upwind from time to time.

Because, as with so many other sailing lessons, trade-wind sailing is all about working with averages and what's most likely to happen. El Niño and la Niña conditions play havoc with regular patterns and the movement of the convergence zone isn't always what you might expect. The relatively easy cruising grounds of the Caribbean often saw us with supposed prevailing winds

blowing directly in our faces, and we spent a month on the south coast of Cuba struggling to make any progress to the west. I remember having a lengthy pause in Bora Bora, becoming increasingly exasperated as we waited for wave upon wave of headwinds to dissipate.

However, when I consider the route of our voyage so far, scrawled across the globe in our main saloon, it's clear that so much of our progress has been thanks to these mysterious invisible powers at play. And, as is often the way, perhaps we didn't appreciate the trades for all they gave us when we sailed in those waters.

Our current sailing is largely in the equatorial seas of Indonesia. In contrast to the pace and regularity of the winds, there is a total mishmash of inconsistencies and contradictions: monsoon wind patterns punctuated by squally disruptions. And, like a petulant child, I find myself whining wistfully for those lovely, constant trades we had back eastwards, full of continual rhythm. Yes, perhaps I didn't truly value what we had when we were under the influence of the trades. Maybe that means I'll be lured into attempting the Indian Ocean next, in order to get back on the well-travelled trade routes of old. There's something nicely grounding and humbling to be forced to acknowledge and remember that the wind will always have its own plans for you.

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