

# Peek-a-boat

The sense of solitude that comes from long distance cruising can sometimes prove illusory as **Jess Lloyd-Mostyn** narrates

We all imagine that we are alone on our boats. Gently swaying at anchor, with the sun shining down, lulls us into a false sense of having some sort of force field enveloping you. So it can come as a rather rude awakening when all it takes is a loud TAP-TAP-TAP “Hullo, ahoy there!” on the hull to remind us that we are not quite so solitary after all.

There was one time when we were on the coast of Pacific Mexico and had pulled into a sweet, isolated bay for the night. The evening was still, the night was quiet, and I remember gently rousing the next morning to the chirp of local birds. I stepped up and out into our cockpit, only to be faced with a 200ft wall of windows. A large cruise ship had anchored nearby and I was suddenly confronted by thousands of tourists taking photos of us, as shouts of “See the sailboat?!” and “Look mum, there’s people living on it!” floated to us on the breeze. On another occasion we were down in the cabin and heard loud bubbling noises against the hull. This usually signals the arrival of dolphins or turtles, sometimes nearby whales and once it was even orcas, so we all hurried up to see. But our new wildlife neighbours turned out to be nothing more than a couple in bright yellow scuba gear, practising their breathing techniques.

These chance encounters with humankind can be even more unnerving at night. We were buddy-boating with friends in Panama and had all convened to watch an evening movie. It was some kind of thriller film so it was rather fitting that we were abruptly interrupted by bright floodlights engulfing us and loud shouts from outside. More disconcerting still was that we emerged on deck to find a bunch of men in boats, dressed in camo gear and holding machine guns, all beginning to clamber on board. This, it turns out, was considered standard practice by the well-meaning but formidably-dressed Panamanian coastguard, who were simply wanting to check our papers and willingly posed for photos with us desperately trying to suppress hilarious giggles throughout.

Being berthed at a marina, of course, results in surrendering a certain amount of your privacy. The



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constant foot traffic on the dock coupled with the open-living nature of life on board inevitably means there will be people dropping round impromptu. Plus you end up using the pontoon as an extension of your living space, a bit like your back garden, so you might well be mending something, or gutting a fish, even bathing your kids with an audience. But, as evening draws in, a meal in your cockpit, a family activity in the saloon or, dare I say it, a romantic clinch in the cabin, can all be unceremoniously cut short by an uninvited guest or a face at a hatch. I suppose I did disdainfully rip down all the nautical-themed curtains that once adorned all our portlights when we first bought the boat. Does that mean I was encouraging casual callers?

I am sympathetic to the attraction and sheer allure of a yacht. We're like a travelling sideshow. We've sailed in some remote places, islands and areas where they maybe only see one yacht every six months or so. If you live on a far-flung island, inaccessible to most, you will see an approaching sailboat from a long way off and the excitement is understandable. We have people swimming, canoeing and paddling any kind of makeshift raft they can in order to get to us and greet us. Plus, we sail with our three tiny children, it's like the circus has arrived! It's common for us to have strings of happy and animated local kids swarming the length of the boat, hanging on to the lifelines, and peeking through the windows. Less visited islands of Southeast Asia have proved the biggest challenge with this kind of reception, where kids and adults alike will scramble up and sit on the sugar scoop at the stern or even up on the aft deck without invitation or welcome. They'd flock to our children to an over-whelming extent, wanting to touch and stroke them, taking “selfies” or demanding attention or conversation in a language totally foreign to our little ones. So we champion their comfort, insisting that they give the kids a bit of breathing space, even stringing a rope barrier to designate a private area for family in contrast to one for visitors. I suppose it's simply part of the deal when sailing unusual paths. Plus, there's comfort in knowing we can pick up our anchor, in search of more secluded sailing spots.



**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)

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