

It looks like rain

One of the great joys – and occasionally trials – of life afloat is that you are much more attuned and in harmony with the elements, as **Jess Lloyd-Mostyn** notes

Sometimes the life of a liveaboard sailor seems completely at odds with that of a landlubber: things that may seem simple in our boat lives may be infinitely more complex in a house. Likewise, there are subjects that appear trivial when you live on land, which are elevated to weighty matters when your home is a yacht.

Take the rain. In city life we glance at the raindrop-dashed window, we opt for water resistant footwear and a jacket for our morning commute, and automatically grab the umbrella idling by the front door on our way out. Bobbing at anchor, with all your portlights open for ventilation, the start of an unexpected shower triggers a flurry of activity. “Quick, shut the hatches!” I bark, as we run from one end of the boat to another closing them, in an order that may seem haphazard but relates to the size of each one and how destructive any water ingress beneath one would be, sliding our companionway hatches over and bolting upstairs, on deck, to grab the dry washing off the line.

“Hmmm, still raining” you might mumble to yourself, noting the time, as you drive in to work. Or perhaps you’re on a bus and check how long the rain is meant to last on your phone. But chances are that you’re checking your email or instagram first. “Is it a big one?” the boat-dwelling counterparts are wondering, peeping out to check the sky and the horizon from the safety of their sprayhoods. You assess the darkness of the cloud, hypothesise how much wind as well as rain it may contain, and consider the position of the surrounding boats, gauging the amount of chain you have out.

A continued unforeseen rainstorm on land is a sigh, a battle to get the broly up, an unwelcome splash to the socks, a roll of the eye. Extended rain onboard is a halt to plans, a “let’s wait it out before we slip lines” or even a choice to stay an extra day. It’s a panicked hide and seek game of spot-the-leak, or a fortunate bit of impromptu water collection in buckets. If it’s underway there’s bound to be increased wind involved so you’re donning foulies and plunged into the activity of reefing-down, keeping the boat calm and controlled, blinking the raindrops



‘Everyone, back on the boat, NOW!’ I commanded, in the most authoritative, unwavering voice I could muster’

out of your eyes as you steer to keep the sails happy and wait it out until the squall passes.

We regard the rain on land in a nonchalant, lazy way. It’s a footnote to our day, a “So what? I’m watching tv...”, an “Oh well, let’s grab a taxi to the restaurant” that’s barely even a minor blip to our plans.

I remember lying at anchor in Panama several years ago, when we had family visiting the boat and were all set to head out for a meal. James was helping them into the tender while I was locking up when a sound made me look up. A hiss, growing to a louder “shhhh” noise caught my attention and I squinted to see it’s source. A wall of white was clearly visible, racing up the street and towards the anchorage.

“Everyone, back on the boat, NOW!” I commanded, in the

most authoritative, unwavering voice I could muster, as my sister and brother-in-law scrambled, somewhat bewildered, back out of the dinghy and stumbled onto deck in their fancy, dressing-up-for-dinner clothes. “IN!” I yelled, and we all piled inside and just got the washboards closed behind us when the rain hit. It pelted down, lashing the boat, obliterating the sky and the accompanying wind blasted us at 30 knots.

My disconcerted family couldn’t quite see the logistical problem the squall had raised. A little rain had entirely kiboshed our evening plans. There would be no last night of holiday special meal with the dinghy suddenly transformed into a bathtub and the anchorage a whiteout. James and I instantly moved into our well-practised rhythms, checking on our GPS position, the wind strength, downloading the most recent forecast, braving the deluge to check on our chain. The torrent of rain finally subsided, two hours later.

And I think that’s the heart of the difference: that land-dwelling, particularly in cities, is so rarely at the mercy of nature and the elements. Our plans are our own for the making, we combat the darkness with electric light, the cold with heating, and can ignore the rain thanks to umbrellas, cars and, ultimately, weatherproof houses. Rain on board doesn’t have to dampen your spirits and neither is it the case that it spoils play. We just engage with it because we have to.



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