

It Still Rains in Paradise

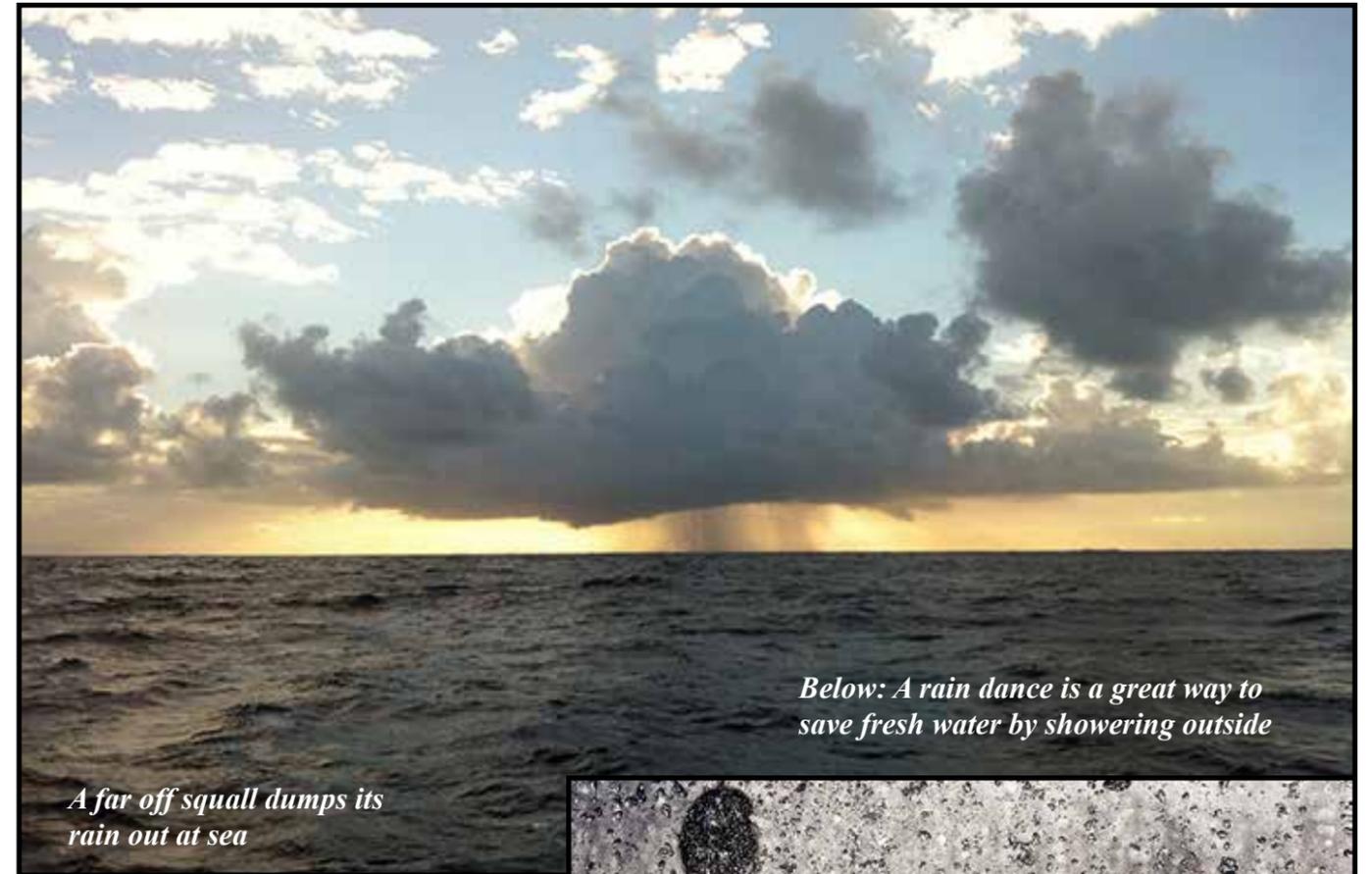
by Jess Lloyd-Mostyn

It's raining today in Fiji. Or perhaps I should say, it's raining again in Fiji. In the last few weeks we've been making passages through the reef systems of this beautiful island group, but progress has been slow as we've been weather dodging, trying our best to avoid huge rain downpours whilst underway.

Shocking as it may seem, we get a lot of rain. This shouldn't really come as much of a surprise but, for some reason, once people know that you're off sailing in exotic locations, it's never an image of a rainy day that comes to mind. Well, perhaps it will come



A squall approaches while sailing off the coast of Costa Rica



A far off squall dumps its rain out at sea

Below: A rain dance is a great way to save fresh water by showering outside



as a nice surprise if you're reading this whilst gazing at a wintry scene through your window. It rains here. It rains a lot.

I think that the real issue is the flippant use of the word "paradise." Since leaving England we've spent the whole of the last three years living in the tropics and we've heard pretty much every single place we've stopped in referred to as "paradise." It's mentioned on the VHF radio nets in the mornings, it's written all over the cruising guides, and we, too, find it creeping into our everyday vocabularies more and more. World cruising throughout the tropics means that your sailing routes can hit some of the countries and places that people have always dreamed of. The dream will always include a cloudless sky and is further fuelled by every book, postcard and every brochure image that is a record of such places. Tahiti, St Lucia, Fiji, the Virgin Islands, Costa Rica, every single one of them trades on the merit of being a glamorous utopia. Emails or Skype calls with our friends and families back home often touch on a note of jealousy about the weather as people tend to picture us, bobbing gently below a clear sky of blazing sunshine. And yet, although we see



Palm trees in the background, rain in the foreground



Adamastor at anchor - French Polynesia

the photographs of the lush vegetation, the verdant hills and the wealth of unusual and colourful flowers which sit so well with our personal understanding of “paradise,” people, in general, fail to realise that such fertility is fuelled by rain.

Tropical rain has a character all its own. London may have showers, or a continuous drizzle for a day, but the rains that we’ve encountered in recent years have much more theatre and spectacle to them. A rainstorm can start in an instant, but with a force that can’t be ignored. It’s like someone flipping a switch. It can pound so heavily that it’s actually quite pleasurable to stand out in it, as it’s stronger than any water pressure you’d get from a shower in a bathroom. The water drums on every surface and cleans our decks in moments.

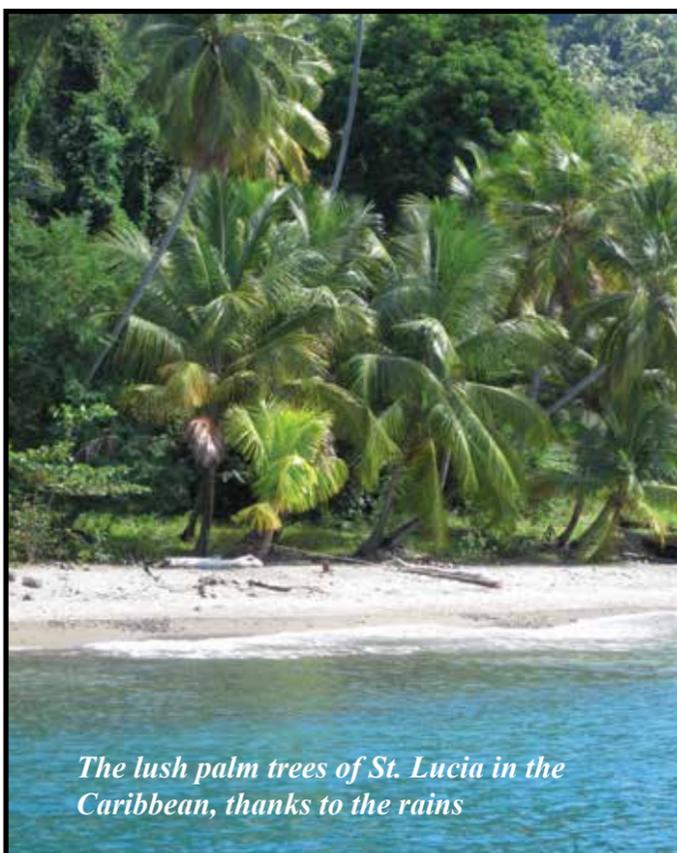
Rain obliterates the mainland from your view, makes the channel you’re sailing towards disappear or suddenly renders a towering mountain invisible. The rains that we experience are so forceful and so sudden that a distinct wall of white can be seen moving towards you when it comes. It’s accompanied by a roar of water and a sudden flurry of movement as every boat at anchor closes itself up, hatches shut and all signs of life gone, like a turtle drawing into its shell.

Sometimes the wall of rain comes with intense gusts of wind, coming as if from nowhere. This sends the water flying horizontally and sets the boat bucking and straining at its anchor. If you’re underway, you have only seconds in which to reef down once you spot the wall of white approaching. Or, it can be the opposite, still and windless, with fat, heavy, relentless drops hammering down. Sometimes it’s even a bit of both, with unpredictable swings and changes in wind direction as well as strength, making sailing through it a real challenge.

Rain in the tropics does, at least, tend to be quite warm, so if you’re caught out in a storm you generally won’t be shivering. But what gives it a real personality is the sheer volume of water that falls in one of these deluges.

We lived on our boat in Panama through one hurricane season. Tucked in as far south as that, you’re safe from tropical storms, but you are most definitely not spared from the full force of the rains that are associated with weather disturbances further north. It can easily rain non-stop for three days. It’s during this type of persistent downpour that you will really be aware of any leaks on board if you hadn’t noticed them before.

These rains can be trying. Everything feels damp and there is no way of drying out soaked clothing, cushions or bedding. The humidity is announced cheerfully over the radio as being 100% and everything you touch seems to be saturated. There are times when you might feel somewhat stir-crazy as torrential rain results in a sort of boat-arrest where your only option is to hunker down. In our pre-baby boating lives we would resort to good



The lush palm trees of St. Lucia in the Caribbean, thanks to the rains



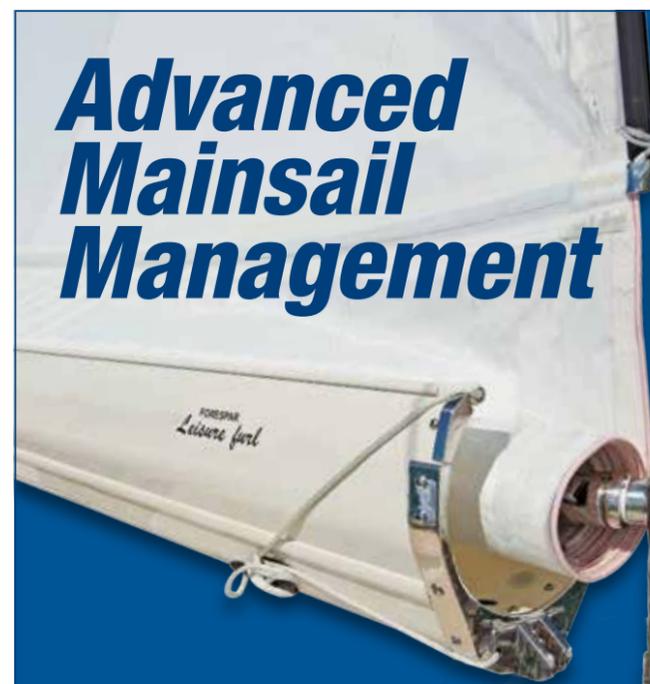
books and good movies, snuggling down into our cocoon of a cabin for a few days. Surprisingly, rainy days with an infant have resulted in even more delightful distractions. The week that we were almost entirely boat bound due to the heavy rains in northern Fiji meant that we had some truly lovely quality family time together.

Sailing a route through a series of islands and countries, as we are doing in the Pacific, means that if you get hit by the rains during the limited time you have in one place, you may miss out on seeing it altogether. We had great weather in Bora Bora, but friends who arrived later than us had a solid fortnight of rain. Our 10 days in Rarotonga in the Cook islands included only three days of sunshine.

It pays to remember that one aspect of life in the tropics is that the people who live there year-round are excited by the rain. They look forward to it and rejoice in it as opposed to our view in England of wishing it away. Rain feeds crops, nurtures plants, sustains animals and provides clean water for drinking, bathing, cooking and laundry. Cruisers too, for all our dislike of rain when navigating reefs, love the opportunity to fill our water tanks. We have no water-maker on board so rain catchment has always been a huge benefit of a few rainy days. We cover our aft deck with extra buckets, stretch a tarpaulin out or even collect rainwater from our dinghy and reap the rewards for the rest of the week. I’m especially appreciative of this extra water now that we have a baby on board and every day is laundry day. There’s something that feels very satisfying about harvesting your own fresh water to live on in this way.

So, the next time that England looks grey and miserable and you silently curse your cruiser friends enjoying the sunshine on the other side of the earth, imagining them in some idyllic location, you should stop and remember to add a hefty dose of rain to that sublime image you’re painting. Or else, feel smug, as you’re the lucky ones whilst we’re longing for some of that glorious rain so we can fill our water tanks. 🇬🇧

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