

THINGS THAT GO

SOMETIMES THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN ORDEAL

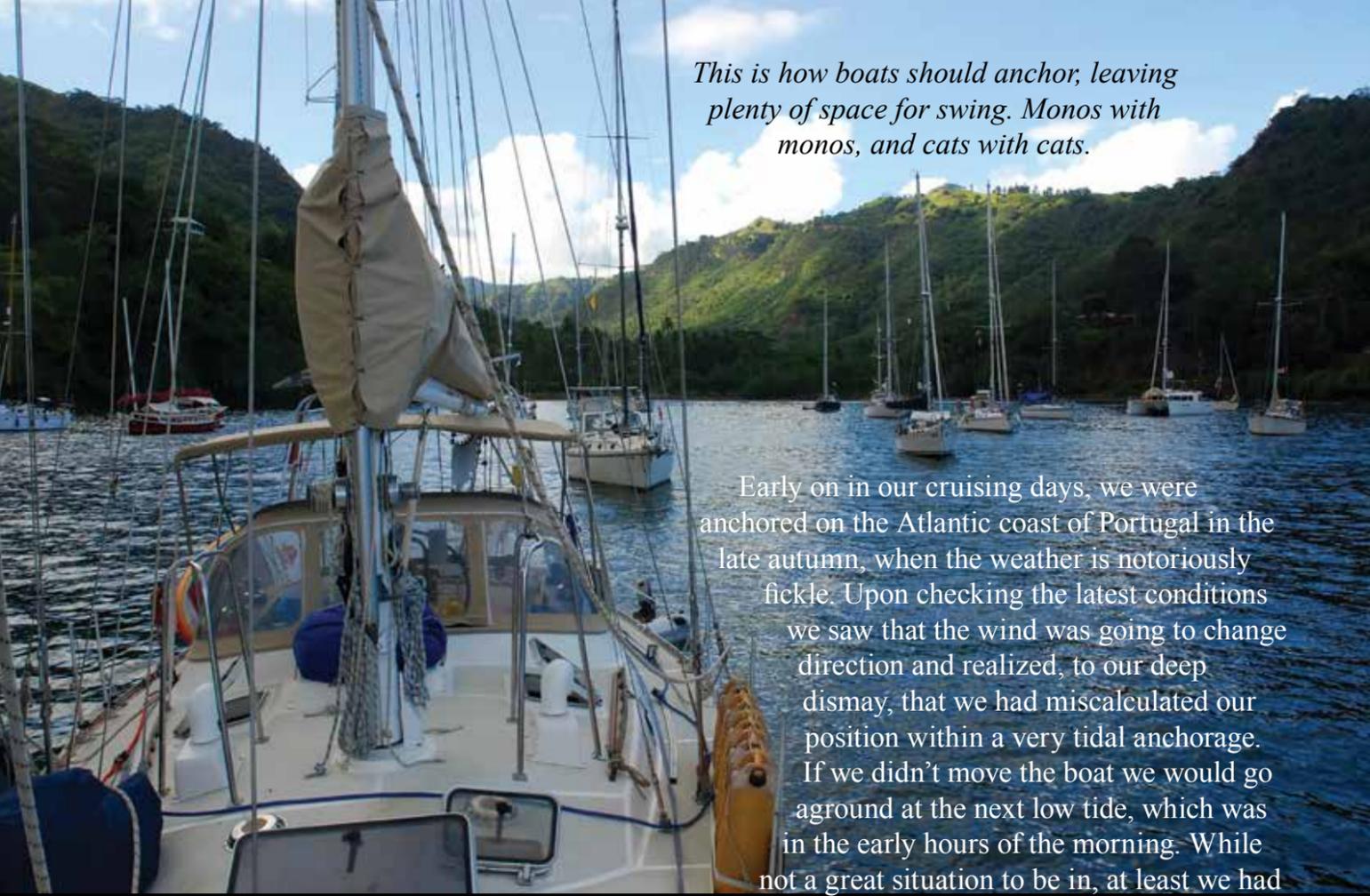
BUMP IN THE NIGHT

AND AN ADVENTURE IS A SECURE ANCHORAGE!

*Anchored in Paradise...
Bora Bora,
French Polynesia*

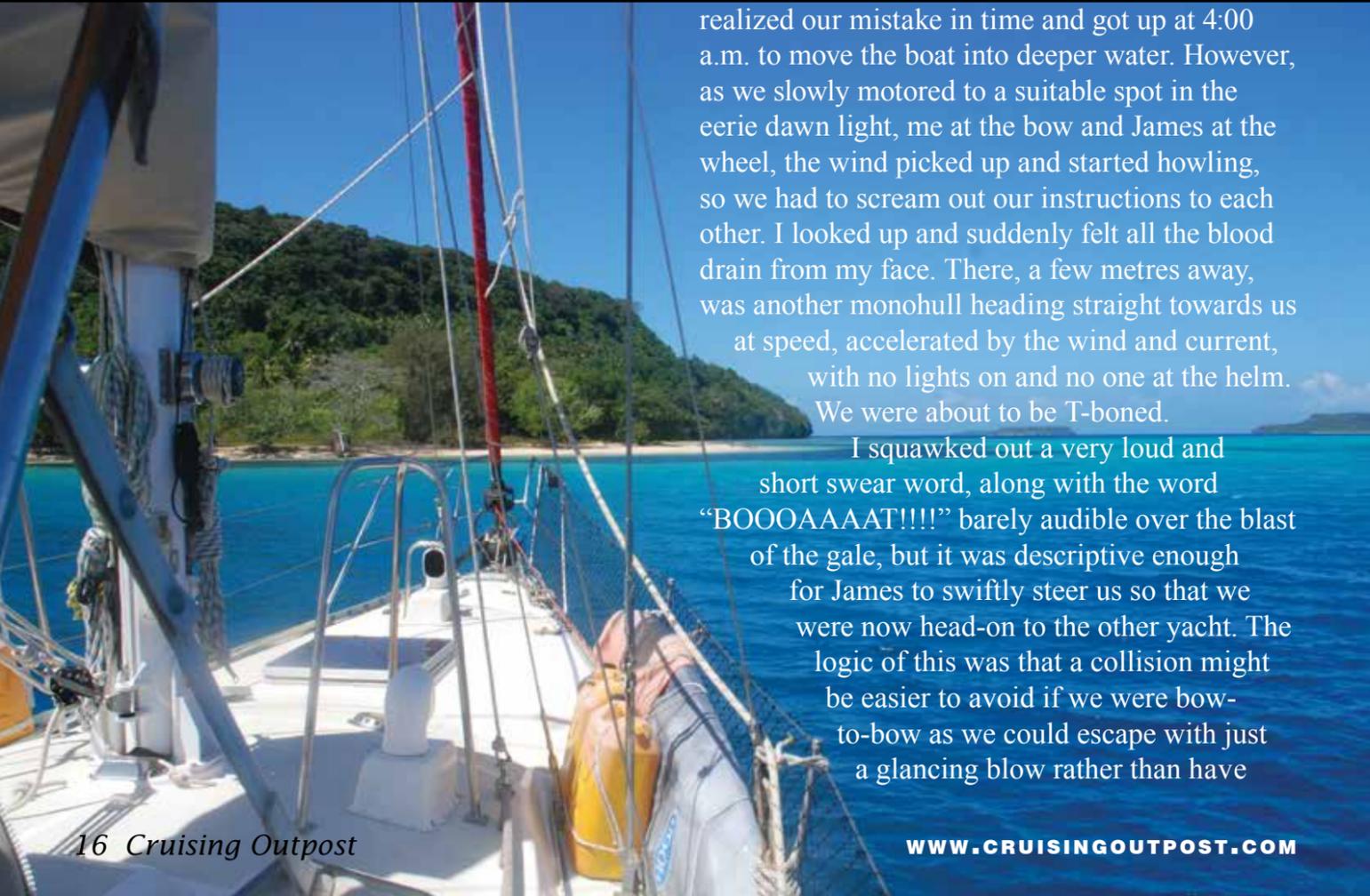
As a liveaboard sailor there is nothing better than dropping the hook and spending the night at anchor. You can pick a beautiful, secluded spot and the boat becomes your own little island of tranquillity. The trick to being content with your spacing is something that comes with experience. The more you gain, the more you develop a feel and a knack for doing it well.

*Story and Photos by
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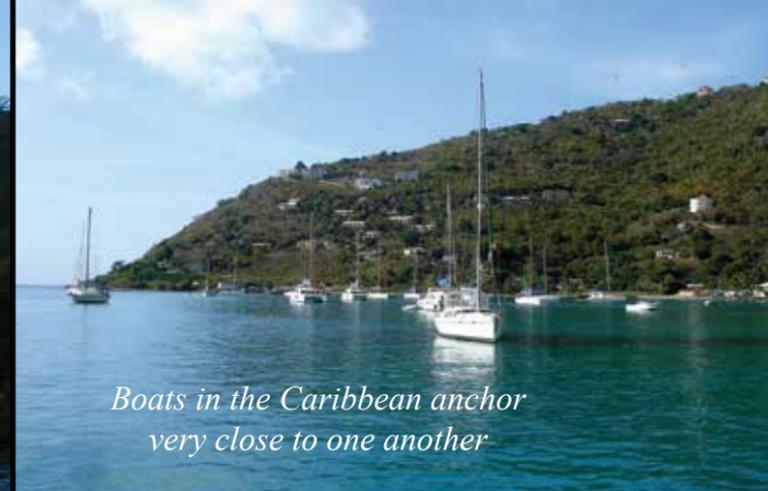
This is how boats should anchor, leaving plenty of space for swing. Monos with monos, and cats with cats.

Early on in our cruising days, we were anchored on the Atlantic coast of Portugal in the late autumn, when the weather is notoriously fickle. Upon checking the latest conditions we saw that the wind was going to change direction and realized, to our deep dismay, that we had miscalculated our position within a very tidal anchorage. If we didn't move the boat we would go aground at the next low tide, which was in the early hours of the morning. While not a great situation to be in, at least we had



realized our mistake in time and got up at 4:00 a.m. to move the boat into deeper water. However, as we slowly motored to a suitable spot in the eerie dawn light, me at the bow and James at the wheel, the wind picked up and started howling, so we had to scream out our instructions to each other. I looked up and suddenly felt all the blood drain from my face. There, a few metres away, was another monohull heading straight towards us at speed, accelerated by the wind and current, with no lights on and no one at the helm. We were about to be T-boned.

I squawked out a very loud and short swear word, along with the word "BOOOAAAAT!!!!" barely audible over the blast of the gale, but it was descriptive enough for James to swiftly steer us so that we were now head-on to the other yacht. The logic of this was that a collision might be easier to avoid if we were bow-to-bow as we could escape with just a glancing blow rather than have



Boats in the Caribbean anchor very close to one another

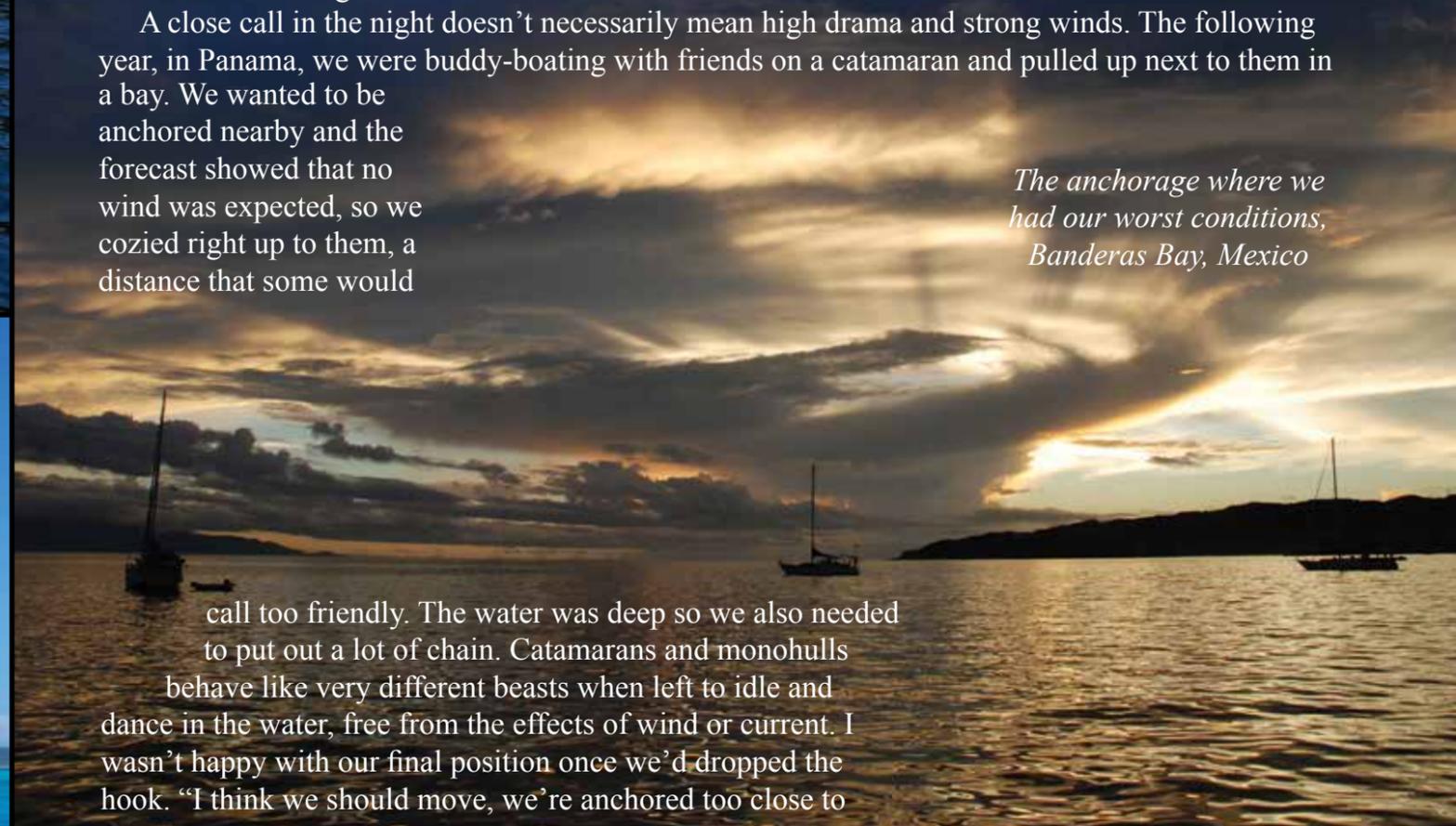


Nicely spaced - Portugal

another vessel crashing into our beam. Luckily, we didn't even touch and we stared in horror as the "ghost boat" sped silently past us and eventually ploughed into the shore next to another wreck. It had broken free from its mooring that night and there was no one on board to hear our shouts and warnings.

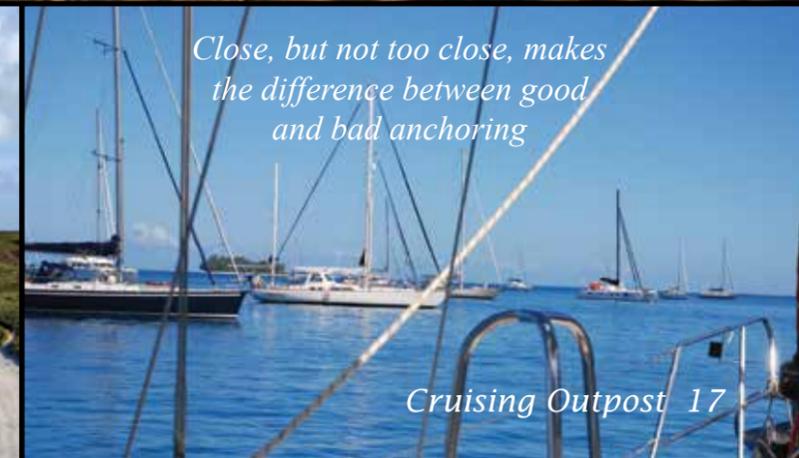
A close call in the night doesn't necessarily mean high drama and strong winds. The following year, in Panama, we were buddy-boating with friends on a catamaran and pulled up next to them in a bay. We wanted to be anchored nearby and the forecast showed that no wind was expected, so we cozied right up to them, a distance that some would

The anchorage where we had our worst conditions, Banderas Bay, Mexico

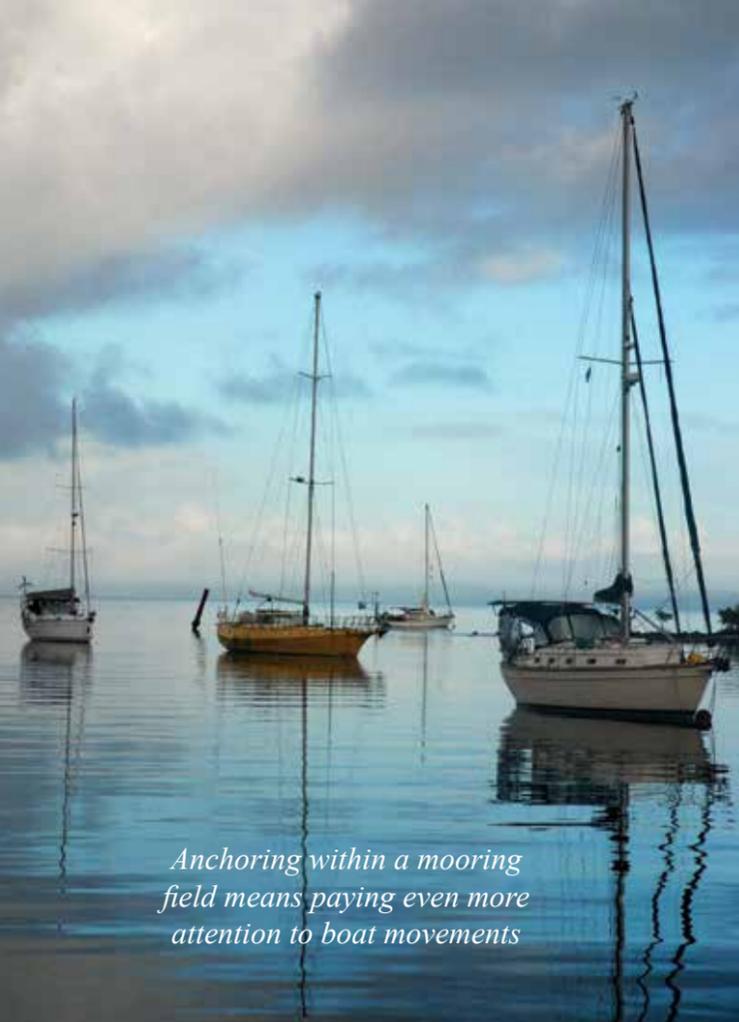


call too friendly. The water was deep so we also needed to put out a lot of chain. Catamarans and monohulls behave like very different beasts when left to idle and dance in the water, free from the effects of wind or current. I wasn't happy with our final position once we'd dropped the hook. "I think we should move, we're anchored too close to

The secluded anchorage is always the best



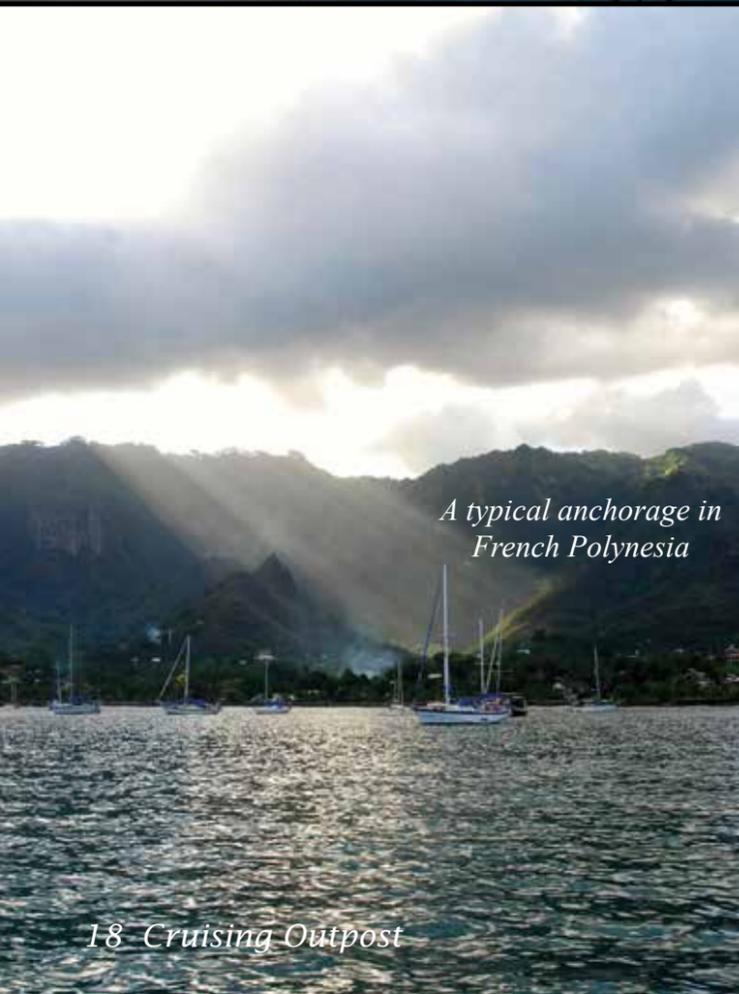
Close, but not too close, makes the difference between good and bad anchoring



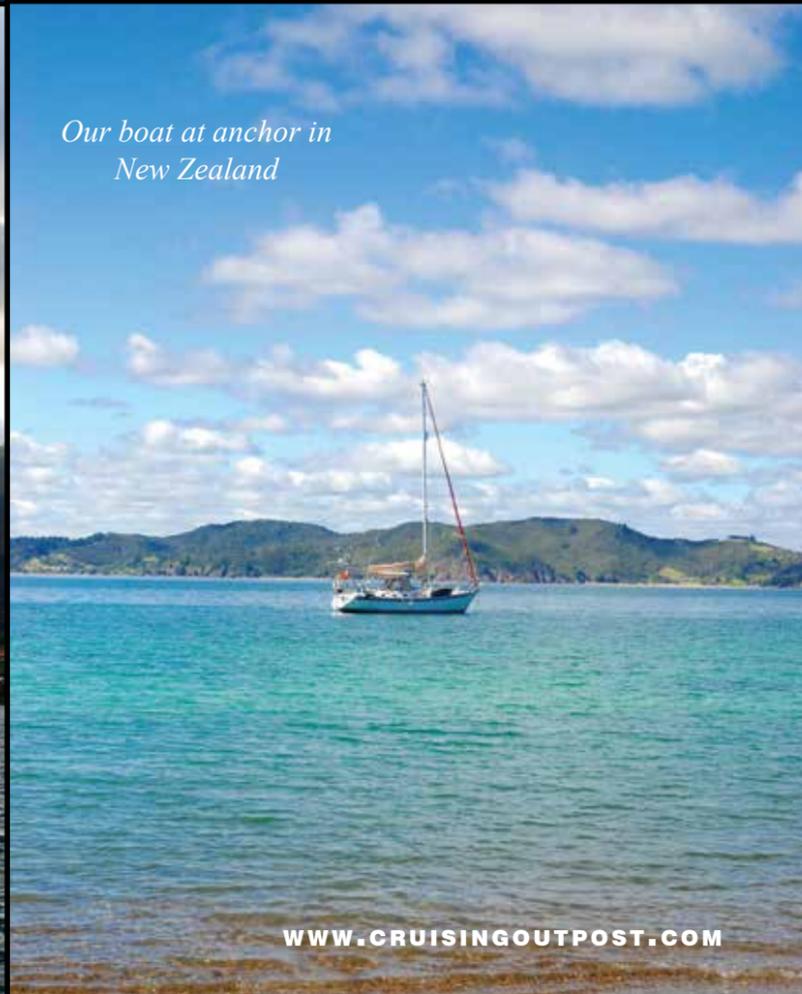
Anchoring within a mooring field means paying even more attention to boat movements



One of our favourite Caribbean anchorages



A typical anchorage in French Polynesia



Our boat at anchor in New Zealand

James reassured me, but I was still grumbling. Sure enough, that night we were woken by a little “bump” and scrambled up on deck to be greeted by the equally sleepy and surprised faces of our mates who were good natured enough to say, “Fancy seeing you here!” rather than blaming us for the situation. In the stillness the two boats had gently bounced together.

Minor though the impact was, it was bound to be repeated over the course of the night if we didn’t do something. In the name of a good night’s sleep our solution was to fender up, raft the two boats together with several lines given the mild conditions, and all go back to bed to deal with detangling in the morning. Thankfully, they

were nice about it and James only had to put up with a day or two of my I-told-you-so smugness.

Fortunately, we’ve come a long way since then, learning more and more about just how our boat moves and swings in every different set of conditions. The great lesson with any kind of anchoring blunder is to realize and rectify your mistake before your boat (or anyone else’s) gets into any real trouble. The true beauty of the sailing community is that everyone has developed their own know-how from a similar set of embarrassing incidents and encounters. Sure, they’re hair-raising and somewhat humiliating at the time, but so long as you do improve, these bumps will be only to your ego rather than your boat. 🍷

