

Message in a bottle

To the editor: Picture the scene — you've just crossed an ocean and, filled with elation, you're brimming with the urge to share that news with your friends and family back home. But, for the global cruising sailor, it's not just as simple as picking up the phone to get the word out that you're safe and sound.

Welcome, dear readers, to the dark world of my constant frustration at trying to keep writing while actually being out voyaging. Because we're on a fairly small budget (like so many people voyaging these days), and also due to the fact that we prefer to run a low-energy-usage, low-fi boat, James and I have no Internet or email access while on board. This makes us increasingly unusual among the long-distance sailors that are in our current cruising fleet. The ability to use things like SailMail or Saildocs via SSB radio or a satellite phone in order to access GRIB files and other weather information proves invaluable when you are in some of the world's more remote places. Those facilities being at your fingertips for vital forecasting also means they are available for the casual email, alerting your key people elsewhere to your major cruising milestones.

And it's something we do strategize and think about. A lot. So, just to clarify how much your long-distance cruiser friend, sister, uncle or whoever truly *does* care about replying to your last email, I'll paint you a picture of what's involved. You need to leave the boat, maybe bringing your own laptop, iPhone

or tablet with you, maybe not. Hopefully, if you do, it's suitably bundled in a dry bag. The dry bag is because we still need to get in touch, pay our bills or order our spares when the swell kicks up and the wind is blowing and the short-est trip ashore results in a hefty saltwater

dousing to everything in the dinghy. That's before we even begin to talk about the joys of surf landings, scrambling up onto shambolic docks, or perhaps the extreme case — such as on the island of Niue in the South Pacific — of needing a crane to lift your dinghy out of the water.

Once ashore, it would be lovely to be greeted with a plethora of Internet cafes, all with high-speed broadband Wi-Fi that's totally free with the purchase of an organic cappuccino or almond croissant. Yes, wouldn't that be lovely? Instead we have to contend with a signal as painfully slow as the dial-up connections of old because in far-flung places they often use a satellite-based form of Internet. Plus



Sometimes voyagers have to get a connection in some unlikely places, such as this island Internet cafe.



Jessica Lloyd-Mostyn



Above, James types quickly while he still has an Internet connection! Left, Jess, with iPhone and laptop in a dry bag looking for the nearest Wi-Fi connection.

you may have to pay through the nose to use it, buying an expensive card or single-use code that gives you a certain number of minutes' use, which seems like less and less of a good value when you realize how painfully slow the connection really is.

Add in to all that the fact that the local Wi-Fi hot spots may be in the most inconvenient of places, such as inside the local post office, which is only open for three hours a day, five days a week, and is a half-hour drive away from the anchorage. It's not unusual to see little huddled groups of cruisers with their laptops, perched in some odd location in town trying desperately to shelter themselves from the rain while trying to get as close to the

hot spot router as possible.

The local businesses are onto us, of course. Any bar or restaurant looking for success will simply get themselves a decent Internet connection, put up a sign in the window saying “free Wi-Fi,” then cunningly only dispense the magic code for its use with a purchase and then, of course, they’ll change said code every single day. Presto, the establishment is full of bursting every happy hour, the bar lined with the usual suspects: the single-hander nursing a lone beer while trying to order his vital boat parts while navigating the local customs taxes; the casual crew browsing online the latest sailing opportunities or perhaps their next flight; the family slowly uploading the photos to update their blog and realizing they may as well just order food as this will take a good few hours; or the frazzled mother, who suddenly remembered that her tax return was due, her computer quickly running out of power, and she left the correct adapter for the country she’s in back on the boat at anchor.

I’m speaking hypothetically of course.

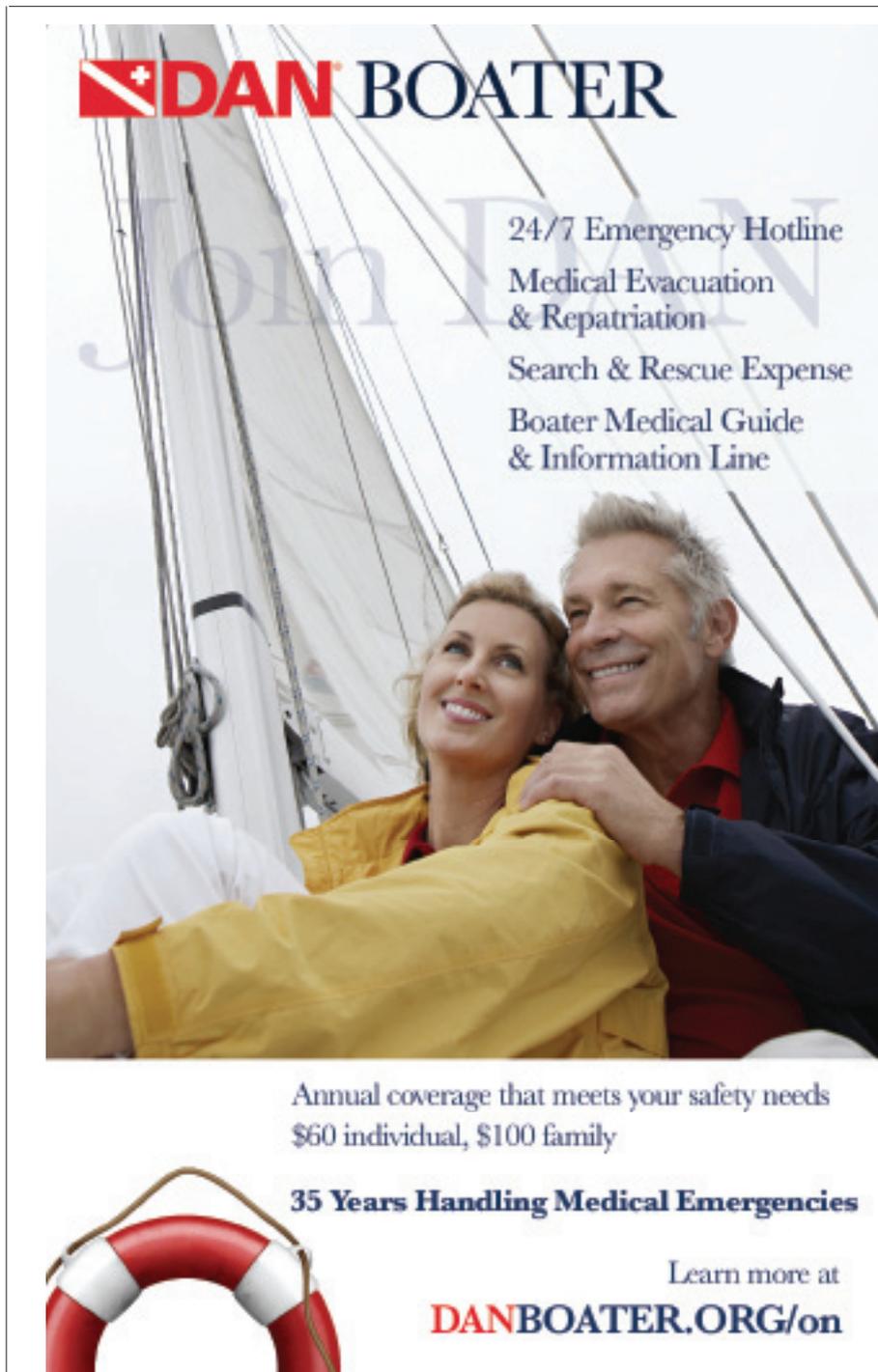
My real point though is not to gripe about it being hard to get online, as really it’s quite amazing that we can use the Internet at all in some of the most remote islands, pure dots in the middle of an ocean. It’s more to confirm that we do read your messages and we love to receive them. Family and friends left behind at home are always on the minds of the long-distance cruiser and if our emails, Facebook posts or blog entries sometimes

seem short, disjointed or clipped, it’s never because we don’t care.

It’s simply that the connection is bad or our minutes have run...

—Jessica Lloyd-Mostyn and James left England in 2011 aboard *Adamastor*, a Crossbow

42, intending to circumnavigate in a couple of years. They have had two children en route, a daughter named Rocket and a son named Indigo. They have covered 18,000 miles and visited 32 countries since they set off. You can follow their progress at www.water-log.com.



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