

Blue note

Our new bluewater cruising columnist Jess Lloyd-Mostyn discovers a home away from home in New Zealand

While strolling along the UK south coast I looked out to sea, saw a boat and said out loud to my boyfriend James, “We could just buy a boat and sail around the world.” He laughed at me, quite rightly, as I’d never even set foot on a sailing boat and dismissed my statement as fantasy. But that one glance planted an idea in my mind, which slowly began to take hold.

Nearly five years on from that and we’ve spent the last four living afloat, sailing around the globe and starting our family on board. We’ve seen white-sand beaches galore, trekked through tropical jungle, swum in coral-fringed turquoise waters and crossed both the Equator and the 180th meridian so we’re now literally on the other side of the world from our home.

Sailing south from Fiji to New Zealand marked our first departure from the tropics since 2011.

Returning to a climate ruled by four seasons meant that it was distinctly more like England than the other 31 countries we had taken in en route. It began to rain. Not the warm, tropical rain we were now used to but days of grey skies and constant drizzle which brought an odd smile of familiarity to James’ face. I was not so sentimental about the shift in temperature and insisted we pull our jumpers out of deep storage, not used since the Bay of Biscay, and huddle together as the nights got cooler.

It was a funny thing to be suddenly reunited with the more ordinary aspects of English life upon arrival; from A4 paper to 240-volt electricity, Marmite to driving on the left. Our first trip to the nearest supermarket made me squeal with happiness at the nostalgic wonders of broccoli, corn on the cob and strawberries, items both imported and prohibitively expensive elsewhere in the south Pacific.

We sailed into the Bay of Islands, situated just to the north of Auckland. With an anchorage for every wind direction and strength it provided ideal respite after the challenges of our recent offshore and ocean passages. No reefs to crunch into, no strong winds to batter you and only a couple of miles from one anchorage to the next. It sounds almost pedestrian after crossing oceans but these perfect conditions were just what we wanted. Pure sailing



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at its best. The highlight of a typical anchoring spot once ashore was a quick hike up to the lookout, giving you a truly stunning panoramic view of the other islands and the bay.

The beaches looked like the Cornish coast where I spent childhood holidays. “Ooh, rockpools!” I shrieked with joy, encouraging our 18-month-old daughter to dip her tiny, pudgy toes in. She looked at me quizzically, as if pointing out how much colder the water was, no doubt noting that I’d never displayed such hysteria at the pristine beaches in our more exotic locations.

From there we sailed down towards Whangarei, a town 15 miles upriver and ignored by most tourists. It is functional as opposed to pretty, with faceless corrugated iron sheds making up many of the buildings. The marina, however, is at the very heart of town, meaning living aboard is very practical, especially with toddler in tow. We also ventured inland and drove around the country, camping

and exploring throughout autumn right up until the first snows. By then even our Biscay jumpers couldn’t keep out the chill and we retreated back north.

But perhaps it’s fitting that, over 180 degrees of longitude from where we first launched, New Zealand feels comfortable. Despite the epic mountain vistas and valley scenes, we delighted in our first sights of leaves turning red and gold, of conkers falling from trees, of parks with duckponds; such small native joys against the big scale of our adventures. This country holds a bit more significance for us than just our latest fleeting home, as it’s where our second baby will be born any day now. This time I don’t have to commit to memory the Spanish for “no caesarean-section unless it’s really necessary”. We’ve somehow ended up in a floating homeland half a world away. All from a silly notion one day on the cliffs. ●



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jess and boyfriend James decided to buy *Adamastor*, a Crossbow 42 cruising yacht. Four months later, they were setting off on a trip that has taken them as far as New Zealand