

# The curse of Internet communications afloat



It's not that cruisers ignore loved ones at home, says Jess Lloyd-Mostyn. It's just hard to communicate properly



*It's a mission to find an Internet hook-up in the middle of nowhere*



*No café is complete without everyone struggling to get a connection*

ALL PHOTOS: JESS LLOYD-MOSTYN

When we crossed an ocean, we wanted to share that news with our friends and family, but for long-distance cruisers it's not as simple as picking up the phone. We're heavily reliant on the Internet and email to make that vital connection. Back home it's only a moment to turn on, ping out a quick message and get on with your day. In our world things aren't so straightforward.

Trying to keep writing while being out there and sailing is an art form. We have no internet access on board, which is increasingly unusual among our cruising fleet. Using single-sideband (SSB) radio or a satellite phone to access weather information proves invaluable when in the world's more remote places. Having those facilities at your fingertips for vital forecasting brings with it the bonus of being available for casual email, even although not for a lengthy message.

Liveboard sailors have a rather love-hate relationship with being contactable. A boat becomes her own island. Much like the practice of writing a letter by hand and the ritual of finding a stamp, there is a certain pleasure in venturing ashore to communicate with your landlubber family. It goes like this: You leave the boat with your laptop, iPhone or tablet bundled in a dry bag, because we still need to get in touch, pay bills or order spares when the swell kicks up, the wind is blowing and the



*You have to seize the moment – Quick, keep typing while the connection is good!*

shortest trip results in a hefty saltwater dousing. That's before surf landings, scrambling up onto shambolic docks or one extreme case where the locals used a crane to lift our dinghy to get ashore.

Once there we have to contend with a signal as slow as the old dial-up connections because in far-flung places they often use a satellite-based form of internet. You may have to pay hefty to use it and for a limited number of minutes. This seems less and less good value when you realise how painfully slow the connection is. WiFi hotspots are in inconvenient places, perhaps inside the local post office, which opens for three

hours a day and is a half-hour drive from the anchorage.

Any bar or restaurant looking for success will get itself a decent internet connection, put up a 'free WiFi' sign, then only dispense the magic code for its use with a purchase. The place will be full with the usual suspects: the singlehander ordering boat parts; the crew browsing the latest sailing opportunities; the family uploading photos for their blog, and the frazzled mother who has suddenly remembered that her tax return is due and her computer is fast running out of power.

Attempting a video call using Skype is an exercise in frustration, repeating 'you've frozen, I can't hear you, what was that?' Any real-time communication becomes further complicated by the growing difference in time zones as you sail westward.

I'm not griping. It's quite amazing that we get the Internet at all in these dots in the ocean. It's more to let everyone at home know – we do read your messages, we promise. Family and friends at home are always on the minds of the long distance cruiser and if our emails or blog entries seem short or disjointed it's never because we don't care.

It's simply that the connection is bad and our minutes have run... ▲

*Follow Jess's progress on her blog at [www.water-log.com](http://www.water-log.com)*