

# Blue note

Don't reach for the camera! The essential wonders of sailing are best left uncaptured, says Jess Lloyd-Mostyn

Sailing is no longer an isolated venture. Every cruiser seems to have a blog, a Facebook page or an Instagram account that can broadcast their breathtaking images of picturesque settings, sending them worldwide in a second. And why do we do it? To share, to transfer some of that boating magic back homewards with the adage of “wish you were here” and to further validate that this way of life, our way of life, is so special.

But the pictures are only a snippet of the reality. Sailing's greatest mysteries and wonders lie in the uncaptured moments; the times you lower the camera and set it down on the chart table; those great occasions when you can't stomach the separation that the lens would create. My favourite images from our cruising adventures so far are the ones that exist only in memory.

One such encounter was when we were motor-sailing and the water was a still and clear bright blue, which is how we saw the grey shape appear so distinctly. A lone humpback whale, extending the entire length of the boat, drew up alongside us. Our crewmate was asleep, I had our infant daughter strapped to me and James was at my side in the cockpit. I don't remember which of us saw it first but I can still feel the joint intake of breath as we both gasped at the sheer, immense size of this creature. That first sight held exactly the same thought for both of us: would the whale hit us?

But then any fear evaporated and what took over, which made us sigh with pleasure and consciously choose to not grab the camera, was the pure grand and humbling feeling of witnessing so large an animal swimming next to us. He span around, exposing his big white belly and then rolled again, blowing water. The salty, fishy smelling spray misting our faces made us laugh at being “kissed by the whale”. We continued to stare at him gliding along, diving and surfacing, until he left an hour later and we felt nothing but awe.

Sailing at night is one of my favourite things about boating life. It always strikes me as wilder, giving a sharper awareness of the speed of the boat and the hiss of the



ILLUSTRATION: AIMEE JEWITT-HARRIS

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water as we cut along. But we've never been able to capture the stars that we've seen. Out on the ocean, thousands of miles from light pollution, you see stars in such great densities that you feel your eyes widening as they try to take them all in. Every turn of your head reveals another shooting star, a cluster of the Milky Way or a brightly shining planet. And there you are, on a tiny little boat, bobbing about in the water below.

Other shots that never made it to my camera include the superpod of dolphins, jumping, leaping and spinning as they played around us. Then there was the giant manta ray that rose up from underneath us while we were snorkelling. I remember sitting and marvelling at the dramatic flashes and forks of far-off lightning, blazing against a rapidly darkening sky or the loud roar of sudden tropical rain, instantly rendering our surroundings white.

There are sights that no technology can really

communicate, like bio-luminescence in the water. I love the way the strength of light relates to the speed of the motion and you can only distinguish what is creating it by reading the activity of the lights. Fast-moving dolphins create glittering zigzags whereas eagle rays dance in the water, only their tails and wing-tips edged by the glow. Shoals of fish are a mass of shimmering sparkles and individuals are reduced to splashes in the darkness, leaving bursts of light hanging in the water. Even our own boat creates a show as luminous waves explode against the hull and our wake becomes a fast-fading jet path of bright-green light. I'll never forget how we dangled our legs over the sugar scoop at the stern, kicking our feet in the river and stirring up millions of tiny glowing fireworks beneath the water's surface.

I am so glad we've avoided countless bad shots with bits of fin sticking out from dark water or endless blurs of light, smudges of stars or phosphorescence that would rob these moments of their magic. No matter how fancy the camera, some things are best described by the reaction that they arouse in you, rather than recording what is seen.

And the very best bits? Well, you will have to come here to find them. ✦



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