

Blue note

Despite four and a half years of bluewater cruising, Jess Lloyd-Mostyn admits she's just as susceptible to seasickness as the next sailor

It is often surprising to me how many people say that they would love to do what we're doing and go out sailing long-term to far-off exotic lands but are unable to because they suffer from seasickness.

Yet what's more unexpected perhaps is that I reply somewhat nonchalantly that I too get seasick. That's right, we've sailed halfway round the world, been living aboard our floating home for nearly four and a half years, crossed two oceans and popped out a couple of babies en route and the chink in my armour is that there are still certain types of sea-state that can make me feel quite ill.

My first-ever day sailing was spent crossing from Gibraltar to Morocco in a sloppy sea one January. The wind was blowing Force 7, with gusts of 8 and the strait was covered with white horses. I was in the cockpit having the absolute time of my life. As a totally green newbie I had no idea just how rough the sea really was and how tough a time my fellow crew was having. And then I became green in another way and was soon bidding farewell to my lunch. Mal-de-mer had crept up on me, seemingly out of nowhere, and temporarily caused my cruising ambitions to falter. We had already schemed our adventure of buying a boat and setting out into the blue. Wouldn't seasickness be the shipwreck of our plans? These thoughts, it turns out, were just another aspect of the illness itself.

Unlike many other common ailments, which stem from infections and viruses, seasickness is essentially your eyes, ears and stomach all getting and sending each other rather confusing messages. There are countless drugs that people swear by, or gentler remedies like ginger, seabands, antihistamine or acupressure. My own trick to overcoming it involves my elegant mantra of "eat a lot, drink a lot, go to the toilet a lot" and recognising the warning signs.

We've had great numbers of friends, family and crew stay and sail on board with us and without a doubt the first sign of any sort of seasickness is people insisting that they are not feeling seasick at all. You might be

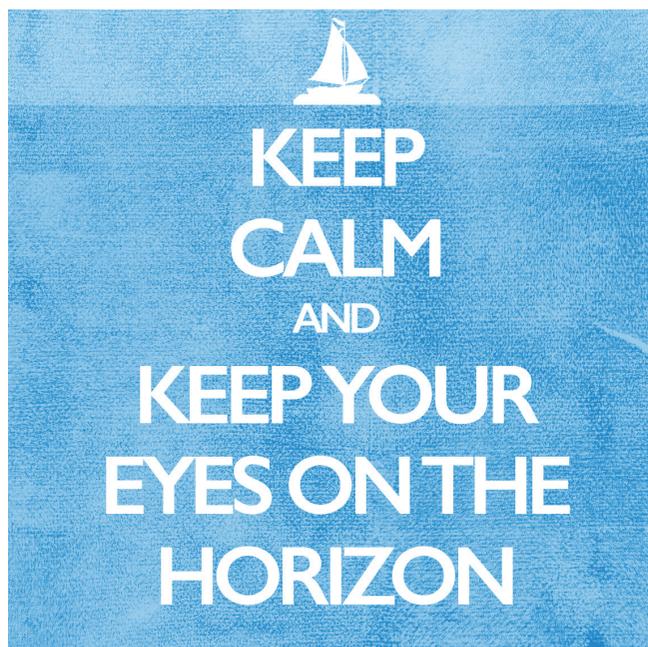


ILLUSTRATION: AMEE JEWITT-HARRIS

'MAL-DE-MER HAD CREPT UP ON ME AND TEMPORARILY CAUSED MY CRUISING AMBITIONS TO FALTER'

gently pointing out that they have gone a little quiet, are looking rather peaky or seem to be slightly grimacing as their face turns a pasty, putty colour but they will vehemently deny that they are succumbing to any sort of queasiness.

Not wanting to go down below into the cabin is another sure sign of getting woozy. That feeling grows worse the more that you want to use the head. I once had a very kind sailing instructor who advised us to remove as much of our foul weather gear as possible while on deck so that we could hurry down below if we needed the loo and then bolt back up to get dressed again. Allowing yourself to get cold also makes you susceptible to queasiness. This was the case on my first sail; I was so enjoying the thrill of being out on the water and having the wind in my face that I ignored the fact

that it was slowly giving me a chill. Then there's dizziness, headaches and not being keen to eat or drink at all: all classic signs that the motion is getting the better of you.

Yet, surrendering to the feeling of sickness and actually throwing up doesn't seem to be the worst element of it. In fact it can make the invalid feel so much better afterwards, so long as they clip on, hold on tight and remember to aim downwind and nowhere near the furling line!

No, instead the most unpleasant aspect of seasickness seems to be the psychological toll it takes on you. We crossed the Atlantic with another couple and the girl suffered terribly from the ocean sea-state. Her worst symptom by far was how hard she was on herself: angry, disappointed and convinced that her enfeebled condition was somehow letting down the rest of us. It took huge amounts of reassurance to persuade her that we were coping fine and that she needed rest in order to recover. Which of course she eventually did as often the only real cure is three days at sea.

So, yes, I get seasick and yet I'm still out sailing. Hands on the helm and eyes on the horizon and you'll be amazed at how far you can manage to get. ✦



HAVE YOUR SAY

How do you cope with mal-de-mer?

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