



PHOTO: JESSICA LLOYD-MOSTYN

Everyone's here in Atuona - nowadays the once-empty anchorages of French Polynesia are packed with boats

All by ourselves... along with everyone else



In every new port, Jess Lloyd-Mostyn gets a feeling of *déjà vu*

It's morning and as I sip my coffee on deck I nod to the couple on the boat anchored behind, as I have done on and off for the last four months. They're in their sixties and the extent of our friendship is exchanging pleasantries. But it's an acquaintance that began more than 3,500 miles away.

In Cuba I was told that 'after sailing for a while you'll go anywhere in the world where there are 10 boats and you're bound to know one of them'. I don't think we're quite there yet but there is a feeling of *déjà vu* on our current sailing route.

The crossing of the Pacific ocean from points along the coast of the Americas to French Polynesia is nothing new among sailors. It's this stretch of water that many people view as the pinnacle of their boating ambitions. However, with the increasing ease of navigation in these waters, improvements in the accuracy of GPS and ever-growing numbers of people setting sail, what was once a deserted

cruising destination is now heaving with boats. There are groupings already, like the Pacific Puddle Jump and the Pacific Seafarers radio net, which create camaraderie on the lengthy stretches that separate the island groups. Dock talk always starts with 'How was that last passage?' and 'Where to next?' which feels like we're on a watery conveyor belt.

We're opting for the one-season route to explore the Pacific, which means that we keep stumbling across the same boats and people on this track. Those who plan a single season are either focussing their travels on French Polynesia and looping back to the States or they're aiming for New Zealand or Australia, which means six months to get from east to west of this vast ocean before cyclone season.

Buddy-boating by accident

I'm now raising my cup to the couple who we met in Mexico, crossed the equator with, came into an atoll pass behind us in the Tuamotus, anchored nearby in Tahiti and now wave back from their position astern of us in Huahine. We're buddy-boating by accident. It seems that we're being followed but we're doing it too. We buy boats and go out sailing as a way of embracing adventure, but we're subject to

the herd mentality that leads us all to the same anchor spots and beaches.

The number of yachts out here is rising, with 250 in this year's Puddle Jump and over 200 in the main anchorage in Tahiti alone. It's nice to cruise in company at times, though. We've been in the happy position to have impromptu reunions with friends made six months, nine months and even 2 years ago, from all different countries, just by chance. It's not uncommon to hear a knock on the hull and a cheery 'ahoy!' from a familiar face, no matter where we are.

Now we make a game of it, guessing how many boats we know from the handful in the anchorage. But then we're also all using the same information, cruising guides and blog posts of those brave boats who went before us, taking the search out of our exploration, creating a Pacific greatest hits list. For all that we might fight against it, there is something nice about seeing a friend when you pull in and knocking glasses with a mate at the bar.

Then if no-one in our current fleet is going to our next stop, will we be lonely? Unlikely, as we're bound to bump into someone we know. And it should mean that we'll have some new stories to tell when we next see the rest of our friends. ▲