

Jess Lloyd-Mostyn

Sea monsters have been an essential part of sailors lore since humans first took to the water. 2020 saw a very modern kind of monster wreak havoc on blue water sailor's plans

A good sailor quickly learns to accept a certain amount of flexibility in his plans. We are forever at the mercy of the weather, storm seasons, cruising rules and regulations and once you begin cruising you discover that your own agendas will always come second to these larger forces.

However, not even the wisest of old salts could have predicted the particular storm that was to befall the worldwide cruising fleet in 2020. All manner of boaters have been affected by the global shutdowns due to Covid-19. Casual day-sailors were unable to get to their boats; liveaboards were forced to stay put in marinas or harbours; and for some an entire sailing season or year was lost.

But none have been more affected than those of us who go offshore, the voyagers, the long-term global liveaboards for whom the stakes have been far higher than simply missed time on the water.

If you are a regular reader of this column you may have noticed that I've not mentioned the Corona situation so far, keeping it limited instead to my separate contributions to the magazine. I tend to view this platform as one of amusing and optimistic vignettes of sailing life. However, I think that the close of 2020 is as good a time as any to address the elephant in the room. But, as we're talking sailing here, perhaps it's more of a formidable kraken-esque sea monster?

Never before, other than in war times, were worldwide sailors forced to be so desperately reliant on the sympathies of our host nations. All across the globe pockets of the cruising community banded together and pooled their information and stories, setting social media flurrying and all manner of speculative gossip spiralling around like whirlwinds. It seemed as though everyone afloat that I was in contact with was facing some degree of peril. There were boaters forced to repatriate, flying "home" to countries they'd left decades ago, while their yachts lay abandoned in overpriced marinas, on unattended moorings or in exposed anchorages. There were voyagers caught out mid-passage in the Indian Ocean or the South Pacific, arriving at a destination only to be welcomed by a sea of red-tape



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and a slew of restrictions.

Families were split apart, crews were grounded, and all of us became glued to our screens, watching and waiting for the latest news and what it meant for us. Our host nations were fire-fighting, the regulations on visas, immigration, cruising permits and customs shifting and changing day by day, meaning that to be a good guest and follow the rules was like trying to walk through quicksand. Or perhaps more like treading water?

There have been many forced to put a border between themselves and their boats, many forced to stay put in the wrong place, in the wrong season, facing months ahead of tropical storms, dashed plans, lost years. And though we all nurture an acceptance of adaptability as part of the sailing life, the coercion and constraints that we are now obliged to abide by

is so at odds with the core principles of life on the water.

We seek out the wilderness of the ocean, the undeveloped coastlines, the uninhabited islands, the secluded anchorages because we have the freedom to do so. This liberty is a fundamental belief of all sailors and it's one of the many joys of choosing a mode of travel where there are no roads to follow, no time restraints, no one set way of being a cruiser. What new future do we face as sailors? Countries that once welcomed visitors with open arms may view us with fear and alarm, others so eager for tourism to replenish their struggling economies that they may open their borders earlier than advised. Yes, it's certainly not the year any of us expected or wanted.

But where there is water there is a way. A yacht that travels at a mere 5kts teaches us how to be patient, how to play the long game and look at the big picture. Of course our previous freedoms have taken a hit but much as we would want it otherwise and squeeze our eyes tight to wish ourselves awake it has happened. But bit by bit we will get moving again, and in the meantime there is always love to give back to the boat and the sea. From the sanding and varnishing projects if you're on board, to the route-planning and island-dreaming if you're not, to the day-by-day baby steps of visa negotiation and temperature testing required even for small moves in some places, it will get better. The sea will be waiting for us and we will get back out there.



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Jess and James left the UK in 2011 in their Crossbow 42 and have sailed halfway round the world, growing their crew en route. Follow their journey at water-log.com

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