

Jess Lloyd-Mostyn

Back in the days of the whaling ships, vessels that met mid ocean would visit each other and exchange yarns. This was a 'gam'. The blue water sailing equivalent remains a rewarding experience

On land life, when you meet someone new, it's normal to ask "what do you do for a living?". It's the go-to, standard intro question and a way of sizing up a stranger. In the cruising life there are equivalent questions but what you do, or perhaps did, for a living comes way further down the list than with our dirt-dwelling counterparts.

"How long have you lived aboard?", "What's been your route?", or simply "How did you end up here?" are far more common. Our sizing up consists more of assessing others' journeys and experience as opposed to a job title or company name. From this you quickly get a sense of whether someone has cruised part-time in the Caribbean off and on or whether they're circumnavigators, decades into their boating life. And what's so wonderful is that there is always more to learn, whether someone is in their first season or an old salt, any and every perspective on sailing can add a new richness to your own understanding.

But it's also funny how quickly talk turns to that other crewmember, the boat. Cruisers ask about each others' boats in a prying, forward and often quite blunt way. They are our pride and joy and we like to boast but they're also a force unto themselves, often griped and moaned about like a disobedient pet. When we meet other cruisers we want to know everything: where was she built, how old is she, what is she made of, how many cabins, toilets, and what about that engine?

We're unashamedly nosy, and openly wistful about anything we feel the old girl may lack: "she's no racer", "try docking her stern-to with any wind on the quarter", "the teak is a lot of work". But almost in the same breath we'll wax lyrical about a yacht's better qualities: "she's solid as a rock", "balances upwind like a dream", "it's an engine you can totally rely on". And for this there really is no land equivalent, as no one ever really is this forthcoming about their house or their car or a member of their family. And yet a cruising yacht is like a combination of all three.

Eventually, by which I mean a few drinks into the conversation, we might get round to the question of



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profession but even then it's approached in a very different way. It's almost as if j-o-b is a rather dirty and taboo word to be mentioned so we tend to circumvent this with phrases like: "Do you plan to always be sailing?", "What did you do before?" or "What's next after here?". These questions are much more holistic as we're enquiring about the entire lifestyle as a whole rather than the clearer set boundaries between work and where you live. Sometimes we even get the more frank and to the point question of "how do you fund your cruising?" but it tends to be after a few meetings or at least several hours of banter have gone by.

More often than not the boaters we meet are, like us, foreigners in a foreign land so the idea of stopping in one place as being just fleeting and temporary is almost expected. Talk tends to

be dominated by routes and good anchorages, local tips and where to source things. And we do like to be helpful, offering an extra hand for an awkward boat job or a good way to get hold of spares or simply an understanding commiseration when some issue on board is proving tricky. After all, other sailors are the closest thing we have to colleagues in this large floating community, so all of our conversations resemble the water-cooler or kettle adjacent chit-chat that you'd have in an ordinary office.

And it's a very easy and fast way to make friends. The overwhelming majority of boaters that we've bumped into, waved at, knocked on the hull of, tied up next to, dropped anchor near to or stumbled upon in any number of ways have been incredibly welcoming, open, friendly and kind.

The folks we've met along the way are simply high on the joy of salt water, enjoying their freedom and circumstances far more than they reasonably should but it becomes infectious. We love our boats, we love what they can do for us and where they can take us. We love being those strange family members who live on a boat and don't seem to fit into the model of 'normal' anymore.

In cruising, it's a lot less about what we do for a living, but how we live for the doing and our world is all the richer for that.



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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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