

Jess Lloyd-Mostyn

Ocean sailors often feel closer to the heavens than landlubbers, and the moon is a pivotal part of this symbiotic relationship

Whenever we stay on land for an extended time, either visiting family or friends, or perhaps housesitting, I'm struck by how easily and quickly I fall out of my well-honed boat habits. The novelty of hot running water still gives me a shiver of excitement; I indulge in the luxury of ice cubes available at a whim; and I sleep differently, knowing that there is zero chance my bed could possibly drag in the night or need to be checked if a storm starts up.

I also tend to forget the moon. It's not that I fail to recall its existence of course, it's simply that I lose track of which phase we're in. And then, when next I glimpse it, I'm hit with an acute sense of guilt. The feeling is similar to suddenly thinking about a friend you meant to contact and have neglected.

Such is the power and importance of the moon in our sailing life. Moored for months in one spot Singapore, our daily rhythms and trips ashore would all be coloured by the state and height of the tide. From scrambling up an unusually steep jetty ladder, to timing when a beach trip would expose the most sea glass for collecting, the water level played a massive role in all our activities. Or hopping between different anchorages each day in New Zealand's bay of islands or the Hauraki Gulf, tide awareness was as crucial a factor as any other part of sailing preparation, timing each passage and calculating for each drop of the hook just how much scope was needed when.

Our next big sailing move, which is on to Darwin in northern Australia, and then back into the Pacific at last, will see us paying particular deference to our lunar escort. There the tides can range to a maximum of 7.5 metres and our entry to the country will be through a method of skilfully timed moves through a system of locks in order to even start the clearance process – let alone the dominating strong tides awaiting us at that ultimate geographical pinch-point of the Torres Strait.

And on passage, crossing oceans or travelling between island groups, the moon is a significant marker point of the time of day or night. Witnessing it rise and set



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quickly becomes yet another layer in the tempo of the progression of the voyage, a note in the log, a comment at change of the watch. It's amazing, when you sail at night, that it's possible to feel a real sense of companionship from having the moon there, hanging above you. It's often spectacularly beautiful as well, reflected on the rolling swell of ocean waves, it's light spilling out over the passing clouds, the soft glow falling onto the deck and the sails. In contrast a moonless night sail feels far more sinister without its presence for comfort.

Perhaps this ever-changing nature makes our relationship to the moon more personal somehow, as if it is a wild animal accompanying us on our sailing passages. And this animalistic unpredictability was ever-present throughout our sailing in Indonesia, where the tides can be diurnal, semi-diurnal or mixed

depending on where you are sailing. When you spend time on the UK coast and get used to the prompt shift of tide from low to high on a six hour schedule, changing to a more chaotic pattern and fickle tide is hugely confusing. We found that the only way to cope was to overcompensate for tidal heights whenever possible and be led by whether the tides were at neaps or springs. The old adage that anchor rode does no good simply sat in the locker rings true, and we countered our uncertainty by allowing a lot of depth and additional chain.

Very occasionally we've even seen a clear halo visible around the moon, usually an indicator of either rain or a storm on the way. The perfect line of light encircling the moon is caused by ice crystals in the high cirrus clouds and looks particularly dramatic out at sea, without the light pollution of any towns. And at other times the moon seems to get bored of its luminous silvery white clothes altogether and you catch it rising a shocking blood red or neon tangerine colour; a state that is so fleeting that it almost seems to fluctuate and change hue before your eyes.

Perhaps my old friend the moon is no different from other people in our lives, and that in order to be a good friend to it we should accept its changing nature, the shifts in appearance and yet still always try to listen to its guidance.



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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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