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Stop and Smell the Roses

Take some time to get to know a venue—both ashore and on the water. It'll pay off in the final standings. "McKee's Minute" from our our November/December 2010 issue

By Jonathan McKee

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In sailing, the field of play changes from day to day. A big part of success in racing comes from understanding the conditions—especially when you're in a new place. By planning in advance and thinking clearly, you can feel at home in any venue.

Enjoy the town. Every venue has its shoreside charms. I recently spent two weeks in Tallin, Estonia. The city has a beautiful, medieval core, and I really enjoyed wandering around and taking it all in. [Stopping to smell Estonia's roses didn't prevent Jonathan from winning the Melges 24 World Championship in August. –Ed.]

Get a chart. There's nothing worse than running aground. Studying the depth gradients won't just keep you off the rocks—it may provide clues about the current.

Talk to the locals. It can be helpful to speak with sailors who know the place—just be sure to get more than one viewpoint.

"Why" is just as important as "where." Understand the factors influencing localized conditions. Is the left favored because of current or wind? When conditions begin to change, the reason for an advantage may disappear.

Examine the geography. Just as depth contours tell you about current, the height of the land provides clues about how the wind will bend.

Keep an open mind. While patterns often repeat themselves, there are always exceptions. Pay attention to fundamentals—sail in more wind, toward the mark, in clear air. Don't blindly follow local wisdom.

Groove on the wave pattern. Every location has different waves. Figuring out how to set up your boat for and steer through them can pay huge dividends. Often, waves will be different from one tack to another. On port jibe, you may be reaching across the waves—requiring a higher, planing mode—while on starboard you're running with the waves in a lower, surfing mode.

—Jonathan McKee



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The Hardest Part

by [Ken Read](#)