



New Convoy Process Makes Passage to and from Trinidad Safer and More Fun

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Chaguaramas, Trinidad – Concerned about sailing to Trinidad? Now you can join a convoy! The Yacht Services Association of Trinidad and Tobago (YSATT), working with Jesse James of Members Only Maxi Taxi Service, and with the assistance of several long-time cruisers, has implemented a process to help cruisers get together and travel in convoys that enhance safety and security.

In response to a pirate incident in April 2019, Jesse James, who provides tour and taxi services to visitors to Trinidad, began to informally coordinate convoys of 8–10 boats. And, most importantly: To enlist the Trinidad & Tobago Coast Guard (TTCG) and North Post Radio (NPR), to ensure that there were “official eyes” watching over the convoys en route. Already, 5 convoys have made the crossing from Grenada and Carriacou to Chaguaramas.

The idea has been so well received that the process is now being formalized, to make participation even easier. For interested cruisers, the first step is to complete the fillable pdf Convoy Request form on the YSATT or Members Only website (www.ysatt.com; <http://www.membersonlymaxitaxi.com>). Local businesses such as Peake Yacht Services and Power Boats are also sending the form to their customers when a reservation is made. (All information received from the requests is kept confidential except as required for convoy management).

YSATT staff identifies boats planning to travel in the same time frame, then asks one member of each convoy group to take the lead in liaising with the other convoy members. YSATT provides the Convoy Leader with route waypoints – convoys leave from Prickly Bay, Grenada or Tyrrel Bay, Carriacou – as well as advice on communications and other aspects to help the convoy proceed smoothly.

Jesse James and YSATT will continue to serve as the liaison between the Convoy Leader and TTCG and NPR during both the preparation and the passage. The TTCG picks up the convoy at a pre-arranged waypoint, and NPR maintains communication along the way. For their part, convoy participants are asked not to spread out over more than 3 nautical miles, and to ensure their running lights are on, as well as their AIS (if available). Participants still file individual Float Plans, which are routed via the Convoy Leader.

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While the convoys were initially set up to provide security, participants have discovered they can also be fun. There's a challenge to adjusting your speed to keep together, and then sailing within relatively close proximity to the other participants. And most of the convoys have ended with a social gathering upon arrival in Chaguaramas, where participants from multiple countries – including the U.K., Canada, U.S., Sweden, Germany, Netherlands, France, and Australia – have the chance to meet each other and share stories.

Pat Ripple of *S/V Capers*, who was a participant in Convoy #1 and assisted in the development of the Convoy forms, says, "We've sailed to Trinidad for the past 14 years and were prepared to do our usual overnight sail. But we jumped at the chance to join a convoy and had a great time. Staying together was a fun exercise, and it was a comfort to look around and see all the navigation lights of fellow convoy members during the night. Hearing the VHF conversations among Steve, our convoy leader, the T&T Coast Guard and North Post Radio was reassuring. Another highlight was the potluck we held a few days after arrival with special guests Jesse and two Coast Guard officers."

"It's pretty obvious that a convoy is a good solution for boats making this passage," says Steve Manley of *S/V Receta*, who led the first convoy and assisted with the development of the process, "but it wouldn't have happened without Jesse's leadership and tenacity, or TTCG's and NPR's willingness to go the extra mile for us. I think the cruising community appreciates that – and I'm sure it will bring new yachting business to Trinidad as a result."

Acting YSATT President Tommy Johnson said, "Trinidad has a wide array of highly skilled workers and businesses serving the Caribbean yachting community. We want to make sure that the yachting community continues to feel comfortable coming to Trinidad to visit our beautiful country, to have work done on their vessels and/or to store their boats. We thank the Coast Guard, North Post Radio, and Jesse James for their engagement and support. This convoy process shows boaters that we care about them both coming and going, too."

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