

*The Usual Suspects*

# Boat Vendors of The Grenadines

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## The Characters

There is no way to cruise The Grenadines without encountering the endless swarms of enterprising youths known as Boat Vendors. They approach your boat and attempt to sell you everything from anchoring assistance to bread, ice, T-shirts, lobster, or even a sunny day. No sales organization anywhere in the world has either the coverage or persistence of this group. Generally, they are polite and can be quite helpful, but on occasion, their lack of professional sales training has gotten them into a little trouble. Compared to their counterparts in St. Lucia, however, the boys in The Grenadines are tame.



If you enjoy meeting the locals when traveling, some of Boat Vendors can be a show unto themselves. I have assembled a brief description of the Boat Vendors you might meet when visiting the various anchorages in The Grenadines. If you recognize any of them, say hello and pass on my regards. From time to time, they change the name and color of their boats, or simply borrow each others boats, so do not be confused.

I have also listed some of the common concerns that charter guests have with Boat Vendors, and provide some recommendations on how to deal with them.

## St. Vincent – Temporary Reprieve

If you start your Grenadines charter from St. Vincent, your only contact with the island is from your charter base in the Blue Lagoon, and the charter companies have basically eliminated all commercial opportunities for Boat Vendors there. While the other St. Vincent anchorages, including Petit Byahaut, Barrouallie, Wallilabou Bay, Cumberland Bay, and Chateaubelair all have Boat Vendors, you're heading directly south so you won't encounter them.

## Bequia – Door-to-Door Service

Admiralty Bay in Bequia is the one place where you can get pretty well anything you want delivered to your boat. The economy of this more affluent island relies heavily on tourism, so the attitude of the inhabitants reflects that. Boat Vendors are very civilized and do not exhibit aggressive characteristics. They generally motor around at a safe distance and watch for you to flag them down.

- **Daffodil Marine Services** (VHF 67) patrol the harbor and come right to your boat at your request. I hardly call this very professional organization, with a staff of 23, a "Boat Vendor" operation. Owned and operated by Ms. *Daffodil Harris* [<mailto:daffodil@caribsurf.com>] since 1990, they provide an excellent and very reasonably priced laundry service. They have a water/diesel barge for topping up your tanks while at anchor, and their provisioning service



will deliver anything you want right to your door. They also have a number of moorings on the north side of Admiralty Bay. Try finding this kind of service at home!

- **African Pride Waterfront Services** [<mailto:africanp@hotmail.com>] – the three Simmons brothers run this reliable operation. They can provide you with a good mooring, water taxi services, boatsitting, provisioning, and probably anything else. Winston, a.k.a. *African*, is the director of operations, while Ian, a.k.a. *Black Run*, and Allington, a.k.a. *Radio* (called that because he operates the VHF) also help out.



Contact *Radio* on VHF 68 any time of the day or evening, or flag the boat down as it passes by. The boys will not approach you otherwise. They have access to a number of excellent moorings conveniently located right in front of the *Frangipani*.

- **Glenroy Phillips** is one of the more ambitious Boat Vendors in Bequia. He waits as you approach Admiralty Bay several miles out, and is usually the first to offer you a mooring. Glenroy provides water taxi services, diving and snorkeling adventures, as well as harbor tours on the water. He is somewhat persistent, and has a carefully crafted response to every possible strategy you might implement to decline his services. His orange boat named *Spice* is easy to spot.



- **Venold Williams**, a.k.a. *Willy*, is easily identified paddling around Admiralty Bay, usually off Tony Gibbons Beach, in his tiny rowboat *No Complain*. He lives in a cottage on the beach with his wife and 5 (yes, 5) children. He is one of the nicest fellows you could ever hope to meet, and no trip to Bequia is complete without a visit from him. His handcrafted local jewelry is unique, well priced, and certainly well worth a look.



- **Water Taxis** – there are plenty around, and they will not approach you unless you flag them down.
- **Sheldon** – In the first edition of this article, I reported the annoying antics of a chubby kid on a broken surfboard harassing visitors for just about everything. Well,

he has grown up! He now scoots around Admiralty Bay in whatever boat he can scam (most recently a boat named *Destiny*), hustling you for business. I am still not certain exactly what service he provides, but he is in your face with the attitude that you owe him something. He just doesn't get it, and until he does, I do not recommend rewarding bad behavior.

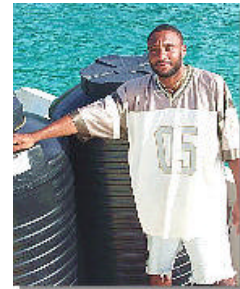
### Mustique – Safe Haven

I have never seen any Boat Vendors in Mustique. *The Mustique Company* has probably made it illegal, and a life sentence for violating the law would not surprise me.

### Canouan

Canouan is not a busy anchorage, and consequently, the lack of commercial opportunities has taken its toll on the Boat Vendor profession. They have not benefited from the presence of *The Moorings* base either. There is only one real Boat Vendor there, although a second one might stop by to introduce his restaurant.

- ❑ **Marcus Williams**, a.k.a. *Ice Man*, pretty well runs the show in Canouan and manages the moorings in Charlestown Bay off the *Tamarind Beach Hotel & Yacht Club*. He also supplies bread and ice (of course!), as well as water from his boat that is equipped with two large tanks. This is the only water refilling service in the lower Grenadines that does not require docking and should be considered when planning your itinerary. *Ice Man* can also provide a tour of the island in his taxi.



- ❑ **Cornell Roland Snagg**, or simply Cornell, makes his rounds late in the afternoon in a yellow boat named *Gypsy Snagga*, advertising the family-operated *R & C Restaurant*. Sadly, his mother Catherine passed away over the past year. She will be missed by the many visitors who appreciated her fine cooking and warm hospitality. They are still operating, so you can reserve a table and place your dinner order, all from the comfort of your cockpit.



- ❑ Land-based nuisances sometimes lurk in the trees at the *Tamarind Beach Hotel*, waiting for you to come ashore so that they can apply their sales tactics. Politely decline their services and stick to those provided by Marcus and Cornell.

### Mayreau – Yellow Territory

The Boat Vendors that serve Saline Bay and Salt Whistle Bay on Mayreau come from Union Island. They make the trek out in the morning and are gone before sundown.

- **Isaac Ollivierre**, a.k.a. *Yellow Man*, operates two red boats *Lady B* and *Lady-B 2*, named after his wife of course. This is the infamous *Yellow Man* of The Grenadines. Anybody who has visited Mayreau will remember him because he is the only white Boat Vendor (Dutch lineage) there. He specializes in selling lobster and hosting beach barbecues in Salt Whistle Bay, but he also sells ice and bread. His grilled lobster, delivered to your boat piping hot, is absolutely outstanding. No trip to the Caribbean is complete without it, and I strongly recommend letting him do the cooking.



He is a peculiar character dedicated to the art of separating you from your money through an endless series of sales pitches. I have heard charter guests report being quite uncomfortable with his level of persistence, and he has been known to be all over the map with his prices. He does provide an excellent and reliable service and is highly recommended.

- **Simon Alexander**, a.k.a. *Kojak*, has a freshly-painted bright green boat named *More Fresh*. This name was chosen because his previous boat was called *Fresh*, and it was smaller. It would stand to reason that his next boat will be named *Most Fresh*. He paints his boat quite often, so you never really know what shade of green to expect. Simon is 34 years old and has been a Boat Vendor for 12 years. He specializes in selling fresh fruit and vegetables, and operates a water taxi service to the Tobago Cays for day visitors.



Simon is considering retirement from the Boat Vendor profession, hoping to obtain that larger boat and conduct deep-sea fishing expeditions for visitors. Recently however, he has taken to semi-retirement on the beach in Salt Whistle Bay, preferring to outsource on-the-water activities to several up-and-coming youngsters. Consequently, you never really know who is operating his boat.

## Tobago Cays – Boat Vendor Central

The Tobago Cays are the most visited anchorage in The Grenadines, and this concentration of potential commerce has earned it the title “Boat Vendor Central.” There are about a dozen vendors who make the journey to the Cays every day from Union Island, departing for home by 5 PM.

They make their rounds first thing in the morning selling ice and fresh bread. Later in the day, they shift their marketing focus and provide anchoring assistance as new boats arrive. Finally, they approach your boat to make their pitch for T-shirts, shell jewelry, fish, and lobster. If you stay on Tobago Cays for any length of time, you will probably need these guys, as there are no opportunities to provision there.

Some of the more interesting “characters” that you will meet on the Cays:

- ❑ **Ken Williams**, a.k.a. *Free Willy*, boat *Arrival 1* – Ken is my all-time favorite and I always make it a point to party with him whenever I visit. He has been a Boat Vendor for 14 years, selling T-shirts, sarongs, and lobster every day of the week. He is from St. Vincent, now lives on Union Island, and is 43 yrs old, single and available ladies! Generally, he works the Cays all day selling his products. He also hosts beach barbecues on Baradel Island, and will fetch provisions for you in Union “at cost” - that is, he will provide you with the original bill from the store. A tip is purely optional but not necessary, as he uses this approach to introduce his prime business activities. Ken is an extremely nice young man and very well respected by cruisers and local residents alike.



*Free Willy's* boatside boutique boasts the finest selection of tropical-themed sarongs in the entire Grenadines. We had professional shoppers check, and no boutique in the entire region can match his selection. So, sit back and shop ‘till you drop, all from the comfort and convenience of your cockpit. Ken can be reached on his cell phone in the Cays at 784-593-8584, so finding him is never a problem.

- ❑ **Larsten Browne**, a.k.a. *Seckie*, boat *Velocity* - Larsten can easily be identified by his dominate set of dreadlocks and is one of the more friendly and helpful guys you could ever hope to meet. At 36 years of age, he lives on Union Island with his 6 and 12 year old children. Larsten makes and sells his own local jewelry and crafts, and his work is excellent. He also conducts an excellent beach barbecue on Baradel Island.



- ❑ **Jean-Claude “Hippolyte”**, a.k.a. *Mr. Fabulous* is one of the more colorful characters on the Cays. At 29 years of age, this man knows how to entertain you. He enjoys “making sure everybody is happy” by hosting specialty beach barbecues and parties on Baradel Island. He is easily identified by his big blue boat named *Mr. Fabulous* of course, and his black dog named *Serge*. He resides on *Mr. Quality's* trimaran that is permanently anchored in the Cays.



- ❑ **Walter Bob**, boat *Free Spirit 2* – Walter is a very serious looking dude with a gold tooth. He doesn't need a nickname, but he does have one - *Engine*. This guy's all business. He's the first out every morning, has THE BEST bread, and the best prices. He never aggressively solicits. Walter has moved into the more lucrative T-shirt business, so you will see him around more now. He always has the correct change, in 27 different currencies. If you want something, he provides it, if you don't, he doesn't bother you.



His family is back on Union where they own and operate the bar near the departure lounge at Union International Airport (UIX). Walter is an executive member of the recently-formed *Southern Grenadines Water Taxi Association* and is highly respected in his community.

- ❑ **Rondel Weeks**, a.k.a. *Mr. Quality*, has the largest boat of any Boat Vendor in The Grenadines. An executive member of the *Southern Grenadines Water Taxi Association*, *Mr. Quality* is the Sam Walton of T-shirts on the Tobago Cays, hands down. His operation even has a floating warehouse right on the Cays, in the form of a rickety old catamaran that's permanently anchored near the southeast corner of Horseshow Reef. He does have some excellent T-shirts that are unique to the Tobago Cays, so I strongly recommend having a look. The quality of his product is excellent - I have shirts I bought from him five years ago that still look great. *Mr. Quality* . . . yes indeed!



- ❑ **Sydney Dallas**, a.k.a. *Italian*, operates the boat named *Surprises*, because, as he says, "I always have a few surprises in store." Sydney is a 41 year old Rastafarian, and is easily identified by a very impressive crown of dreadlocks. He is very charming, totally entertaining, and a visit with him is a must. He has been working the Cays for 19 years, and specializes in selling very unique hand-painted T-shirts that are well worth a look. Sydney also owns *Sydney's Bar and Restaurant*, located beside the airport runway on Union (beside the Cable and Wireless office). Sydney is the Vice President of the *Southern Grenadines Water Taxi Association* and can be reached on the Internet at [soconny2@yahoo.com](mailto:soconny2@yahoo.com).



- ❑ **Tyrone Sam**, the man with no last name, operates from a number of boats, so you really never know which one he will turn up in. He is from Clifton Harbor and has been selling jewelry on the Cays for 13 years. The Academy would probably not nominate him for a Mr. Congeniality award, as he can be quite grumpy at times. His jewelry is outrageously expensive, but he does have a lot of merchandise that is quite interesting and worth a look.



- ❑ **Tuffer**, the man with no real name, has operated the boat *Desparado* for many years. Not incredibly talkative, he is the largest lobster retailer in the Cays and has a huge live inventory in an underwater storage container off Baradel Island. Extremely reliable and well respected, his lobster beach barbecues on Baradal Island are excellent.



### Clifton Harbor, Union Island – The *Hive*

Union is the nerve center for the Grenadines Chapter of the *Intergalactic Boat Vendors Federation*, as most of them live there. Only a handful of them actually patrol Clifton Harbor, however this lot has the reputation of being the most aggressive in the region. So much so, that charter companies do not recommend *new* charter guests overnight in Clifton unless they have had sensitivity training. Steps are being made to reverse this trend, led by *Erica's Marine Services*, however it will take some time for the reputation of this anchorage to improve. I look forward to that day.

The Boat Vendors who patrol Clifton Harbor include:

- ❑ **Herman**, famous worldwide for a number of less than ideal reasons, is known simply as *Parrot* to the locals because he talks too much. He hangs around *Lambi's Restaurant* during the day and cruises around Clifton Harbor in a beat up old white boat with "*Lambi's Restaurant*" painted haphazardly along the side. He is not directly employed by *Lambi*, although the lettering may lead one to erroneously make that connection. *Lambi* provides the boat and the moorings, Herman does the sales pitch for *Lambi's Restaurant*, and receives tips for his services.



Herman drinks too much. His daytime behavior is consistent with someone who blew his brains out at the bar the night before. He is not consistent with his prices, and the discrepancy has created numerous incidents in the past. He has a serious temper, punctuated by a lot of shouting and swearing, and due to his 6'2" frame, can be quite intimidating. He is the single largest contributor to the unfavorable reputation of Clifton. While he's under the influence, he has a reputation for having his hands all over female charter guests. When he's sober, he's fine, and is really excellent at helping people on the water.

Over time, I have learned how to deal effectively with Herman, and actually get along with him quite well. I specifically use his services when I visit and this gesture ensures “total protection” while in Union. I give him a wide berth when he has had too much to drink, and I remind him that female guests from my boat are off limits. It is unfortunate that I’ve had to resort to such tactics while vacationing.

- **Calvin Mers**, from the boat *Skipper 2*, is 32 years old, and has been a Boat Vendor in Clifton Harbor for 14 years. Calvin is a perennial winner of the Persistent Salesman Award, and is perhaps partly responsible for the aggressive reputation earned by the Boat Vendors of Union Island. However, once you engage in just one form of financial transaction, his tune changes completely and he is actually a very nice young man.



- **Jude John**, a.k.a. *Boutique*, operates the yellow boat named simply *Taxi 4711* and is easily identified by the brightly colored bandana on his head. I always make it a point to have a beer or two with *Boutique* whenever I visit. He will go out of his way to help visitors get what they need. He and his wife Margaret, who works at *Anchorage Yacht Club*, have 3 children.



- **Fitz Hutchinson** - Twenty year old “Fitz” can hardly be classified as a Boat Vendor, given that he is an employee of *Erika’s Marine Services*. This organization specializes in pick-up laundry services and a number other shore-based services, so Fitz’s marketing strategy is focused on providing information about *Erika’s* services to visiting cruisers by distributing flyers on the water, not aggressive hustling. Fitz is also Master Baker at *Erika’s*, making the hot bread he sells on the water each morning.



## **Palm Island, PSV, and Petit Martinique**

Palm Island and Petit St. Vincent are just across the way from Union. These anchorages tend to have fewer boats, and with it, a smaller Boat Vendor presence. They make periodic journeys from Union so you will likely see the same cast of characters from Clifton Harbor.

Once a day, a Boat Vendor from Petit Martinique makes the trip across the channel to PSV in a small boat, advertising the *Palm Beach Restaurant and Bar*. In keeping with Boat Vendor traditions practiced in the country of Grenada, this association with a restaurant is pretty standard, as is the soft sell. The Boat Vendor distributes flyers, books dinner reservations, takes food orders, and arranges transportation. Quite a service!

## **Common Concerns**

For someone unfamiliar with this form of capitalism, it can be a little imposing, and maybe a touch frightening. You have just paid a large sum of money to cruise a location known for its deserted beaches and quiet anchorages, only to find your personal space invaded by uninvited guests. I have heard of some unpleasant sales situations, and without being there or hearing the other side of the story, it's difficult to say what actually happened. Of course, I only hear the one side, and it usually paints a negative picture of the Boat Vendor. There have been suggestions that they steal things from boats, or that they might harm you if you do not buy their products.

I have summarized my understanding of the most common concerns you might have about Boat Vendors, and provide a few tips that you might use to alleviate them, based on my experience:

- ❑ You might not want to be disturbed at all, and you consider the Boat Vendor visit an invasion of privacy. You might also be understandably uncomfortable with strangers approaching your boat. The Boat Vendor's usual tactic is to follow as you approach the anchorage, waiting to offer anchoring assistance. Once you have anchored, they come up alongside and switch off the motor, meaning that you are stuck with them for a few minutes at the very least, as they make their sales pitch. You will be visited by several waves of them during your stay.

There is no way to avoid these visits, so prepare yourself to make the best of it. You are a visitor in their country, and selling you products and services is how they feed their families. These are people with names, and they have homes and families, just like you. They have a right to be there. Feeling that they should simply go away is not realistic, and will only serve to anger you and ruin your vacation. I do not recommend being rude first, as they will understandably respond negatively, leading you to believe they are unfriendly and that it is not safe.

- ❑ You simply might not require or want the product of service being sold, and are concerned about the implications of declining. You do not want to be pressured by an overzealous Boat Vendor, or worse, fear that you might be insulted or treated negatively. You might also be concerned about possible "extortion" tactics – maybe something bad might happen to you or your boat if you decline.

Again, remember that selling you a product or service is how they put bread on the

table. You should also be aware that Boat Vendors earn a decent living when compared to other forms of local employment. They are aware that mistreating you will negatively impact their business in the long term. They absolutely will not harm you or your boat if you choose not to buy. Neither will they insult you or swear at you, although I have heard of cases where they are less than hospitable, but only if you treat them with disrespect first. None of them have been on Wal-Mart Sales Training; so a few may not measure up to your expectations of white glove customer service.

If you do not want a product or service, smile, greet them with a “good morning” or “good afternoon,” comment on how beautiful the day is, politely tell them that you do not require their product or service, and wish them a great day. Add a tone of respect to your voice and you will get a positive response back.

If you are busy doing something, or just don't want to be bothered at the time, you can tell them that, and ask them to come back later. Don't use this as a method of getting rid of them because they will be back, and will expect you to be interested – remember, that's what you told them.

- ❑ You are concerned about the Boat Vendor accidentally damaging your boat. There have been reports of damage to charter boats as a result of “huge rusty nails” sticking out of the side of the Boat Vendor's equipment.

This problem is not as bad as it used to be as the Boat Vendors now have large bumpers. Despite their best efforts, the sides of charter boats do get scuffed a little. It's not serious enough to have a meltdown over. It is house paint, and most of it comes off by wiping it with your hand. Stubborn scuffs may require a light scouring pad. I have yet to experience any gelcoat damage.

- ❑ You might be concerned that the Boat Vendor will ask you to “give” him things. Nobody likes mooching, and a few Boat Vendors have been known to ask for quite a lot. I have been asked for beer, juice, coffee, water, food, condoms, and money. I don't like it one bit.

This one bothers me, and I have yet to devise a suitable strategy to avoid it. I don't mind providing a glass of water if asked, but the other stuff infuriates me because there's really no nice way to decline. If it's a Boat Vendor I am familiar with, I always offer him a beer first – I figure I might as well get credit for being nice to him instead of grumbling about surrendering something unwillingly. This strategy has also allowed me to get to know some of the locals, and opened some doors to a number of experiences that would have normally not been available. In addition, the Boat Vendors seem to lay off on the hard sales pitch now that they consider me more of a friend than a customer. Some of them actually avoid me because they lose out on other sales opportunities if they are sitting on my boat having a beer! Surprisingly, over the course of a stay, this strategy hasn't cost me any more than a half a dozen beers.

- ❑ You might be concerned that the Boat Vendor will rob you or physically harm you.

I know most of these guys and find it hard to believe any of them would steal from you or mug you. While I cannot promise that nothing will ever happen to you, I can assure you that these islands are not a “war zone.”

## **Positive Changes**

A new organization, the ***Southern Grenadines Water Taxi Association***, was formed in May 2004, with the following objective:

*“Bring all speedboat operators (i.e. Boat Vendors) in the southern Grenadines under one organization, with rules and regulations, licensing, an educational program, to make them more professional.”*

Headed by an executive committee consisting of Sydney Dallas (“Italian”), Walter Bob (“Engine”), Montgomery Labord, Jasper Smith, and Rondell Weeks (“Mr. Quality”), this group has finally decided to implement most of the things that are necessary to improve their image. Specifically:

- ❑ A licensing system enforced by the Coast Guard. Each boat will have a license number that is clearly visible. No license, no operation.
- ❑ A “two strikes you’re out” policy. One complaint and the vendor receives a warning. Two complaints and the license is revoked - permanently.
- ❑ Uniform shirts – you know you are dealing with a member of the Association.
- ❑ A vendor education program. These people have never taken the “Wal-Mart Customer Care” course. Now they will be educated on how to conduct business properly.
- ❑ Standard price lists for products – you will know what you are getting and how much it should cost.
- ❑ Standard contracts for pulling a boat off a reef – run aground and there is no longer any question about how much the mistake will cost.

These changes are long overdue and should mark the end of harassment and the resulting negative publicity. Visitors will be able to enjoy the anchorages without concern, and hopefully get to know some of the guys, resulting in a more enjoyable visit. A more positive image should also result in a more profitable business for them. Time will tell.

## **Let’s Make a Deal**

If you are comfortable with Boat Vendors and have no problems with them coming alongside to show you their stuff, then you are in for a treat. Some of these guys are downright entertaining! Getting to know them has opened doors to some very rewarding Caribbean experiences.

You will need and want some of the things they have for sale. Cold beverages require a steady supply of ice. Freshly baked bread for breakfast goes great with that morning coffee. Live lobster or a fresh fish cooked on a barbecue on an uninhabited Caribbean island is the stuff dream vacations are made of. Some of the jewelry and clothing is very Caribbean and not available back home. Have a look – some of the stuff is excellent!



Here are a few ideas I employ when dealing with Boat Vendors:

- ❑ Negotiate a price up front. Be nice, smile a lot, and have fun doing it.
- ❑ If possible, avoid making a deal for a product or service to be delivered later. Sometimes, one of the parties forgets the price that was agreed to, and the discrepancy leads to an unpleasant situation later. As well, you may forget who you dealt with earlier, and another Boat Vendor will step in to scoop the sale. They hate it when you promise to buy from one, then buy from another. They will let you know it too.
- ❑ If you order a fresh fish from a Boat Vendor, remember that the transaction took place the moment you ordered it, not when it was delivered. Be specific about the type and size, but understand that the sea does not produce made-to-order inventory, so allow for a little leeway on final delivery. It is inappropriate to back out of the deal later, unless of course the fish is downright rotten, which is rare. They have to buy the fish before delivering it to you, so they become quite irate at “window shoppers.” Keep in mind that this is the Caribbean, not your supermarket back home.
- ❑ If you order lobsters, get the Boat Vendor to weigh them right in front of you and agree on the total price then. Do not leave it to the Boat Vendor to select a size, as he may deliver larger ones that will end up as very expensive leftovers.
- ❑ Spread your purchases around several Boat Vendors, and tell them that is what you are doing. They will appreciate it. They are all going to pitch you anyway, so you may as well maximize the amount of goodwill. Once you spend even a small amount with them, they back off the hard sell and are quite fun.
- ❑ Be sure to have a cache of local \$EC currency to use for Boat Vendor transactions – you’ll pay too much if you use \$US for small transactions, as the arithmetic sometimes gets fuzzy. They cleverly never have the proper \$US change. If you must use American dollars, just remember that a US \$20 is really \$52 EC.

You will not have any problems dealing with Boat Vendors if you plan to have a good attitude in advance – be friendly and smile a lot. You will find the experience quite rewarding and a memorable part of your visit. Have fun!!!

\* \* \*