

A boating adventure business
in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands



The Cat, and a second boat named Castaway Cat, are the centerpieces to Fun Water Tours.



Success in Sails

—Tim Cotroneo

The sounds of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young serenade excursion customers as they step aboard The Cat, Jim Trilling's pearl white catamaran. Like entering the living room of a palatial home at sea, guests hand their shoes to Trilling's crew. That's so The Cat's deck stays spotlessly clean.

It's hard to read Trilling's eyes behind his ever-present sunglasses. What's not hard to read is the smile that creases this Boston native's face as he surveys the length of his 54-foot home away from home. As long as guests are having a good time and The Cat is running seamlessly across the Caribbean Sea, life is good for the 64-year-old Trilling.

Two years removed from receiving a kidney transplant, Trilling lets his crew take charge. On this day, Trilling's job is to make sure his paying guests feel special and relaxed. On today's six-hour snorkeling excursion to St. John, the goal is to ensure pleasant vacation memories and vivid testimonials.

Jim's big adventure

In 1980, Trilling departed from Boston on what he calls "a world adventure." After spending five years building his boat by hand, Trilling's goal was to sail around the world. Four days after embarking on his trip, Trilling and his crew encountered the "perfect storm." Trilling's 32-foot Westsail limped into the safe harbor of Hamilton, Bermuda, battered but not beaten.

After a two-month detour rebuilding the boat dubbed "Windsong," sails were set for the next

leg of Trilling's adventure. Upon arriving in St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Trilling's life would reach a turning point. He concocted the idea of offering six-passenger sailing and snorkeling adventures to the handful of cruise ships that docked in the island's Charlotte Amalie Harbour. With a business belief that "the worst thing they could say is no," the former Brookline High School grad began knocking on doors of ship operators.

Three weeks to "yes"

"I called on cruise ships for about three weeks. Eventually, the cruise director from Costa Cruise Lines agreed to offer my excursion, the "Windsong Sailing & Snorkeling Adventure," to his passengers. Looking back, I guess this was my business break," Trilling recalled.

"One of my first customers was a news reporter from WGN television in Chicago," Trilling said. "I took his group on a sailing and snorkeling adventure on my original 32-foot boat. At the time, this type of excursion was unheard of. The reporter gave a great testimonial about his trip to the cruise line. He also talked about his excursion on the air when he got back to Chicago. Costa Cruise Lines began to regularly book through me from this point on."