

KEEPING IN CONTACT FOR VOYAGERS™

By J A Rogers



In many of the places where voyaging boaters venture, telephone calls are expensive and technology is lagging. The phone companies in those places are government monopolies and the calls are big money makers. So unless you can't avoid it, don't make long distance telephone calls.

One way to avoid being a hostage to government owned phone companies is by reversing the charges and billing the person you are calling, then settling up the bill later. Another way to get the cost down further is by the use of a calling card account. Calling cards have become a very common convenience in recent years. On a touch tone phone, you enter your calling card account number and the number you wish to call and the call is billed to your account at predetermined rates. No operators are needed to handle the transaction. The most widely accepted card is probably the ATT calling card. Before departure, it will be worth your while to be sure that a calling card is accepted where you plan to sail.

Another feature of calling card accounts which is very handy for keeping in touch with people by telephone is the voicemail feature. They work like an answering machine but don't require a physical phone anywhere. By dialing a number which is toll free for callers in the US, Canada, Mexico, Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands and some other places, people can hear a greeting

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left by you and leave their own message like using a regular answering machine. You then can call in from any touch tone phone and pick up your messages. Be sure to check the cost and availability in the countries you will be visiting before signing up though, because depending on where the calls are initiated, rates can change radically for use of the system.

Your phone bill will be a regular piece of mail that you will need to receive while voyaging, and that brings up the problem of receiving mail reliably while on the move. Some boaters have friends or family who receive and forward mail for them while cruising and that can work well in some cases. But when important mail like regular bill payments, bank statements and so on are involved, it is better to turn the job over to professionals who specialize in mail forwarding for boaters. Many of the companies who do this are owned by people who have been boaters themselves and know about the special needs involved. They know the most common addresses where voyaging boaters have their mail sent and can tell you what those are ahead of time, whether it be a general delivery post office near a cruising anchorage in the Caribbean, a yacht club or port captain's office in Mexico. They know the time it takes for mail to travel to and from various destinations and will have better luck sending mail so that it gets to you on time during your limited stays at the various points along your way.

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For a membership fee and the cost of the postage, mail forwarders will send mail at regular intervals to the addresses along your route. In certain cases there may be extra charges involved which you should take into consideration, and in many cases there are extras included at no charge. So be sure to get all the details clearly understood before signing up. Below is a list of several mail forwarding companies which specialize for cruising boaters.

Most mail forwarders will forward telephone voice and fax messages with regular mail. Some can also receive and pass e-mail and offer voicemail and satellite systems as well. Others offer extra conveniences like selling and shipping discount marine hardware as part of their services. Some offer free communications by HAM, SSB and VHF radio. With this feature, cruising boaters and their friends and family can pass messages via regularly scheduled radio nets by calling the mail forwarder who contacts the other party. One service that has been in existence for decades passes messages free for any cruising boaters on the Pacific coast of Mexico via a Ham radio net. Non-Hams can call their messages in by phone or receive them aboard their boats in Mexico either by VHF radio or a friendly visit from a Ham anchored nearby.

In summary, handling mail and phone calls is an important area of concern for those preparing for cruising and is sometimes overlooked until the last minute or until it's necessary to bite the bullet and pay expensive costs that could have been saved by a little more planning.

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MAIL FORWARDING FOR VOYAGING BOATERS

Downwind Marine

2804 Canyon St.

San Diego, CA 92106

Marine hardware and supplies. Not in the mail forwarding business, but will send packages of mail with cruising boaters for delivery to others along the Pacific coast of Mexico and Central America.

Monitors and passes messages along the Pacific coast of Mexico over the Manana Net ham radio net.

Downwind's Web Site

Downwind's Cruising Mexico Guide

Mailbag

1314 E Las Olas Blvd

Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33301

Telephone answering, notary, secretarial services.

Mailbag's Web Site

Mail Call

2726 Shelter Island Drive

San Diego, CA 92106

Most Mail Call customers are boaters. Receives and forwards e-mail and fax messages.

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Postal Annex
2907 Shelter Island Drive # 105
San Diego, CA 92106
Part of large franchise like Mail Boxes Etc.
Has a Cruising Services account for mail
and message forwarding once a week.

Postal Annex Web Site

St. Brendan's Isle, Inc.
411 Walnut Street
Green Cove Springs, FL 32043-3443
Comprehensive mail forwarding services.
The most frequently used forwarding
address among cruising boaters I've
encountered.

St. Brendan's Web Site

Voyagers Mail Forwarding
88005 Overseas Hwy. #9
Islamorada, FL Keys 33036
Radio and satellite communications.
Marine SSB radio monitoring.

Voyagers' Web Site

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