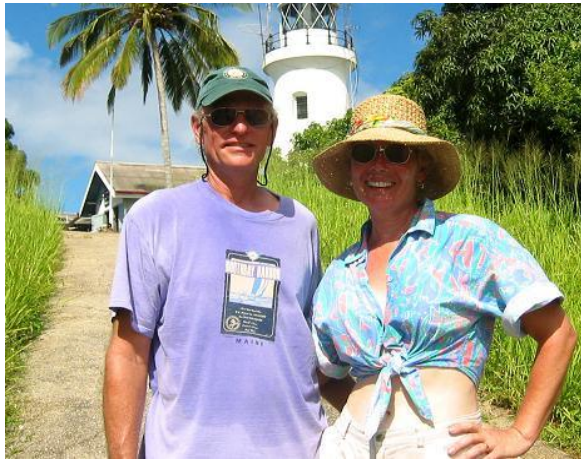


# *Trinidad's Chacachacare*

by Marcie Connelly-Lynn

It's a mouthful and I heard it called "Catch-a-canary" more than once. But it's easy to get to and well worth the quick 5-mile trip. Chacachacare is a haven of calm, quiet and natural beauty contrasted to the crowded waters and hectic atmosphere of the Trinidad's main cruisers' port of Chaguaramas.



*Marcie & David with Boca lighthouse in background*

Three months in a marina in Chaguaramas and it was time to head out. We picked Columbus Day for departure, not trying to be presumptuous, just looking for good vibes. We had all but forgotten how good it felt to have the wind in our faces and we were anxious to swim in cool, clear water and sip morning coffee while watching a sunrise from a fine anchorage.

A leper's colony until about 35-40 years ago, the island of Chacachacare was abandoned when the "cure" for leprosy was found. The houses still remain...some even had plates on the tables and linen on the beds when they were abandoned, we're told. (Incidentally, since we knew so little about leprosy, we did a little research. It seems that a cure was never actually found, but rather the symptoms can now be treated rendering the patient non-contagious.) Though the jungle is reclaiming its own, the remains of the houses can be visited and provide a good day or two of exploring along with a visit to the lighthouse on top of the hill.

We wandered through many of the abandoned buildings. All were decrepit and dilapidated ... not

just from the years of neglect and the weather, but from vandals who had broken out windows, pulled up floorboards for campfires, left piles of trash everywhere and topped it off with graffiti. Nature, as if ashamed by the disorder, was working assiduously to reclaim territory as quickly as it could. Walking in some areas was challenging due to the undergrowth and David, machete in hand (purchased in the DR and never used till now), cleared a path to allow for more exploration.



*Nature is reclaiming the area, but remnants of the past linger like the Chaca Chapel pictured above.*

The Nun's Residence was a huge dormitory-style building. Though crumbling, it was interesting to walk through and imagine this convent still inhabited; women dedicated to the care of the lepers. The building formed a traditional cross with a chapel at one end. We were able to appreciate the arched windows, one of which still had two small panes of green stained glass left in tact in the upper corner. In addition to the Nun's residence, there was a deserted village and a doctor's residence. All had succumbed to time, weather and vandals. The view of the bay from these vantage points, however, was incredibly beautiful.

The road to Boca Lighthouse is paved and all uphill. Even in the early morning, the 3½ mile roundtrip trek was a hot, sweaty venture, but delightful nonetheless. The island is teeming with flora and fauna. Colorful butterflies including Blue

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Emperors fluttered by us not to be outdone by the huge iridescent dragonflies. Hordes of leaf cutter ants filed up and down and across the pavement, seriously intent on getting leaf parts from here to there. Birds chirped and we could hear the sound of vulture wings not far above ...waiting for the weak one among us to become separated from the herd on the slow trek up to the lighthouse. The lighthouse keeper still maintains his vigil in this active lighthouse, but he was "sleeping in" on our visit and only his dog greeted us on arrival. A tire swing hung from a sturdy branch and beckoned the little kid in each of us to take a turn at soaring through the air. We could barely see the anchorage from this vantage point and the boats looked small and toy-like.



*"Nine of Cups" look small and toy-like when viewed from the vantage point of Boca Light high above the bay.*

The world is so very different here. We swam each morning, afternoon and evening. We gloried in the sunsets and sunrises. The water was calm each morning with nary a ripple and we could see Nine of Cups' full reflection on its surface. We ventured to Chacachacare on our way to Venezuela to try out newly installed gear and get our sea legs again. We thought we'd stay a day...five days later, we were still hanging on the hook enjoying the good life!



*David's seldom used machete came into good use when walking along the trails.*