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Tragedy on Turkish Vessel Raises Questions

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Three Russian tourists died and 17 others were sickened by suspected alcohol poisoning during a yacht party off the coast of Turkey this week (story).

The tragedy raised many questions: Out of the 100 or so guests on the yacht, why were only the Russians affected? The yacht, furthermore, did not have a license to sell alcohol and didn't have alcohol on the menu. How then were the tourists served alcohol?

The Turkish government quickly announced that it will offer compensation to the victims and their families, and the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism announced additional steps to ensure safety at Turkish resorts, including requiring tour agencies to inform tourists about where they can buy safe food and alcohol. The government also launched an investigation into the owner of the yacht, Orhan Denizcilik Marina Tourism and Ticaret.

This is not the first time that Russian tourists have been the victims of food or alcohol poisoning. In September 2010, a group of Russian tourists fell sick with food poisoning at an Egyptian resort. Fortunately, no one was killed in that incident.

Also onboard the Turkish vessel were industry professionals on a "familiarity trip." Such trips give tour agents, partners and journalists an opportunity to try out the hotels, sights and experiences that they'll later sell to their clients.

The exhausting trips are anything but vacations. In one week, agents can expect to visit dozens of hotels and places of interest, participate in official receptions organized by inbound operators and meet support staff teams. They sleep in different hotels practically every night.

The incident thus reminds us of the risks that travel agents take to make our vacations unforgettable. But, of course, our hearts go out to the victims of this tragedy.

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