

Russians Speak of Bungled Ship Escape

By [Jonathan Earle](#)

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Italian rescuers standing atop the Costa Concordia cruise liner Monday, two days after it capsized off Tuscany. **Gregorio Borgia**

Russian survivors of the cruise liner that capsized off the coast of Tuscany last week, killing at least six, recalled a haphazard evacuation and heaped scorn on the ship's captain, whom the ship's operator has blamed for the disaster.

The 290-meter-long Costa Concordia was carrying more than 4,200 passengers and crew, including 111 Russians, when it struck a shoal near the port of Giglio and rolled onto its side on Friday night while many passengers were eating dinner.

A slow, haphazard evacuation ensued, hampered by power outages and general confusion. Russian passengers arriving at Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport on Monday morning told reporters that they were shocked at the crew's poor performance.

"Nobody did anything. Worst of all, there wasn't any coordination," passenger Maxim Benkovsky [told](#) Lifenews.ru.

"The crew didn't help us with lifejackets. We did everything ourselves," said another passenger, Alexei Kuchin.

In a statement [posted](#) on its web site Sunday, Genoa-based Costa Cruise lines said Captain Francesco Schettino maneuvered the 114,500-ton liner too close to the shore, causing the ship to strike a rock, leaving a 50-meter gash in the hull.

But Schettino has said the collision took place 300 meters offshore and that the rock was not on navigational maps.

"That's just ridiculous," said Andrei Vislov, the deputy director of NordEx, a Russian tour company that books trips on Costa Cruises.

Vislov, who has travelled the Costa Concordia's route, also said mandatory safety courses for passengers could have saved lives. "Currently, only about 15 percent of passengers attend voluntary courses at the beginning of each trip," he said by telephone.

The Costa Concordia, which set sail earlier Friday, had planned to carry out an emergency drill for passengers on Saturday.

Italian police arrested Schettino on Saturday on accusations of manslaughter and abandoning the ship. Sixteen passengers are still missing and feared dead. All the Russians are alive and accounted for.

The sinking of the Concordia drew comparisons to the RMS Titanic, which went down after hitting an iceberg 100 years ago on April 15, 1912.

"The captain of Costa Concordia ignored the dangers facing him just as the captain of the RMS Titanic ignored the dangers he faced with the results being the same — they both lost their ships, taking lives with them," Dr. Robert Ballard, whose international team located the wreck of the Titanic in 1985, said by e-mail.

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