

Over 150 Russian Tourists Stuck on Cruise Ship in Qatar as Middle East War Rages

By [Moscow Times Reporter](#)

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A cruise ship docked in Qatar amid the Middle East crisis. **EPA / TASS**

More than 150 Russian tourists have been stranded for days aboard a cruise ship near the Qatari port of Doha after the war triggered by the U.S.-Israeli attack on Iran disrupted travel across the Middle East.

Passengers who spoke to The Moscow Times described days of anxiety as they received little clarity or assistance from either the cruise operator or the Russian Embassy in Qatar, leaving them with no choice but to wait.

The Celestyal Journey, operated by Greece-based Celestyal Cruises, departed Dubai in the United Arab Emirates on Feb. 23 and was scheduled to return there on Monday.

But it was forced to stop in Doha on Feb. 28 after authorities closed nearby sea routes due to

the U.S.-Israeli military operation against Iran.

On the same day, passengers said they heard air raid sirens and saw Iranian missiles intercepted by Qatari air defenses.

“Small children on the ship started crying. Their parents and reception staff tried to calm them down. We were ordered not to leave the ship,” Polina, a passenger from Moscow, told The Moscow Times, withholding her surname for safety reasons.

About 155 Russian nationals are officially registered among the passengers, Polina said, though the real number may be closer to 170. Citizens of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and several European countries are also on board, she said.

Polina, who is traveling with her husband and three-year-old daughter, said the situation has been especially stressful for families with children.

“My daughter doesn’t really understand what’s happening, but she can feel the tension,” she said. “Amid all the anxiety, she even got a fever of 39 degrees [Celsius].”

Another passenger named Radmila said that passengers initially received little guidance when they tried to contact the Russian Embassy in Qatar.

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After they started [complaining](#) on social media, the embassy offered them free hotel accommodation in Doha and three meals a day from Saturday.

Passengers were allowed to leave the ship for a few hours on Wednesday for the first time in over a week to buy medicine at pharmacies in Doha, Polina and Radmila said.

The cruise operator has extended passengers’ stay on the ship free of charge until Saturday.

"We were told: Stay on the ship until March 7, and then we'll see," Radmila said.

But those on board say they have little understanding of when they will be able to return to Russia.

“We were supposed to fly to Moscow on March 2, but our flight was canceled because the skies are closed to civil aviation,” Radmila said.

Polina said her family has no clear plan if they are forced to stay in Qatar beyond Saturday.

"My husband can work remotely from here. But our daughter really wants to go home," she said. "Let's hope the embassy will be able to find us accommodation for as long as we need. I will ask for a room with a kitchen so that I can cook for my child."

In a statement to The Moscow Times on Thursday, Celestyal said it had canceled the remainder of its Arabian Gulf cruise season.

“We continue to follow developments in the Middle East and remain in regular contact with

the relevant authorities. Throughout this period, our focus has been and continues to be the safety and wellbeing of our guests and crew,” the company said.

Guests currently aboard the Celestyal Journey in Doha will be informed of disembarkation plans within 24 to 48 hours, the company added.

Onboard teams will assist passengers with onward travel arrangements, including transfers or accommodation where needed, and affected passengers will be offered either a full refund or credit toward a future cruise, Celestyal said.

The Moscow Times has sent a request for comment to the Russian Embassy in Qatar.

The U.S. and Israel launched a joint offensive against Iran on Feb. 28 that has killed senior Iranian military commanders, Iran’s supreme leader and [hundreds](#) of others, including civilians.

In retaliation, Tehran has launched attacks across the region targeting Israel and several Persian Gulf countries, including the UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

The fighting has led to major flight disruptions in the region, [stranding](#) tens of thousands of travelers worldwide.

The UN's International Maritime Organization told AFP on Thursday that around 20,000 seafarers and 15,000 cruise ship passengers are stuck in the Gulf because of the war.

Russia started evacuating thousands of its citizens from the region using emergency aircraft and charter flights this week.

Samantha Berkhead contributed reporting.

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