

Stranded Casino Ship Frees Itself, Docks in Ga.

Written by Administrator
Thursday, 17 July 2014 19:11 -

A casino boat stuck on a rocky sandbar freed itself Thursday without help from tow boats and returned to its home dock, a day and a half after the vessel ran aground during its first passenger cruise out of Savannah.

The Escapade, a 174-foot ship, made its escape at high tide, said Coast Guard Petty Officer 1st Class Lauren Jorgensen. Less than two hours later, after passing a Coast Guard inspection for leaks, the ship arrived at its dock at the Bull River Marina.

The ship was able to dislodge itself without assistance, probably because it was no longer weighted down with passengers, Jorgensen said. The Coast Guard rescued 118 passengers and crew from the stranded boat Wednesday afternoon.

"Without the passengers, I would imagine the ship was sitting much higher in the water," Jorgensen said. "So they got underway under their own power."

The Escapade, owned by Florida-based Tradewinds Casino Cruise, was making its maiden voyage in the Savannah market Tuesday night when it ran aground in waters between Tybee Island and Hilton Head, South Carolina. Passengers were stuck on the boat overnight and most of the next day. They returned to shore aboard Coast Guard cutters about 16 hours after they were first stranded.

Boats using tow cables had been unable to pull the casino ship free with passengers and crew aboard, prompting the Coast Guard to evacuate most of the people using rescue boats and a helicopter. Seven crew members remained aboard the Escapade to get it moving again.

There was no answer Thursday at Tradewinds' phone number in Savannah. A phone message left at the company's headquarters in Madeira Beach, Florida, was not immediately returned.

The casino ship operator posted a short message Thursday afternoon on its Facebook page noting that all passengers had returned to shore without illness or injury. The statement said

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Tradewinds is cooperating fully with the Coast Guard, which the company thanked for its assistance.

"Please know that our first concern has been for the safety of our passengers and crew," said the company's statement, which was also emailed to The Associated Press.casino boat

The Coast Guard said the Escapade crew initially reported a malfunction in the ship's course plotter, a part of its navigation system. But it had not confirmed Thursday why the ship ran aground.

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