

CRUISE LINES

Judge orders seizure of SeaEscape casino ship

The Port Everglades-based Island Adventure gaming vessel will be detained by U.S. marshals after crew members said they have not been paid wages.

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SeaEscape Entertainment crew members who claim they have not been paid for months obtained a warrant to have the vessel seized by U.S. marshals.

U.S. District Judge Patricia Seitz on Thursday ordered the arrest of the SeaEscape gaming vessel, known as the M/V Island Adventure, after 14 crew members sued in admiralty court for at least \$28,000 in unpaid wages.

The order comes nearly two weeks after SeaEscape's last passenger cruise from Port Everglades. SeaEscape cited competition from casinos, operating costs and the economy for ceasing operations. The vessel remains at Port Everglades, which charges it a \$2,200-a-day dockage fee.

SeaEscape officials did not respond to a request for comment. Its website says it will relocate to a new port in the next few weeks. A SeaEscape executive made a presentation to Port Canaveral's commission last week.

It wasn't immediately known when U.S. marshals will detain the ship, but a seizure could complicate SeaEscape's plans unless it resolves the dispute with crew members. They remain on the ship unable to return to their home countries, according to Ross B. Toyne, their Miami lawyer.

"Unless they get additional capital, this ship will not resume operations," Toyne said. He represents about 14 workers who have not been paid as much as eight months' salary, and he said he has been contacted by at least 20 others on the ship.

"It's the only way to ensure the crew members will be paid their wages," Toyne said of his decision to file court papers seeking the vessel's arrest.

Admiralty law generally is very protective of seamen. When the vessel has been seized, Toyne said he will ask the court to schedule an auction of the ship. Proceeds would go to pay crew.

The Bahamian-flagged Island Adventure, built in 1976, is owned by Cruise Charter Ltd., also of the Bahamas, according to www.Equasis.org.

National Maritime Services of Fort Lauderdale was appointed the ship's custodian, assuming responsibility for the safekeeping of the vessel.

Cruise-to-nowhere operators have struggled against shore-side competitors, particularly the Seminoles with their expansion into Las Vegas-style gaming. In recent months, Horizon's Edge Casino Cruises and Aquasino ceased operations in Miami-Dade County.

The parent of Palm Beach Princess, which sails from Port of Palm Beach, is in bankruptcy. The vessel is scheduled to be auctioned next week.