Beat: Travel

Passengers rescued from Russian ship stuck in Antarctic ice

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USPA News - More than 50 people on board a Russian cruise ship that got stuck in sea ice in Antarctica last month were rescued by helicopter on Thursday and flown to a nearby vessel, Australian officials said. Nearly two dozen crew members remain with the vessel.

The operation began at approximately 6 p.m. Australian Eastern Daylight Time (AEDT) on Thursday when a helicopter from the Chinese research vessel Xue Long had reached the MV Akademik Shokalskiy. Twelve passengers boarded the aircraft and arrived at another nearby vessel, the Australian icebreaker Aurora Australis, a short time later. "Five flights were conducted to take the passengers to the Aurora Australis over a distance of about 14 nautical miles (25.9 kilometers). Four flights were undertaken with 12 people each flight, and the fifth flight rescued four passengers," a spokesperson for the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) said, adding that the helicopter was able to land on an ice floe near the Aurora Australis. All 52 passengers, along with their luggage and some equipment, were rescued by 10 p.m. EADT and the group was provided with hot drinks and meals. The Australian icebreaker later began a slow journey through heavy sea ice and is expected to reach open waters by late Friday. "The Aurora Australis will then head towards the Casey base to complete a resupply before heading to Australia. The Aurora Australis is not expected to arrive in Australia until mid-January," AMSA said in a statement. It added that 20 crew members remained on board the Russian vessel to wait for further icebreaker assistance, which is likely to take several weeks. The MV Akademik Shokalskiy became beset by ice on early Christmas morning when the vessel was approximately 1,500 nautical miles (2,778 kilometers) south of the Australian island state of Tasmania. The former research ship was on an Antarctic cruise, carrying 74 people, to retrace the footsteps of Australian Antarctic explorer Douglas Mawson more than 100 years ago. Several icebreakers, including the Aurora Australis and Xue Long, had attempted to reach the Russian ship but were both forced to abandon their attempts due to thick sea ice and severe weather conditions. Throughout the ordeal, however, the passengers and crew were never in any acute danger as they had supplies lasting for several weeks.

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