

BREAKING

## Moscow passengers grateful for Egg Harbor Township hospitality

MAXWELL REIL, NICHOLAS HUBA & CLAIRE LOWE Staff Writers 2 hrs ago



The 294 passengers and 14 crew members from an Azur Air flight from Moscow to Cuba spent Wednesday at Atlantic City International Airport after the plane was diverted due to a fuel leak. The Russians were expected to take another plane to Cuba on Wednesday night.

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EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP — Passengers aboard a Russian flight headed to Cuba didn't expect to make a pit stop at Atlantic City International Airport after their plane suddenly became low on fuel.

They also didn't expect such kindness from the Atlantic County community.

U.S. Customs and Border Patrol Public Affairs Officer Steve Sapp said the first plane had to make an emergency landing in Atlantic City to refuel about 3:45 a.m. Once the plane landed, inspectors realized there was a fuel leak in the engine and it would not be able to take off again. Mechanics certified on the Boeing 767 worked to repair it, Sapp said.

Sapp said the American Red Cross came out right away and brought cots and extra water to the passengers. Sapp added that the South Jersey Transportation Authority was a gracious host, along with state and airport police. The passengers were provided food, water and even toys for the children.

The 14 crew members were taken to a nearby hotel to rest until the flight to Cuba later that night.

"It was a good example of a community coming together to help," Sapp said.

Darya Hrybava works as an events and communications specialist at the William J. Hughes Center for public policy at Stockton University. She worked as a translator for the passengers at the airport and was there until they left later that night.

Hrybava said she had to make a lot of announcements to the passengers, who were also given pizza from the airport.

"They were happy because they never had American pizza," Hrybava said.

The passengers were also very excited to be so close to Atlantic City and Hrybava said that they wanted to go to the resort but couldn't leave the airport.

Hrybava said the passengers were very thankful for the local hospitality.

"They didn't expect to be overwhelmed with kindness," she said.

Rowan University history professor James Heinzen, a scholar of Russian history, was also called in to serve as a translator.

He said this situation is "a good example of people coming together to help people who need some help."

The airline, Azur Air, was taking the 294 passengers and 14 crew members to Havana, Cuba, through the tour company, Anex Tours.

A second jet arrived from Azur Air at about 7 p.m., and once loaded with passengers and baggage, the flight took off around 10 p.m., Sapp said.



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The consulate general of the Russian Federation in New York had tweeted about the plane's status Wednesday.

The South Jersey Transportation Authority and local and State Police, as well as the FBI were on the scene assisting Wednesday. Sapp said Border Protection, which maintains a presence at Atlantic City International, although there are no public international flights, is the lead agency in this incident.

"We are because these are foreign nationals who do not have visas to enter the U.S.," he said.

Sapp said that although the flight did not have FAA clearance to land in the United States, the health and safety of the passengers superseded that.

"The passengers and crew are being taken care of right now. We have cots for them. People are bringing in food," Sapp said. "They're in generally good spirits. They just want to get on the next flight out to get their vacation started."

The passengers rested in a secured section of the airport, Sapp said. Besides cots and food, officials from local and state agencies, the South Jersey Transportation Authority and local volunteers provided water, comfort and language assistance to the stranded passengers, Sapp said.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers paroled the 14-person crew into this country to rest at a nearby hotel to prepare for their later Wednesday flight to Cuba, Sapp said.

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## **RUSSIAN FLIGHT LANDS AT A.C. INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**

A Russian flight headed to Cuba was diverted Wednesday morning after it suddenly became low on fuel.



KRISHNA MATHIAS / PRESS GRAPHIC