



FLORIDA TODAY file photos

Say goodbye. Mirage I is likely to take its final cruise out of Port Canaveral into dry dock in the Bahamas and possibly out of the country. Canaveral Port Authority officials said the vessel's owner paid all the fees owed to the port.

Mirage I likely leaving Port Canaveral forever

Florida group probably will not win leasing contract today

BY DONNA BALANCIA
FLORIDA TODAY

The Mirage I will be setting sail as early as today from Port Canaveral for dry dock in the Bahamas — and most likely will not return here, its new owner said Monday.

"I have tried to do the best I can to close the deal to keep the ship at Port Canaveral," said Haim Tsuff, chairman and chief executive officer of Isramco Inc., which purchased the Port Canaveral-based ship out of bankruptcy court in Miami for \$8.05 million March 29. But he said it looks unlikely that the ship will be based here.

Isramco is a publicly held oil company operated by Israelis. It maintains offices in the Netherlands, Israel and Houston. Tsuff said the company is looking for a management company to lease the vessel, and hopes to sign a deal with either a company based in Tel Aviv or a company based in Taiwan.

The Mirage I was the only ship of Ocean Club Cruises, which offered two- and three-night trips to the Bahamas sailing from Port Canaveral. The

company started service in May 2003, but filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in December and halted its cruise operations.

There still is a skeleton crew on board, which will remain with the ship as it navigates its journey to dry dock and beyond, according to Tonya Meister of the law firm of Morgan & Barbary, an attorney for the crew members.

"They were down to the skeleton crew, and there's about 36 people on board," Meister said. "They've been told they're going into dry dock. They're going to Freeport for dry dock to get the boat in shape to get it ready to run for passengers."

Tsuff said he was moving ahead to refurbish the ship, but beyond Freeport, he said he was not sure where the ship would operate.

"I am now back home in Holland, waiting to know if I can close the deal with two other potential buyers," Tsuff said. "I

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Moving out. Isramco Inc. purchased the Port Canaveral-based ship, Mirage I, out of bankruptcy court in Miami for \$8.05 million March 29.

tried to do the best I could to have the ship at Port Canaveral. But I have tried to have meetings, I have brought lawyers, and I have spent a lot of money to make a deal happen. I can't wait for this group of investors

See **MIRAGE**, 3C

Canaveral bills are paid

MIRAGE, from 1C

any longer. They told me they were going to come up with the money, and they didn't."

When Ocean Club Cruises declared Chapter 11 bankruptcy, it owed more than \$4.8 million, with creditors that included the port, the crew, food and service companies and media outlets.

Canaveral Port Authority officials said the vessel's owner had paid all the fees owed to the port.

Tsuff said a Florida-based investor group that wants to keep the ship at Port Canaveral had until today to come up with an undisclosed amount of money for a lease to operate the ship.

However, he said it appears unlikely that the group would emerge as the front-runner to operate the ship, and he does not expect the ship to return to Port Canaveral after its refurbishment in Freeport. ■

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