

American Queen Steamboat Co. Cancels Countess Inaugural Cruise

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American Queen Steamboat Company canceled the March 21-26 inaugural cruise of the American Countess from New Orleans after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention put a halt to it.

A scaled-back christening ceremony will still take place March 21 in New Orleans.

American Queen Steamboat said it did everything it was supposed to do to meet CDC and U.S. Coast Guard regulations. Ships that carry fewer than 250 people don't fall under the no-sail order issued by the CDC during the pandemic.

"We are disappointed to share that the CDC has notified us that they are denying our ability to conduct the christening cruise on the American Countess this weekend out of the Port of New Orleans," the company said in a statement. "This decision is based on their review of our Coast Guard Certificate of Inspection and the date on which this certificate was issued.

"To be clear, we have a valid U.S. Coast Guard Certificate of Inspection in place that authorizes us to carry up to 249 passengers and crew. We have been transparent with the CDC regarding our intentions to operate the American Countess with a reduced onboard capacity," the statement continued. "Although we are disappointed with the CDC's actions, we are optimistic this latest challenge is short-term, and we are diligently working with the CDC so we can begin the inaugural season on board the beautiful American Countess and once again create amazing experiences for our guests."

The christening was originally scheduled to take place a year ago but was canceled as the coronavirus evolved into a pandemic.

The surprise move came as the company resumed sailing on March 15 with the American Duchess. Its current cruise is operating with charter passengers onboard under the line's health and safety protocols with a reduced capacity of under 166 guests per CDC guidelines.

