

Thousands held on cruise ship in Hong Kong for Covid testing

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Dhaka: Thousands of passengers were being held on January 5 on a cruise ship in Hong Kong for coronavirus testing, after the health authorities found nine passengers were linked to a recent omicron cluster and ordered the ship to turn back.

Authorities forced the Royal Caribbean's Spectrum of the Seas ship, which began sailing on January 2 on a "cruise to nowhere," to return a day early on January 5. The ship was ordered to return after nine passengers were identified as close contacts of an infected patient who was linked to a new omicron cluster.

The ship returned to Hong Kong on January 5 morning and passengers were being held onboard while they awaited testing.

Royal Caribbean said in a statement that the nine guests were immediately isolated and had all tested negative, and that the company was working closely with authorities to comply with epidemic prevention policies and regulations.

Over the past week, clusters emerged after several Cathay Pacific crew members broke isolation rules and dined at restaurants and bars in the city, before testing positive for the omicron variant.

Royal Caribbean said guests who were on-board the affected ship would receive a 25 per cent refund on their cruise fare. The ship's January 6 sailing was also cancelled as the crew has to undergo mandatory tests, and those guests will receive a full refund.