Sold in June, AIDA Cruises' pioneer vessel AIDAcara has emerged under the ownership Cypriot ship manager Mester Commercial. Photo: Pixabay

Former AIDA Cruises' ship emerges in Russian hands after sale

AIDAcara emerges under the ownership of Cypriot ship manager, but Russian interests are believed to be behind its purchase

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By **Jonathan Boonzaier** 🔔 in **Singapore**

The name Astoria Grande has been painted on the bow of an AIDA Cruises ship that was reported sold in June.

Industry players believe small ship manager Mester Commercial, listed as the owner of the former 38,500-gt cruiseship AIDAcara (built 1996), is launching a new Russian cruise line.

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AIDA, the German subsidiary of Carnival Corp, did not give any details on the future owner of the ship when it announced the deal to sell it in June. Few details were available until it was recently handed over to Mester.

Although Mester could not be reached for comment and did not respond to emails, the IHS Ships Register indicates a Russian link. Listed as the bareboat owner of the ship is Aquilon Shipping, a Moscow-based company that TradeWinds was also unable to reach for comment.

Cruise industry sources who have followed the AIDAcara sale believe the ship is ultimately owned by a Russian entrepreneur who is poised to launch a cruise operation for Russian passengers.

"The Russian outbound travel market is huge, and many Russians cruise with foreign cruise lines, although they are always in the minority on board. It absolutely makes sense to have a ship dedicated exclusively to the Russian-speaking passengers," said a senior executive at a US-based cruise operator.

At present, there is only one Russian-owned cruise line. Black Sea Cruises, a division of the state-owned maritime infrastructure company Rosmorport, operates seasonal cruises to Krasnodar Kray and Crimea on the 9,200-gt Knyaz Vladimir (built 1971).