

THE FIJI TIMES

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Roughly handled, fire ship passengers claim

Passengers in the Greek liner *Australis* described in Suva last night how they had to wait at boat stations for more than 12 hours while the crew fought a fire raging in the galley.

A member of the crew told the *Fiji Times* he had seen passengers roughly handled while their cameras were confiscated.

He said he had seen one passenger thrown against a bulkhead.

The 35,000-ton liner will spend at least three days in Suva while repairs are made.

The ship's galley was gutted and more than 40 cabins damaged.

The fire broke out in the galley about 3.30am on Thursday when the *Australis* was between Auckland and Suva.

The ship arrived in Suva about 5pm yesterday, 11 hours behind schedule.

ASHORE

The *Australis* is carrying 2130 passengers from Australia and New Zealand. Most are traveling to Southampton.

Four hundred of the passengers were backed into Suva hotels.

The remaining 1730 were taken ashore for dinner. X

Hotels had to call in extra staff.

Passengers said they waited for more than 12 hours at boat stations while the crew fought the fire.

The fire spread to nearby cabins, destroying personal belongings.

Pressmen were not allowed on board. But passengers told them that three decks were affected by the fire.

The crew lowered life boats and put hoses through the galley port holes. Other hoses were used through the galley doors.

STOPPED

The cabins near the galley were damaged by fire and water and will not be able to be used until extensive repairs are done.

A Chandris spokesman said passengers would dine ashore while the ship was in Suva.

Passengers complained that ship's officers stopped them from taking photographs of the fire and the consequent damage.

"We thought this was

Miami, who have a 7-month-old son, said their cabin was damaged by the fire and water from the fire hoses. They had to sleep in chairs in a lounge.

"Some people in cabins

near the gutted galley lost all their personal belongings," Mr Watkins said.

He and his family spent

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Primitive, says liner passenger

Conditions in the *Australis* were "primitive," Mr G. H. Hooker, of New Cross, London said.

Many passengers did not want to travel any further in the ship, he said.

"We're very disgusted," Mr Hooker said. "People are sleeping on the deck with just blankets."

Mr Hooker, who said he spent 19 years with the London Fire Brigade, said there was no organisation during the fire.

He said passengers were talking of approaching the British High Commissioner.



WEARY passengers leave the *Australis* last night to spend the night in Suva hotels. They had occupied cabins in the liner which was damaged by fire which began in her galley.

