

FLORIDA CASINO CRUISES

by Mark Lighterman Ch-006

Collectors of Florida casino chips, checks and tokens missed a great opportunity recently when the voters of the state defeated casino gambling. States that have allowed casino gaming have also generated a wealth of material for collectors within their own state. Many casinos produce chips for events such as grand openings, anniversaries, tournaments and special events like boxing matches and star appearances. These chips (both general play and special event) as well as the free play and lucky coin tokens that a casino produces throughout the year can add a great many pieces to a collection. But all is not lost in the state of Florida. This state has over 3000 miles of coastal area in which the thriving industry of casino day cruises has flourished. What then is a casino day cruise? Well, whereas a cruise ship is built with areas for eating, lounges for shows and staterooms for sleeping (gambling is secondary); a casino day cruise ship is built for one purpose only and that is to provide players access to Las Vegas style gambling. These casino cruises ships usually holds between 300 and 600 passengers and the cruises last between four and six hours each. For these ships to operate legally they must first cruise into international waters which is at least three miles off the east coast of Florida (or federal waters, 9 miles off the west coast Florida) . Once there the casino can open and will remain open until the ship is ready to return to the dock. These ships usually cruise twice a day and the amount of time they stay out varies depending on whether it is a day or evening/ weekend cruise. There are very few exceptions (externally) to how one operation varies as compared to another (these are pointed out in the ship listings below).

As was stated above this is a thriving industry so much so that it is

nearing the saturation point in the state of Florida. There are supposedly 17 ships state wide (run by some 10 different operators). Two ships, not included in the 17, have ceased to operate because of poor locations. These location usually had high docking charges and not enough passengers to cover costs. Others have move their operations to more lucrative ports (like the Europa Sun that has moved from Key West to Miami Beach). While still others start out as only day cruises then find that they need to expand their cruises to a foreign port once or twice a week. (We have only included in our list those boats that started out as casino day cruises. Boats like the Sea Escape and Discovery cruises have always included foreign ports and thus have been omitted.)

On a sad note: as of the writing of this article, is that the Club Royale docked at the Riviera Beach Marina sank 90 miles off the coast of Cape Carnival Florida. There were only 11 crew members (a skeleton crew) on board when the ship went down trying to outrun Hurricane Erin. Eight people were rescued, one was found dead on a life raft and both the captain and owner of the ship are still missing. This boat was only in operation for 1 month.

So what does this do for the collector of Florida material? Well, to the collector of casino chips, even though most of the chips do not have a city or state (required by many state gaming regulations) they are attributable to a particular casino just by the color of the chip and its inserts. The inserts are the different color areas, like stripes, found on most chips that when the chips are stacked on their sides can show chips that do not belong. Security is so strict at chip manufacturers that they will not produce two chips in the same color combination for two different casinos. This now open a whole new area of Florida material to collect. What now follows is what has been compiled of known Florida casino day cruises.



- Club Royale** - Riviera Beach Marina, Port of palm Beach, Riviera Beach, Fl. [7/1/95 - 8/1/95] *Formerly the Europa Jet.
**Note this boat sank 90 miles off the coast of Cape Carnival Fl. trying to out run Hurricane Erin.
- Emerald Princess** - Golden Isles Cruise Lines Inc. Fernandina Beach, Florida. [? -present] *Note: This boat left Fernandina Beach to sail out of Downtown Brunswick, Ga. but reports are that it has returned to Florida.
- The Entertainer** - American Casino Cruises, 2080 Main Street, Ft. Myers Beach, Fl. [4/1/95 - 9/18/95] *Note: This boat is currently moving to the Port of palm Beach replacing to void left by the sinking of the Club Royal.
- Europa Sky** - Europa Cruises Corp., John Pass Village, Madeire Beach, Fl. [5/92 - Present]
- Europa Sun** - Europa Cruises Corp., Miami Beach, Fl. Pier A - South Beach 5th Street and Alton Rd. [6/95 - Present]
*Formerly sailed from Key West, Fl.
- Europa Star** - Europa Cruises Corp., Fort Myers Beach, Fl. [6/91 - Present]
*Note: Europa Cruises Corp. allowed Casinos Austria International to operate the casinos on the above boats and thus the use of Casinos Austria chips on these boats. The Europa Fun Kruz, on or about 2/95, took over the operation of their own casinos and released their own Fun Kruz chips.
- La Cruise** - La Cruise Casino, Located next to Mayport Ferry. Mayport, (Jacksonville) Fl. [? - Present]
- Lucky Star** - Gold Star Casino/Star of Texas, Port of Miami Pier 10, Miami, Fl. [4/94 - 11/94] *This boat was a converted cruise ship, 650 feet long, with state rooms and such, Day cruise capacity 900 passengers and cruises lasted 5 hours. **This boat did make one cruise trip to the islands for the day before closing.
- Mr. Lucky's Florida Casino** -MM 47.5 , Marathon, Fl. [12/94 - ?] *This boat is seasonal and stopped sailing for the year 4/1/95.
**Indications are that the casino (ship) may have closed on the above date.
- Crown Empress** - Empress Cruise Lines, Clearwater Bay Marina 198 Seminole Street Clearwater, Fl. [? - Present]
- Imperial Empress** - Empress Cruise Lines, Bayboro Harbor, St. Petersburg, Fl. [Sails Sept/ 95] *Ship will hold 2500 passengers.
- Majestic Empress** - Empress Cruise Lines, Kingfish Wharf, John Pass Treasure Island, Fl. [9/17/92 - Present]
- Royal Empress** - Empress Cruise Lines, Bayside Marketplace, Downtown Miami, Fl. [8/95 - Present] *Ship holds 900 passengers. **Sailing postponed untill December.
*Note: All of the chips and Tokens that are used on all of Empress Cruise Line ships (Crown Empress, Majestic Empress and Royal Empress) are the same.
- PAIR-A-DICE** - Holiday Casino Cruises, Docked at Holiday Inn MM 100, Key Largo, Fl. *This boat leaves in the early afternoon and runs shuttles from the dock to the boat every two hours to take on and let off passengers. [5/ 93 - Present]
- Star Dancers** - Fernandina Cruise Lines, Inc. Fernandina Beach Florida. [? - Present]
- Tropicana** - Winston Cruise Lines, Port of Miami Pier 6, Miami, Fl. [2/14/95 - Present] *This boat is a converted cruise ship. **This boat started out as a day cruise but on 6/95 started day cruises to Bimini twice a week.
- Vegas Express** - Florida Casino Cruises, Docked at Tugboat Annie's, Dania, Fl. [9/9/94 - Present] *Note: Formerly the Savannah Lady sailing out of Savannah Ga.



