



JUST CRUISING

MSC Cruises has become the world's largest privately-owned cruising company, no doubt thanks to its great deals for budget-conscious travellers. But if you've got the urge to splurge on a special trip, the Italian company's luxury liners are a great choice too



It's with good reason that MSC's newest vessel, the *Preziosa*, has garnered gushing column centimetres around the world. Imbued with a bold Mediterranean spirit (the ship contains a real stone piazza and the world's first two Eataly restaurants at sea – members of a globally revered artisanal Italian food chain), its June and July itineraries include stops in historic ports like Naples, Barcelona, Genoa and Marseilles.

And with cruising being the fastest-growing tourism segment on the planet, modern cruise liners are likely to play host to millions of very happy customers this year.

It's a holiday that appeals to a very broad cross-section of travellers, with award-winning cuisine and spas, duty-free shopping and little land jaunts to charming ports making for a multi-faceted, but restful experience.

Other *Preziosa* attractions include an adults-only solarium (no X-rated entertainment – instead, a space free of little people's chatter) with premium deck space, a dedicated spa service and thoughtful, complimentary fruit skewers. Children are catered for elsewhere with a fantastic aqua park and a bright sweet emporium.

However, if you need a mid-year breather

from the office without denting your leave allotment, you could also try the *MSC Opera*, which hugs local shores.

On this fun-packed cruise, families and couples can enjoy a true Italian experience, sipping espressos from the coffee station and sampling the delightful gelato at the ice cream bar on board.

Try the buffet restaurant for breakfast on the fresh Tosca deck, as the two main restaurants, La Caravella and L'Approdo, can be a tad stuffy, especially if you suffer from sea sickness. An outdoor restaurant, Il Patio, serves snacks like pizza slices and hot dogs.

Although you're sailing in local waters, on board you pay in dollars for any extras (including the drinking water in your cabin!), so watch your spending. Cocktails are also pricy – our mediocre mojitos cost in the region of \$5 (about R46) each. Nip into the casino for a quick smoke break or make the long trek to a designated smoking bar on a lower level.

On our cruise Kurt Darren was the live performer, so check the entertainment schedule before booking to ensure you enjoy the experience optimally. We were also entertained by a "Mr *Opera*" competition, which passengers – in this case, mature and with a penchant for pole-dancing – were invited to enter.

The MSC brand's Aurea Spa is a pricy, if indulgent, treat. While your back's gently pummelled (therapists are trained in Bali massage), a wide glass window provides a vista of the ocean.

However, you can also relax in your surprisingly spacious, jewel-toned suite, sipping a cocktail on a peaceful balcony alcove (not recommended if you have small children). For newly-weds, the balcony suite provides the perfect setting for a romantic honeymoon while soaking up the beautiful azure views.

Evenings begin with tasteful seven-course dinners, followed by a variety of live music acts up on the deck or dramatic productions in the *Opera's* splendid Teatro dell' *Opera* – a state-of-the-art, 713-seat theatre. Afterwards, enjoy a quiet nightcap at one of the eight bars on the ship.

For further information, visit: www.msccruises.co.za

MSC'S VIP CLUB

Initially launched on the *MSC Fantasia* in 2008, the company's Yacht Club was taken to even more spectacular heights on the *Preziosa*.

MSC Yacht Club guests have exclusive access to some of the ship's best areas, including an elegant panoramic lounge, a leisure deck (with pools and a solarium) and a private restaurant that offers gourmet cuisine at all hours of the day.

Each lavish suite is also assigned a private butler (trained at the International Butler Academy in the Netherlands) who's available 24/7 to help with things like priority check-in and unpacking your bags. He'll even ensure that a copy of your favourite newspaper is delivered to your cabin every morning

(thanks to web printing, not helicopters!).

One of the best benefits of the MSC Yacht Club is the private concierge reception area, which boasts 800 dazzling Swarovski crystals. Its services include everything from private on-shore excursions (with your personal multilingual tour guide and photographer) to priority reservations in the on-board spa (accessed via private lift and offering complimentary thermal suites) and after-hours shopping in the ship's many duty-free stores. (You can also have designer jewellery brought to your cabin so you can view and purchase items at your leisure.)

As expected, living in the lap of luxury doesn't come cheap. (A number of special packages are offered on a regular basis, so visit the company's website for the latest special deals.) However, the MSC Yacht Club offers good value for money when you consider that the price includes all accommodation, entertainment, food and drinks.

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