

When it comes to planning a family holiday, many parents find themselves wondering how to choose a trip that gives everyone something to enjoy. The answer's simple: go on a cruise.

Even though there were about 200 children on my three-day MSC *Opera* trip to Portuguese Island, I didn't see many. I suspect it's because their parents took advantage of the free kids' club, which offers children aged three to 17, split into different age groups, a range of activities to keep them occupied from 9am-11pm. For a fee, parents can even extend it to 2am so that they can enjoy a much-needed break.

For adults who enjoy keeping active, there's an open-air jogging track and a fully equipped gym. There are also dedicated pools, kid-free sun decks and Jacuzzis that are great for relaxing aching feet after dancing the night away. For those who prefer taking it easy, there's a luxury spa. And while it costs extra to use the relaxation room (with sauna and Turkish bath), a one-hour Balinese massage does wonders to banish a year's worth of stress.

On the entertainment side, the ship has about a dozen themed bars, a casino, a disco and a selection of duty-free shops. However, I most enjoyed the enormous theatre, which staged a different

show every night. Even with only a handful of performers and the challenge of catering to different tastes, the on-stage babes and hunks blew the audience away.

For budget-conscious families, the joy of such a cruise needn't come at an exorbitant price. For example, a family of four will only pay for the two adults, while two children under 18, sharing the same cabin with their parents, travel free of charge (apart from the mandatory charges).

This deal is subject to availability of four-berth cabins, of which there are more on the *Sinfonia* than on the *Opera*. But families could also opt for interconnecting cabins (great for privacy and peace of mind) and only pay 50% of the adult fare for each child. MSC Cruises even caters for single parents who share a cabin with up to three kids under 18, the first of whom will pay 60%. Either way, it's a good deal.

"Cruising is becoming a vacation of choice because it offers value for money," says *Sinfonia* Cruise Director Stephen Cloete. "Very few other options are a fully inclusive package covering all your accommodation, entertainment and food." And that's without factoring in the extra discounts you get for booking and paying early.

• The South African season on MSC *Sinfonia* runs until May 2016 and offers early booking discounts of up to 50%. [www.msccruises.co.za](http://www.msccruises.co.za)

# SAIL AWAY

Raising children costs a fortune, but a family holiday needn't break the bank, writes Eugene Yiga

