



*That's why I love the service, flexibility, and simplicity of cruising holidays.
Life is stressful enough as it is so when it comes to planning a break,
it makes sense to pick a holiday that will leave you feeling relaxed.*



It happens every year. We get so busy with our work that the idea of planning a vacation becomes way too stressful. Where do you even begin?

For many of those looking for a good holiday, cruising turns out to be the answer.

EUGENE YIGA gives you three reasons why.

3 things to love about a cruise holiday



1 Service

There are some big numbers when it comes to running a big ship... like 26 000 fresh eggs per week! But the only number you need to remember with MSC Cruises is that the ratio of passengers to staff is 3 to 1.

So even though there might be a lot of complexity behind the scenes (like seven different weddings on our three-day cruise!), passengers get efficiency all the way. And even though you might be on a budget trip, the quality of the service is anything but cheap.

My trip to Portuguese Island started at the Durban airport. Instead of having to take an Uber to the harbour, which I suspect would have been well-priced, there were shuttles to the port (and porters to shuttle our bags). Yes, the embarkation process took a while (even though we were on 'Fast Track'), but it was still quite efficient when you consider all the checks for security, immigration, customs, and so on.

How they manage to disembark around 2000 passengers, all while preparing rooms for the next group an hour later, is beyond

me! And just as impressive is the fact that all the food, drinks and other equipment for a beach braai on Portuguese Island has to be transported from the ship along with several hundred people too.

In the end, MSC Cruises prides itself in giving guests all the amenities you'd find in a hotel on land. But beyond the expected things like having bags (eventually) delivered to your room or Wi-Fi on board, the crew keep going the extra mile. They'll find a way to answer your questions, or else find someone else who will.

One of the things that most impressed me on my four-night cruise was seeing a few waiters



at dinner comforting a couple's crying baby and entertaining him with conversation and magic tricks. It wasn't their responsibility to be nannies while the parents enjoyed their meal but they were happy to help.

"The staff become like your family," cruise director Stephen Cloete says. "One person, who had been on the cruise for almost two weeks, even went out to buy a gift for the cabin attendant. Of course the staff member was very moved!"



And I suspect he deserved it too. Even with the long shifts they work, like one guy making pizza for what must have been twelve hours or more, their tiredness doesn't seem to show.

2 flexibility

Many things can go wrong when you're on holiday. Just about every year the news has stories of people stuck in airports, sleeping on floors or bathing in public restrooms because severe weather cancelled their flights. But cruise trips have a lot more flexibility when life gets in the way.

For example, when gale force winds left the MSC Sinfonia 'stranded' in Cape Town a few years ago, people could still enjoy most of the on-board facilities. Similarly, when the weather's bad, the activities move inside, which is where most of them are in the first place. "Instead of being stuck in a small resort or hotel, where you might be forced to interact with people you don't like," says Cloete, "you're free to meet a variety of interesting travellers."

And there definitely is a wide spectrum of passengers on board. Whereas most cruise trips of the past were predominantly white Afrikaans, the traveller demographic is now a lot more cosmopolitan. This is partly to do with theme cruises, which cater to specific markets, but also to the broad variety of things you can do on the boat.



“Whether it’s a crazy party until 3am or a romantic evening up on the deck, we cater to everyone,” says marketing manager David Randall.

Beyond the logistical flexibility, MSC Cruises studies trends so that they can cater to the individual preferences of passengers across the world. It’s about paying attention to the details and doing the simple things, like downloading and printing a hard copy of your favourite newspaper for you to read every morning.

Every year, the team goes to Geneva to discuss how best to meet local needs, whether it’s entertainment (like a place to watch a live rugby game) or food (Dom Pedro’s, anyone?). “We have to cater for different cultures,” says Cloete. “For example, South Africans like fish and scrambled eggs twice as much as other travellers. They also prefer white wine over red. Knowing this means that we can give them what they want.”

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Simplicity

The third and best thing about a cruising holiday is the simplicity. Sure, it can feel a bit chaotic to have hundreds or sometimes thousands of people on a cruise. And trying to find your way around, even with maps on the walls, could leave you confused for the first day or so. (I accidentally boarded through the crew’s entrance only to realise I was in a restricted area!)

But everything becomes much clearer after the orientation on the first day, which explains how everything works (to the hundred or so people who bother to show up). And there’s also the detailed daily programme, delivered to your room the night before so that you can better decide what activities you’d like to do the next day.

“Cruising is great for people who don’t have the time to plan a detailed holiday or just want a last minute getaway,” Cloete says. “All one has to do is pick dates, make a booking, and go. There’s no need to worry about hidden costs for food, accommodation, or entertainment because it’s all included.”

Of course, it’s a good idea to set aside some extra money for things like shopping, excursions and drinks, which can be pricey (and is where the company makes its profit). But there are several options for beverage packages so that you get a good deal.

There’s also no need to worry about schlepping your bags from one place to another or living out of a suitcase. For longer trips, instead of unpacking over and over again as you move from one hotel to the next, it’s like unpacking once and having the countries come to you. That’s about as simple as it gets!

As much as I loved a recent holiday to South America, I did spend several weeks researching flights, accommodation, and activities to the point that I got a bit addicted to Expedia. In the end, it was so exhausting that I needed a holiday to recover from planning the holiday!

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and simplicity of cruising holidays. Life is stressful enough as it is so when it comes to planning a break, it makes sense to pick a holiday that will leave you feeling relaxed.

The bad news is that the MSC Opera has said goodbye to South African waters for now, but the good news is that the new (refurbished and extended by 200

rooms) MSC Sinfonia is joining us for the 2015/2016 season. Email cruises@southafrica.to to book for the next South African cruise season which runs from November 2015 to May 2016 and offers early booking discounts of up to 50%. Visit www.msccruises.co.za for more. Bon voyage! 🌊

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