



# Sail the heaven

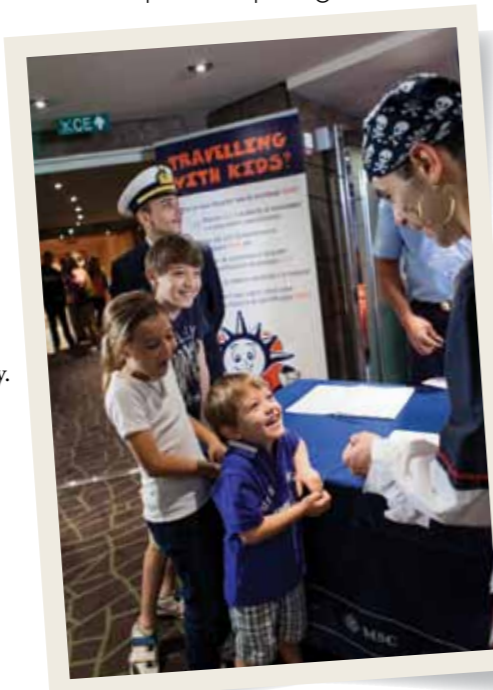
## FUN FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY!

It's tough being a parent. In addition to juggling work and home during the year, there's the complicated question of planning a holiday. How do you pick an option that gives everyone in the family something to love? Well, it's quite simple: go on a cruise! **BY EUGENE YIGA**

### WHERE DID THE KIDS GO?

MSC Cruises, the largest privately-owned cruising company in the world, owes its position as a leader in the world's fastest growing tourist market to its innovative approach when it comes to catering for families. The ships offer different clubs for children in three different age groups – 3 to 6, 7 to 12, and 13 to 17 – with customised activities, from arts and crafts to video games and a disco, to keep them busy all day.

The children's club is available from 9am to 2am, which means that parents don't have to take turns watching the kids, something that would be unfair to them both on any other trip. Instead, they can leave their children in total supervision and with the peace of mind to do their own thing. (Kids also get to enjoy their own fun



meals together in case they're too young to appreciate gourmet Mediterranean cuisine.)

### ADULT TIME

So, once the kids are taken care of, what can the parents do on their well-deserved break? Quite a lot! On the sporting side, the ships offer a range of facilities, including an open-air jogging track, virtual golf simulator, and a fully-equipped gym, where I got lost in the 180-degree ocean view and could have sworn I saw a mermaid (or maybe it was just a dolphin). There are also dedicated pools and sun decks that are completely kid-free, with spa baths that are great for relaxing aching feet that danced the night away.

For those who prefer taking it easy on holiday, you can skip the gym and go directly to the luxury spa. Time really

does melt away when you're lounging on heated chairs in a relaxation room overlooking the ocean, getting hypnotised by the endless waves. And don't be surprised if a year's worth of stress vanishes after a one-hour massage from a Balinese woman who knows how to find all your knots! It really is the perfect way to pamper yourself, restore your wellbeing, and rejuvenate body and mind.

### SHOW BOAT

And then there's the entertainment. Aside from around a dozen themed bars, a casino, and a selection of duty-free shops, what I loved most was the ship's massive theatre, which put on a new show after dinner every night. Despite the challenge of using a limited cast to create entertainment that caters to a wide



seas...

variety of tastes, the babes and hunks of the All Star Dancers achieved remarkably well in giving local audiences the kind of international performances they haven't seen before.

On my four-night cruise, the shows were Bella Italia (celebrating the cruise company's Mediterranean heritage) Burlesque (think Moulin Rouge), Fantasia (a fusion of Japanese, Spanish, Arabian and Indian culture), and One Night Only (Las Vegas magic and feathers). For a guy who sees around a dozen shows a month, I was quite impressed by the high production values and could see why so many people in the audience couldn't get enough!

### THE AFFORDABLE HOLIDAY OPTION

Given that people are budget-conscious all over the world, and that raising a family can



cost a small fortune, it's good to know that a trip with so much on offer doesn't cost a lot. "Cruising was just a dream for around 92% of the population," recalls guest relations manager Marcello Monici, who was just 8 when he set sail for the first time. "Only 8% could afford it. Now things have changed."

MSC Cruises keeps costs low without compromising on quality by importing certain foods from the best available markets. (The pasta comes from Italy, which is clear when you taste how good it is!) This means that a family of four will only pay for the two adults while two children under 18 travel for free.

"Cruising has become a vacation of choice because it offers value for money," cruise director Stephen Cloete said. "Very few other options are a fully-inclusive package where you pay one price that covers all your accommodation, entertainment, and food." And this doesn't even take into

account the additional discounts of up to 30% that are available from booking and paying early.

### GO! GO! GO!

So, if you're still scratching your head about what to do on your next family holiday so that everyone has the freedom to get what they want, you might as well stop. Cruising is the answer! Most of the 1300 people on the trip I went on were families, some with new-borns and toddlers while others brought the grandparents along too. I guess this means cruising is the perfect holiday option at all stages of our lives. And I guess this means you should make your booking now before all spots are gone. It's the smart thing to do.

The South African season for MSC Cruises on board the MSC Opera runs from November 2014 to April 2015 and includes special trips for Christmas and New Year. You can begin your search or learn more at [www.msccruises.co.za](http://www.msccruises.co.za) for more. Bon voyage! 🌊