

Just Cruising

Eugene Yiga plunders the high seas in luxury.



As long as it's not one of those cruises for people over 60,' my friend said when I mentioned my holiday plans. Like many people, he believes cruises are for senior citizens who sail around the world, doing aqua aerobics and playing bingo, because there's nothing else to do after retirement.

But two trips with MSC Cruises – four nights on the *Sinfonia* and three nights on the *Opera* – convinced me that cruises aren't just a slow break for the elderly; they offer plenty of fun for young people too! →



ENTERTAINMENT GALORE

First on the list has to be the range of entertainment options. Aside from several themed bars as well as a new theatre production every night, a popular option is the disco. Soon after the *Sinfonia's* Pasha Club opened at 11pm, it filled up with people, and even a guy

like me, who's not particularly fond of spending nights in loud clubs listening to music about nights in loud clubs, couldn't help but get into it.

I liked the fact that there's more than enough room on the dance floor (in case you manage to drink just enough to offset the motion of the ocean), seating

areas for when you want a break, and plenty of space outside to enjoy the fresh sea breeze. I left at about 1am on the first night, but the party was just getting started. (I'm told the music went on until sunrise.)

It was similar on my *MSC Opera* trip. Although I skipped the clubbing, I got caught up in the tropically themed party on our second night – I even joined the conga line. It was the same with hundreds of other passengers, many of whom were in party mode, drinking tequila shots and dancing on deck before the ship even left the harbour.

HARD TO PORT

MSC has been operating in the Indian Ocean and along the Mozambique coast for over 25 years since 1992. The company has invested more than R2-million in capital expenditure on tourism-linked infrastructure and has spent roughly the same in promoting travel to Mozambique. Opened in 2011 and set for a further multi-million rand boost, MSC's beach facility on Portuguese Island offers travellers a welcome break from the Mozambican sun. The facilities include an undercover entertainment area; a venue for MSC's chefs to prepare and present beach barbecues; and a unique beach bar with themed entertainment.

'Portuguese Island is one of the most popular cruise destinations on the SA cruise calendar,' says Allan Foggitt, marketing director of MSC Cruises SA. 'Previously, the destination was a Robinson Crusoe-type of call, with a lack of facilities for passengers enjoying a day on the beach. This was therefore an important area of focus for MSC, and we're now sure our travellers will enjoy the same high standards on the island as they do on our ships.'

MUNCHIE MADNESS

The only way to keep the party going is to fuel up on food. The good news is there's a lot of fuel. I enjoyed the more formal sit-down dinners, with tasty Mediterranean cuisine and fine Italian wine, but each ship has several restaurants so there are causal options too. If you're not too fussed about gourmet food (which changes every night, depending on the theme), →

EXCURSIVELY YOURS

Shore excursions are an integral part of the cruise-ship business. When you get to port, you can go your own way and wander around, find a local tour operator, or let the ship staff take care of it for you. If you'd like a customised excursion, complete with a driver and guide just for you, staff at the excursion office will provide help and advice around your own specific desires and preferences. Here are highlights from the list of around a dozen:

- **Exclusive beach lounge station:**

A beach lounger, umbrella and drinks table set up especially for you. Includes access to an exclusive area with a private bar service, free drinks and fruit plates. Also offers priority disembarkation from the vessel to the beach.

- **Sea kayaking:** Master the ocean in a Fluid Synergy kayak, featuring a soft tri-hull that's super stable – so you don't have to worry about becoming fish food if it's your first time.

- **Santa Maria snorkelling:** This excursion leaves from the beautiful shoreline of Inhaca for 16km to Santa Maria, the most southern part of the Inhaca Island. There's a rich variety of fish and abundant, colourful coral. Snorkelling equipment (mask, snorkel and fins) is provided, but sizes are not guaranteed, so it's always advisable to bring your own.



or don't want to be bound by fixed restaurant hours, the buffets on deck go on pretty much all day.

That means you can always find something to eat (or have breakfast delivered to your cabin) no matter how late you wake up or how late you get to bed. And who can resist the lure of an authentic Italian pizza at midnight?

ACTIVE RELAXATION

Of course, there's a real risk that all this food could result in you departing as a passenger and returning as freight. On the sporting side, the ships offer a range of facilities, including an open-air jogging track and a fully equipped gym, where I got lost in the 180-degree ocean view and could have sworn I saw a mermaid – though I might have been hallucinating from fatigue. There are also dedicated pools and sundecks that are completely kid-free, with Jacuzzis that are great for relaxing those aching feet after dancing the night away.

For those who prefer taking it easy on holiday, you can skip the gym and

go straight to the luxury spa for some downtime. Time melts away when you're lounging in a relaxation room overlooking the ocean, hypnotised by the endless waves. And what a treat to have a year's worth of stress vanish after an hour Balinese massage that found all my knots – even the nautical ones.

PRICE WISE

Even though there's so much on offer on a cruise, it's actually one of the most affordable holiday options. 'Cruising is becoming a vacation of choice, because it offers value for money,' says cruise director Stephen Cloete. 'Few other options offer a fully inclusive package, where you pay one price that covers all your accommodation, entertainment and food.'

Of course, it's a good idea to set aside some extra money for things like shopping, excursions and drinks, which can be pricey (this is where the company makes its profit). But there are several options for beverage packages, so you get a good deal. What are you waiting for? Get your cruise on! ■