



# Sail the heaven seas:

## FUN FOR THE FAMILY

Raising children costs a fortune but going away for a family holiday doesn't have to break the bank, writes **Eugene Yiga**.



**O** It's tough being a parent. First, you've got to juggle work and home during the year. Then you've got to figure out what to do for the holidays. How do you pick an option that gives everyone in the family something to love? For many people the answer is simple: go on a cruise!

MSC Cruises 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 four different age groups: 3 to 6, 7 to 11, 12 to 14, and 15 to 17. Each club then offers customised activities, from arts and crafts to videogames and a disco, to keep them busy all day.

The children's club is free and available from 9am to 11pm (extended to 2am if you want to pay), 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



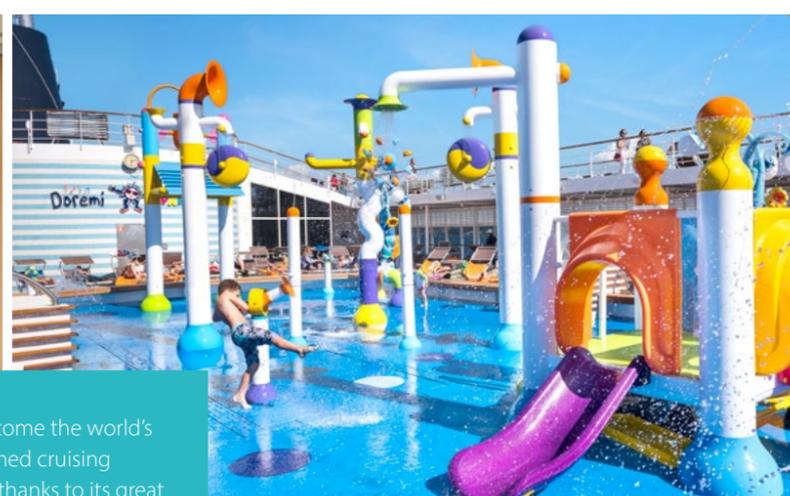
meals together in case they're too young to appreciate gourmet Mediterranean cuisine.)

**Spa** With the kids taken care of, parents can do quite a lot on their well-deserved break. On the sporting side, the ships offer a range of facilities, including an open-air jogging track, virtual golf simulator, and a fully-equipped

**PREVIOUS SPREAD:** Bar and lounge

**TOP:** Aerial view of the MSC

**ABOVE:** Relaxation Spa



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Baby club section; Junior club section; Kids deck and pools; Cabins available for guests with disabilities.

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 Jacuzzis 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 straight to the luxury spa. Time melts away when you're lounging in a relaxation room overlooking the ocean, getting hypnotised by the endless waves. And what a treat to have a year's worth of stress vanish after a one-hour Balinese massage that found all my knots. It's the perfect way pamper yourself, restore your wellbeing, and rejuvenate body and mind.

**Cruising in Style**

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. Initially launched on the MSC Fantasia in 2008, the company's 'Yacht Club' was taken to even more spectacular heights on the MSC Preziosa. It's all about combining the privacy you'd get on a yacht with the facilities you'd get on a cruise in order to get the best of both worlds.

**Fun and entertainment**

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. As an arts journalist who sees over a hundred shows a year, I was quite impressed by the high production values.

On my four-night MSC Sinfonia 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).

And for my three-night MSC Opera cruise, the shows were Icons (60s and 70s music from The Village People, Tom Jones, and other men in tights), Inferno (acrobats and contortionists in a modern version of Dante's classic), a tribute to Bollywood, and The Voice (a matinee of comedy, music, and impressions from Danny Fisher).

Despite the challenge of using a limited cast to create entertainment that caters to a wide variety of tastes, the babes and hunks on stage gave local audiences the kind of international performances they don't often see. It's no wonder so many people in the crowd couldn't get enough!

**Fine dining**

Given that people are budget-conscious all over the world, and that raising a family costs a small fortune, it's good to know that big fun doesn't come at a big cost. MSC Cruises keeps costs low without compromising on quality by importing certain foods from the best available markets. (For example, the pasta comes from Italy, which is clear when you taste

**Special Events**

- MSC Cruises offers a professional dedicated events coordinator, available day and night to help with on-board planning of everything you can imagine: from business conferences and corporate meetings to honeymoons and more.
- One of the most popular options, more so for South African cruises than for Mediterranean ones, is for weddings on board. (There were seven on my three-day Portuguese Island cruise!) Happy couples can select from three different packages to accommodate a small spur of the moment nuptial or a big shindig planned months in advance. And even though it's purely ceremonial (you can't legally be married at sea without a physical address), it's a unique way to tie the knot! "A land wedding has so much stress involved," says cruise director Stephen Cloete. "You have to organise flowers and makeup and music. On a ship is the easiest thing because everything is already here." That means they'll do your makeup and your hair; provide you with a beautifully decorated wedding cake from the kitchen; handle all the décor in the venue; and include any other extras like a private disco for your reception or a special music selection from a live band. Oh, and if the captain's available, he'll officiate the ceremony!
- MSC Cruises also offers special honeymoon and anniversary rates. (Book and pay in full 3 months before departure and your partner pays 50% of the full brochure fare on selected cruises.) So whether you're getting engaged, tying the knot, or renewing your vows, it seems that the only thing left is to say "I do!"

**ABOVE:** One of the Casino's onboard

cruise director Stephen Cloete. "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 extra discounts that you get for booking and paying early.

So, if you're still scratching your head about what to do on your next family holiday, you might as well stop. Going on a cruise is great option to give everyone the freedom to have what they want. That's why around 60% of the 1900 people on the trip I went on were families, some with new-borns and toddlers while others brought the grandparents along too. Young or old, it's clear that a cruising holiday is ideal way to have some family fun!

how good it is.)

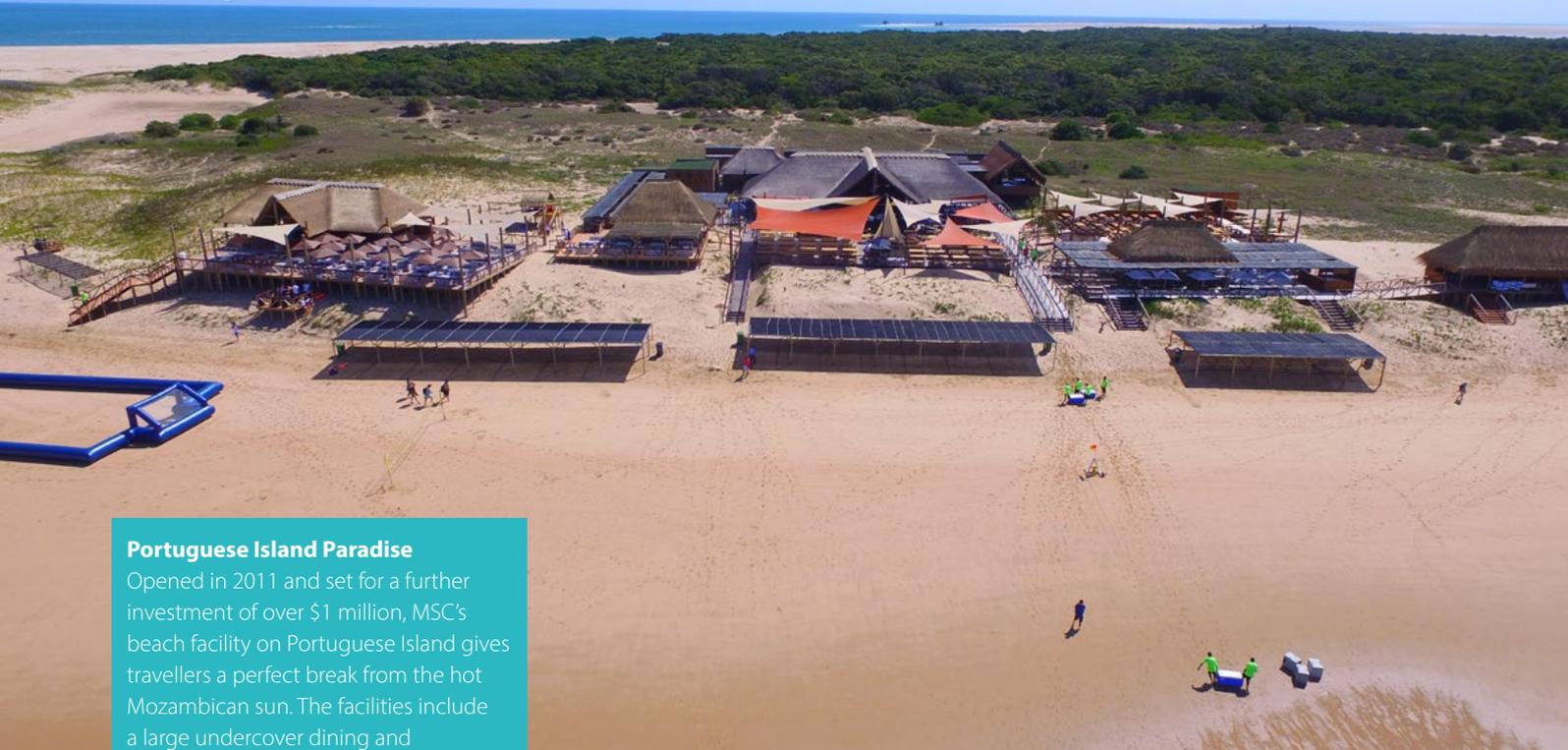
This means that a family of four will only pay for the two adults while two children, under 18 travel for free (only paying the mandatory charges). This is subject to availability of four-berth cabins, of which there are more on the Sinfonia than the Opera.

But you could also opt for an interconnecting cabin (great for privacy and

peace of mind) and only pay 50% of the current adult fare for each child. MSC Cruises even caters for single parents who want to share a cabin with up to three kids under 18, the first of whom will pay 60%. Do the math. It just makes sense.

**Family**

"Cruising is becoming a vacation of choice because it offers value for money," says



### Portuguese Island Paradise

Opened in 2011 and set for a further investment of over \$1 million, MSC's beach facility on Portuguese Island gives travellers a perfect break from the hot Mozambican sun. The facilities include a large undercover dining and entertainment area; a venue for MSC's chefs to prepare and present beach barbeques; and a unique beach bar with themed entertainment.

"Portuguese Island is one of the most popular cruise destinations on the South African cruise calendar," says Allan Foggitt, Marketing Director of MSC Cruises South Africa. "Previously, the destination was a Robinson Crusoe type of call: a beautiful, untouched island, but with a lack of facilities for passengers enjoying a day on the beach. This was therefore an important area of focus and improvement for MSC, and we are now sure that our travellers will enjoy the same high standards on the island as they enjoy on our ships."

ABOVE: The Portuguese Island

always find something to eat (or simply have breakfast delivered to your cabin) no matter how late you wake up or how late you get to bed.

Each lavish suite is also assigned a private butler (trained at the International Butler Academy in the Netherlands) who is available 24/7 to help with things like priority check-in and even unpacking your bags. Oh, and your butler will even ensure that a hardcopy of your favourite newspaper is delivered to your cabin every day. (Think printing, not helicopters.)

One of the best benefits of the MSC Yacht Club must be the private concierge

and offering complimentary thermal suites), to after-hours shopping in the ship's many duty-free stores (which also give you the option of having designer jewellery brought to your cabin so you can view and buy in bed).

As expected, living in the lap of luxury doesn't come cheap. But the company still believes that the MSC Yacht Club offers good value for money when you consider that what you pay includes all accommodation, entertainment, food, and even drinks. And given how quickly the suites were booked on the MSC Preziosa's first season around the Mediterranean, it's clear that other travellers see the value as well!

So if you're in the mood for a great getaway, I suggest you start making plans now. Go ahead. You're worth it! ●

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So, what does this mean? To start, 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. That means you can

reception, which boasts 800 dazzling Swarovski crystals. Their services include everything you can imagine, from private on-shore excursions (with your own personal multilingual tour guide and photographer), to priority reservations in the on-board spa (accessed via private lift

*Eugene Yiga was a guest of Mango Airlines and MSC Cruises, the largest privately-owned cruising company in the world (over 1.5 million passengers per year). The next season on the extended and refurbished MSC Sinfonia runs from November 2015 to May 2016 and offers early booking discounts of up to 50%. Visit [www.msccruises.co.za](http://www.msccruises.co.za) for more. Bon voyage!*