

# Dubai to host naming ceremony for MSC Cruises' newest flagship on 27 November

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MSC Cruises, in partnership with Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (Dubai Tourism), DP World and Emirates Airline, today announced that the naming ceremony for the line's newest flagship, MSC Virtuosa, will take place in Dubai on 27 November at Mina Rashid (Port Rashid). The event reflects the growing importance of Dubai as a must-visit destination for global travellers and the cruising's key contribution to the city's tourism industry.

The newest addition to the MSC Cruises fleet derives her name from the Italian word virtuoso and refers to the master craftsmen who designed and developed this masterpiece, which will be the most technologically and environmentally advanced cruise vessel ever deployed in the UAE. Her naming will be celebrated with a stunning array of live entertainment and performances awaiting the specially invited guests from around the world as well as from across the Gulf region – one of MSC Cruises' key markets where the company is brand leader. Further details of the line-up of entertainment events will be revealed in due course.

The naming ceremony event will take place in compliance with all public health and safety protocols outlined by the Dubai government, as well as with the support of MSC Cruises' Health and Safety protocol that allowed the line's ships to restart its operations in this region. The occasion will also be a part of the celebrations surrounding the Golden Jubilee of the UAE and will be staged as Dubai welcomes the world to Expo 2020.

**His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Chairman and Chief Executive, Emirates Airline and Group, said:** "Dubai has charted a strong and steady course to become a global tourism destination and preferred regional cruising gateway. The milestone naming ceremony and maiden voyage of MSC Virtuosa from Dubai underscores the trust and confidence that the city has earned as a great partner for the cruise industry. We've leveraged our city's world-class transport and tourism infrastructure, including with Emirates' investment in a dedicated remote check-in facility at Port Rashid, to provide cruise operators and passengers the best possible experiences, with seamless sea-air connections and exciting Dubai itineraries during their transit. We look forward to the reinvigoration of cruise passenger growth with these solid foundations in place, and are excited to welcome the world to Dubai in the coming months as we move full speed ahead with the Expo Dubai, UAE's Golden Jubilee programmes, and many other initiatives."

**Pierfrancesco Vago, Executive Chairman of MSC Cruises, said:** "We are incredibly proud and honoured to hold the naming ceremony for our cherished flagship and masterpiece MSC Virtuosa in one of the world's most sought-after travel destinations - Dubai. This event assumes more significance due to the fact that it is part of the line-up of glorious events and activities taking place for the "Year of the 50th" and coincides with the region's first World Expo, as well as truly celebrating Dubai as one of the favoured destinations for travellers from all over the world. I am so glad that cruising has played and will continue to play an important part in this achievement. I also want to thank Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, DP World and Emirates Airline for their partnership and support in making this event happen."

The UAE's Golden Jubilee programme will see a host of activities held across the country, celebrating the country's formation in 1971 and its rise from a small trading port to an iconic global destination. Hosting the MSC Virtuosa naming ceremony recognises Dubai's position as an international hub for tourism, trade and technology, and highlights its achievement in setting the highest international standards across various sectors over the past 50 years. With world class infrastructure including remarkable port and cruise terminal facilities, Dubai is able to handle some of the world's biggest cruise ships, further bolstering the city's position as one of the most viable gateways for both regional and international cruise itineraries.

**Sultan Ahmed Bin Sulayem, Group Chairman and CEO of DP World, said:** "The quadripartite partnership further consolidates collaboration, takes MSC Cruises' operations in Dubai to a new level and highlights the emirate's world-class ability to embrace the expected growth in cruise tourism, given optimistic forecasts of a long-awaited finale of the COVID-19 pandemic looming in the distance".

"As industry prepares for the return of global tourists with health and safety protocols in place, the event planned in November adds to the glitter of EXPO 2020 and highlights Dubai's position as a cruise destination of choice," he added.

**Helal Saeed Almarri, Director General of the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (Dubai Tourism), said:** "We take great pride in the fact that Dubai has emerged as the cruise hub of the region based on the vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, to make the city the world's most visited and re-visited destination. Dubai's partnership with an internationally renowned cruise line such as MSC Cruises is testament to the global appeal of Dubai's cruise industry and its position as a multi-faceted tourism destination. This milestone event will contribute towards sustaining tourism momentum and further strengthen the destination proposition, as we continue to open up to the world in a safe and secure way.

"Within the past five decades, Dubai has built a heritage of excellence across several spheres with the city's transformation into a highly successful international city being largely driven by the unique style of collaboration between the government and private sectors. As we look forward to marking this momentous tourism event in this landmark year for Dubai, we remain grateful to our valued network of stakeholders and partners such as Emirates and DP World for their continued support, which has helped Dubai kick-start global tourism recovery including a return to cruising in the region."

Following the naming ceremony, MSC Virtuosa will depart for its maiden Gulf voyage on 28 November with guests on board from Dubai as the first of a series 7-night cruises with visits to the ports of Abu Dhabi, Sir Bani Yas, Dammam in Saudi Arabia and Doha with additional embarkations at Abu Dhabi and Doha.

MSC Virtuosa was delivered in February and is one of MSC Cruises' most innovative and environmentally-advanced ships and part of the generation of Meraviglia class vessels that are characterised by an iconic 112-metre-long promenade with a stunning LED sky dome as the social heart of the ship.

The 19-deck vessel will offer its guests of all ages the very best of fine dining restaurants, world-class entertainment, relaxing bars and lounges, boutique shopping, spa and fitness centres, an aquapark and clubs for toddlers and teenagers.

Likely to be a huge draw for all guests will be the brand-new MSC Starship Club featuring the world's first humanoid robotic bartender offering a futuristic immersive bar and entertainment experience.

MSC Cruises resumed its operation in August 2020 following approvals from regulatory bodies throughout Europe for an industry-leading health and safety protocol designed to protect the wellbeing of MSC

Cruises' guests, crew and communities its ships visited. Most recently, on 20 May the line was also the first to restart operations in the UK where MSC Virtuosa is currently performing local cruises in the British Isles.

Thousands of guests have to date enjoyed safe and responsible cruise holidays including the Company's pioneering protected shore excursions. This summer sees the restart of up to ten vessels as a result of this protocol.

The protocol was developed in 2020 with input from international health experts – including MSC Cruises' 'COVID-19 Blue-Ribbon Expert Group' – and in close cooperation with relevant national and regional health, transport and safety authorities throughout Europe.