

Mansoor bin Mohammed attends naming ceremony for new luxury liner launched by leading global cruise operator MSC Cruises

27 Nov 2021, Dubai, UAE



His Highness Sheikh Mansoor bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Chairman of Dubai Council for Border Crossing Points Security, today attended one of the biggest cruise ship naming ceremonies in the region, in an event that reflects the rising global profile of Dubai's cruise industry. Hollywood superstar Sophia Loren officially named MSC Virtuosa, the new luxury liner launched by MSC Cruises at a glittering ceremony held at Port Rashid.

In partnership with DP World and Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism, MSC Cruises, the world's third largest cruise operator and part of the Cruise Division of MSC Group, chose Dubai for the naming ceremony in recognition of the Group's commitment to Dubai and the UAE, as well as the wider Middle East market where MSC Cruises is the brand leader. The milestone event reflects Dubai's emergence as a must-visit destination for global cruise holidaymakers and reinforces the importance of the cruise industry's contribution to the growth of Dubai's tourism industry.

His Highness Sheikh Mansoor bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum said: "Dubai's glorious seafaring legacy, which is an integral part of its cultural heritage, has inspired its development as a major global maritime destination. The emirate's status as a leading international maritime hub has significantly strengthened its position as a pivotal global trade and tourism centre." Furthermore, His Highness noted that "Dubai's renewed growth as an international cruise tourism hub, overcoming the repercussions of global challenges in the industry, is testament to the vision of the leadership to create an infrastructure that surpasses the world's best. The accelerated rebound of its cruise industry also reflects Dubai's ability to adapt rapidly and flexibly to the evolving global situation and take advantage of new opportunities emerging in a changing environment."

A long-standing maritime tradition, the official Naming Ceremony of MSC Virtuosa took place in the presence of the Master of the Vessel, Captain Francisco Veniero. The event was held in compliance with all public health and safety protocols established by the Dubai government, supported by MSC Cruises' industry-leading health and safety protocol that allowed the line's ships to restart operations in 2020. The special occasion is also part of celebrations surrounding the Golden Jubilee of the UAE and coincides with Dubai's hosting of Expo 2020 Dubai.

Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem, Group Chairman and CEO, DP World, said, "It is a proud moment for us to host the MSC Virtuosa naming ceremony at Mina Rashid that has consistently reaffirmed its status as a leading destination, regionally and globally. The port's state-of-the-art facilities, passenger handling capacity and strategic location have helped us win several significant accolades, the recent being The Middle East's Leading Cruise Port Award at The World Travel Awards 2021, received for the 14th consecutive year. To ensure that the port continues to be an integral contributor to the UAE's economy and a significant economic pillar of Dubai, we are working to enhance its capabilities. Our sole aim is to reinforce its status as a preferred recreational facility that represents Dubai's rich cultural heritage. Through our efforts, we will strive to ensure that the Emirate continues to gain recognition globally as a world-class cruise destination. We are also expecting a total of 126 ship calls and over 500,000 cruise visitors for the upcoming 2021/22 cruise season. This will further bolster Dubai's tourism figures and drive our progress."

His Excellency Helal Saeed Almarri, Director General of Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism, commented: "Inspired by the vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, UAE Vice President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, to make the city the most preferred, revisited and visited destination, Dubai continues to chart a course forward as one of the world's leading tourism destinations, and the cruise capital of the Middle East. Hosting the naming ceremony for MSC Cruises' newest vessel is testament to the popularity of the city as a must-visit destination and the cruise gateway to the region. Dubai's reputation as a global cruise hub continues to grow in stature and milestone events such as these reflect the crucial contribution of cruising to the city's tourism industry. Dubai is also committed to ensuring that each and every visitor arriving by land, air or sea has an unforgettable experience, and the yearning to come back to Dubai, time and time again to explore, experience and enjoy our diverse destination offering. We remain grateful to MSC Cruises and our stakeholders and partners such as DP World for their continued support, which has helped restart cruise tourism in the region. With Dubai continuing to welcome international tourists, this event will build on the momentum generated by the new cruise season, further fuelling growth during this landmark year for Dubai featuring Expo 2020 and the UAE Golden Jubilee, and beyond."

Pierfrancesco Vago, Executive Chairman of the Cruise Division of MSC Group, said, "We are honoured to host this time-honoured maritime tradition ceremony in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates during its Golden Jubilee year and with it, to mark our Group's longstanding and long-term commitment to this region. This is also why this winter MSC Virtuosa, a new and one of the most technologically and environmentally advanced ships in our fleet, will homeport in the country as part of our deployment in the Gulf region. Cruising is an integral part of Dubai's dynamic tourism industry, and we will continue to promote the UAE and the Middle East all around the world as an attractive holiday option to support the further growth of the tourism industry locally."

MSC Virtuosa can carry up to 6,334 passengers and 1,704 crew. The ship features 10 restaurants, 21 lounges, plus five swimming pools, and will serve stunning Arabian Sea itineraries throughout the winter season from March 2022 at its base in Dubai, to offer the ship's guests the opportunity to experience the

best destinations in the Gulf region, including Abu Dhabi, Sir Bani Yas Island and Qatar. Equipped with some of the latest marine technologies available, MSC Virtuosa is one of the world's most environmentally advanced cruise ships. No effort has been spared to minimise its footprint. MSC Group shares the UAE's ambition to reach net zero emissions by 2050 and MSC Virtuosa represents yet another milestone on the journey towards reaching this goal.

The innovative ship stands 19-decks tall and is set to welcome guests this winter for week-long cruises from Dubai with the very best of fine dining international cuisine, world-class entertainment, relaxing lounges with the largest shopping area at sea, spa and fitness centre, an aquapark and clubs for toddlers to teenagers. The ship's showstopping feature is its iconic 112-metre promenade with a stunning LED sky dome, the social heart of the ship.