

Cruise Control

Forget traditional. Set sail aboard an MSC Yacht Club Cruise for a luxurious seaside excursion.

Story by Marlene Montanez

WHEN TRAVELING, NO MATTER the destination, there are always small obstacles to deal with. Particularly, waiting. There's the line at the airport. There's airport security. There's getting to and from your destination and around unfamiliar territory. When you think about it, it's actually quite the waiting game that amounts to precious time lost that could be better spent sightseeing or relaxing in your new surroundings.

When stepping aboard the MSC Yacht Club, all of these small nuisances become a thing of the past. Forget waiting in line. Forget fending for yourself. Forget even having to bother to "learn" where things are or how to get there; you get your own 24/7 personal butler who will navigate the mess for you. He'll escort you around the ship; he'll bring you your daily newspaper. He'll even unpack your luggage for you, upon request. And that's just a preview of some of the perks.

Sea legs aside, an MSC Yacht Club Cruise is unlike your typical cruise vacation. Expect glamour. Expect pampering. Expect posh perks. You can even expect to forget how to do things for yourself. But don't fret, this is all part of living the luxe life—or at least getting a taste of it aboard the MSC Yacht Club.

MSC Yacht Club is a prestigious "ship within a ship" aboard the MSC Fantasia and MSC Splendida cruise ships. When you book a Yacht Club suite, all travel details are taken care of for you. The cruiseliner books Business Class tickets to and from your embarkation destination and arranges airport transfers. Upon arriving, a butler will escort you past the long security line aboard the ship—a truly brilliant bonus considering once you've made the transatlantic journey, the last thing you'll want to do is wait in a line just to get in.

Once on board, you'll be happy to learn the top three floors are

reserved exclusively for MSC Yacht Club guests; they include the Top Sail Lounge, luxury state rooms, a members-only pool area and an exclusive restaurant that doesn't require designated seating times. What's more, these Yacht-Club-only spaces occupy prime real estate at the top of the ship, affording amazing views of the ocean and each destination.

Cocktails and dining is all-inclusive at all MSC Yacht Club venues. But what you'll really want to take advantage of is the private restaurant where you can indulge and satiate your palate. The restaurant features fine foods in an upscale modern setting that's truly the best on the ship. Floor-to-ceiling panoramic windows afford drop-dead-gorgeous ocean views. Oh, and there's plenty of wine to be had, too.

You can make a reservation for dinner through the private concierge service all Yacht Club members have access to. This concierge, in fact, can arrange just about anything for you from show tickets to butler-accompanied,

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SOOTHING AT SEA: MSC Yacht Club guests enjoy private treatment rooms at MSC Aurea Spa.

out-of-hours shopping aboard the ship.

But perhaps what's most enticing are the private excursions at each destination the concierge can secure. An English-speaking guide will take you on a customized tour of each city, away from the hustle and bustle of larger group tours. Since it's just you and your guests, it's easy to break away from the agenda. (Perhaps you'll deviate from the tour schedule when a guide mentions a locals-only spot he or she loves.)

After a long day of sightseeing, unwind at the MSC Aurea Spa, a Zen-like space that has private treatment rooms for MSC Yacht Club guests. Or head back to your suite and enjoy an in-room movie or a video game; there is a Nintendo Wii gaming system in every room.

Undoubtedly, one of the prime reasons many book cruise vacations is access to plenty of entertainment. And as an MSC Yacht Club guest, you can enjoy everything the ship has to offer while still being able to escape the hecticness that can ensue when more than 3,000 passengers are on board.

Do a little on-board duty-free shopping (you'll find luxe brands like Ralph Lauren and Bvlgari); have a wine tasting; try your luck inside the casino or enjoy a cool cocktail at one of the ship's many bars and lounges. When you're ready for a bit of a reprieve and a quieter, more intimate ambience, head back up to Top Sail Lounge which is exclusive to Yacht Club guests.

After a few days aboard the MSC Yacht Club, you'll have to remember to come back down to earth. Waiting in line and remembering to dot your i's and cross your t's are reality once more. But that's only because it's everyday life. Not having those worries on a vacation, however, allows you to truly maximize your time for once-in-a-lifetime adventures, which is really what traveling is all about. ■

PICK YOUR PORT

MSC cruise ships sail around more than 150 destinations including North and South America, The Mediterranean, The Caribbean, South Africa and more.