

MSC Seascape Christened in New York City



Last week, MSC Cruises—which touts itself as the world’s fastest growing cruise brand—welcomed MSC Seascape to its fleet. I had the opportunity of attending the ship’s naming ceremony which took place at the Manhattan Cruise Terminal in New York City in recognition of the city becoming the line’s newest U.S. homeport in April 2023.

One of the highlights of the ceremony was a performance from international singer-songwriter Matteo Bocelli. Godmother of the entire MSC Cruises fleet is movie icon Sophia Loren and she blessed MSC Seascape virtually.

MSC Seascape has 2,270 cabins with 12 different stateroom and suite categories, along with 11 dining venues and 19 bars and lounges, six swimming pools, a waterfront promenade, and the largest Yacht Club in the entire fleet. Guests sailing on MSC Seascape can enjoy 98 hours of live entertainment per sailing and such amusement options as Robotron.

The Deck 8 Infinity Promenade is also a standout—wrapping fully around the ship. At the aft, there is an adults-only Infinity Pool. Heading up to Deck 16, brave guests can walk across the Bridge of Sighs, a glass-floored bridge that’s cantilevered over the back of the ship, above the infinity deck. Also new to this ship, located on Deck 18, is the Robotron, a robotic arm with three chairs that’s designed to mimic the feeling of being on a roller coaster. The thrill ride is nearly 175 feet above the sea and spins and flips guests according to their chosen level—easy, medium, intense—all synced to music. Along the same lines, guests can also enjoy enhanced Immersive XD Cinema, VR 360° Flight Simulator, VR motorbikes and the Formula Racer virtual simulator. After being strapped in and with goggle in place, I shot the zombies virtually and did go upside down and it felt so real. Absolutely amazing!!!

In addition to the main restaurants, buffet, and the Aurea and Yacht Club restaurants, there will be five specialty concepts onboard MSC Seascape.

Guests can expect the line’s signature steakhouse, Butcher’s Cut, with al fresco dining, as well as HOLA! Tacos & Cantina, offering a selection of Mexican-inspired dishes with a twist. Kaito Sushi Bar which provides an interactive dinner thanks to a conveyor belt that constantly moves fresh sushi in front of you. Kaito Teppanyaki—serves Japanese dishes to tables of eight. At Ocean Cay Restaurant, you can expect fresh seafood complemented by an impressive wine list.

After dinner, you can head to Venchi 1878 for some gelato—the cappuccino gelato was the best I’ve ever had—and the samples at the chocolate bar made you want some to bring home; which, of course, I did. The Wine Cave allows guests to explore the ship’s wine cellar and indulge in a tastings paired with a cheese selection. Other bars include the revamped Sports Bar, which offers individual TV booths to watch the action with your friends, the rooftop Sky Bar cocktail lounge, a Champagne Bar that offers a variety of champagne, prosecco and other bubbly from around the world accompanied by an array of caviar, and The Cocktail Bar, located in the Chef’s Court (home to several of the specialty dining venues).

For the kids, there is the impressive Pirates Cove Aquapark, which made me wish we weren’t in New York in December (and that I were a bit younger), as well as the LEGO Experience On Board, where kids have free range to build as they please. There’s a Mini Club for three- to six-years-olds and the Juniors Club, for those aged seven to 11.

In addition to the Infinity Pool, MSC Seascape also houses a Marina Pool and the Jungle Pool. The former—located on Deck 18—has a new design that included a water fountain island, lounge space and an adjacent screen for movie nights. The latter—located on Deck 16—has a magrodome, making it suitable for warm weather or colder/rainy days. This area has been enlarged and includes an additional deck over and around the space, providing new areas for guests to sit and relax. It’s also located next to the buffet.

MSC (con't.)

I stayed in a Deluxe Balcony stateroom, which can have a king or two single beds, a sitting area with a sofa and desk that doubles as a vanity, a large TV and a balcony with a couple chairs and small table. I was very impressed with the handicapped balconies—a button on the wall next to the balcony door activates a retractable mini ramp which allows access to the balcony, by wheelchair, much easier. These rooms have walk-in showers, lots of space between furniture for wheelchairs, a different material deck, emergency buttons by the bed and in the bathroom, and closets that have drop-down rods for hanging clothes.

My favorite room category is the Premium Suite Aurea with Whirlpool. The cabin is about 300 square feet (up from about 180 sq.ft. from my cabin), has a balcony with its own hot tub. Additionally, being part of the Aurea “experience,” guests additionally receive access to the solarium, 10 percent off all spa treatments, priority boarding, a welcome package and more. Many rooms connect, which is perfect for families. The Yacht Club experience is the top option onboard; it’s followed by Aurea, Fantastica and Bella (the basic package).

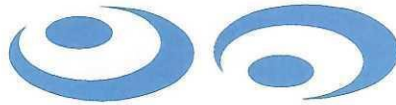


MSC Seascape departed New York to its homeport of Miami, where it has begun sailing to the Caribbean and the Bahamas—where it’s expected to remain year-round. The new flagship for the U.S will offer two itineraries:

Eastern Caribbean: Calling at Ocean Cay MSC Marine Reserve and Nassau in the Bahamas, San Juan in Puerto Rico, and Puerto Plata in the Dominican Republic.

Western Caribbean: Calling at Ocean Cay MSC Marine Reserve, Cozumel in Mexico, George Town in the Cayman Islands, and Ocho Rios in Jamaica.

As for Ocean Cay MSC Marine Reserve, it in itself is a sustainability triumph. Debuted right before the COVID-19 pandemic, to make the space fit for cruise guests, MSC removed 1,500 tons of scrap metal and waste; it also planted 75,000 trees and shrubs and replants 400 coral colonies. Now, 64 square miles around the cay are protected as a marine reserve. In addition, it's entirely self-sufficient thanks to its water treatment plant, lack of single-use plastic and solar panels that generate energy. There is a private beach for Yacht Club guests, as well as one dedicated for families.



Nancy,

Thank you for recommending Excellence Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic for our latest vacation.

My wife Liz and I had a great time. This was our first time at the resort, and in the DR.

The resort was beautiful, the food, the service, the entertainment, and the very friendly staff were all top notch.

The travel experience on JetBlue and Seasons Transfers was superior to anything we experienced in 4 prior trips Riviera Maya, Mexico.

Excellence Punta Cana provided tremendous value for our travel dollar.

Thanks again for another great Hometown Travel vacation.

Tom and Liz McGrath



Royal Caribbean Officially Names Wonder Of The Seas as New Largest Ship in the World

Royal Caribbean International officially welcomed its newest and largest ship, Wonder of the Seas, into the fleet, although she has actually been sailing since March 2022. The ceremony also marked the start of a new chapter for Wonder as it makes Port Canaveral, Fla., its new home. Displacing 236,857 gross registered tons and capable of carrying 6,988 guests when all berths are filled, Wonder of the Seas is the largest cruise ship in the world, and will remain so at least until Royal Caribbean introduces Icon of the Seas late next year.



Beyond Wonder's more than 40 restaurants, bars and lounges, guests will also experience The Ultimate Abyss, the tallest slide at sea; the FlowRider surf simulator; rock climbing walls; The Perfect Storm racing waterslides; newly designed areas just for kids and teens; and original entertainment across four stages.

Wonder is now sailing seven-night Eastern and Western Caribbean cruises from Port Canaveral, such as the cruise line's private island destination Perfect Day at CocoCay in the Bahamas; St. Thomas, St. Maarten; and Mexico.



Summer's already in the air

United® flies to more cities in Europe, Africa, India and the Middle East than all other U.S. airlines combined.

Flights are subject to change. Dubai service is subject to government approval.

UNITED 

The banner features a collage of travel images on the left, including the Burj Khalifa, a cityscape, and the Eiffel Tower. The text is in white on a dark blue background.

VIENNA CELEBRATES THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE VIENNA WORLD'S FAIR IN 2023

As a dynamic European destination, Vienna enjoys a rich cultural heritage marked by major historic events. In 1873, the city captured the world's attention as host to the World's Fair, which cemented Vienna as a major global city. Honoring this historic event and its impact on the destination, Vienna will celebrate the 150th anniversary with a display of the best of its past, present and future. Don't miss this opportunity for your clients to experience all the exciting reasons why Vienna is continuously named "Most Livable City".





Officially open! A new **Adults Only holiday experience** arrives in a prime Cancun Hotel Zone location. Introducing new services such as a mixologist, a new burger bar by the pool and offering our new and improved room experience, with upgraded bedding, streaming options and additional choices in our 24 hour room service menu as part of our renowned **All Inclusive service**.

In addition to the fantastic All Inclusive Offer, discover now our brand new **Elite Club by RIU**. A new premium holiday concept that gives your clients the ultimate vacation upgrade.

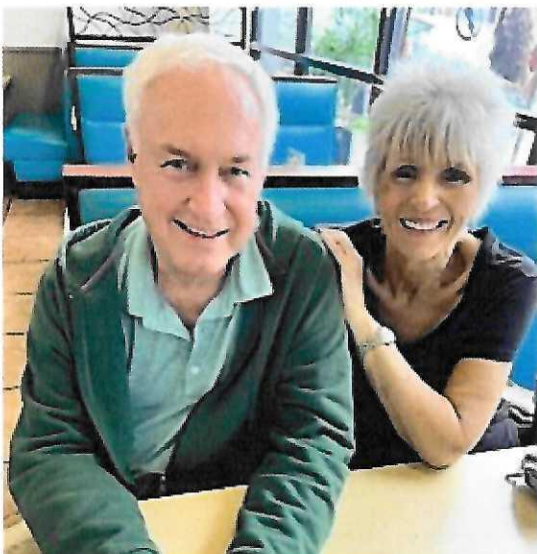
Hyatt Zilara Debuts in Riviera Maya

Hyatt Hotels and Playa Hotels & Resorts have announced the debut of **Hyatt Zilara Riviera Maya**. Nestled in the secluded region of **Riviera Maya, Mexico**, the all-inclusive, adults-only resort offers easy access to the **Cancun International Airport**, and is six miles from **Playa del Carmen**.

Hyatt Zilara Riviera Maya has 291 rooms and suites, all of which offer spa-like bathrooms with rainfall showers, turndown service, LCD satellite TVs and complimentary minibars. Guests will also enjoy Wi-Fi access and 24-hour in-suite dining with chef specialties.

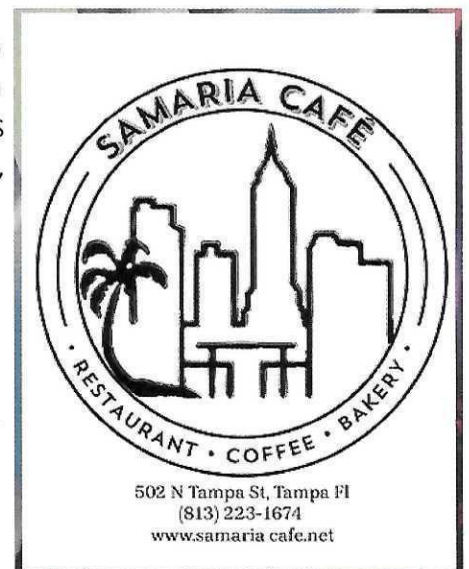


RECENT VISIT TO TAMPA AND A WONDERFUL LUNCH CATCHING UP WITH FATHER STEVE



I RECENTLY SPENT A GREAT WEEKEND IN TAMPA AND HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDED VISITING MY GIRLFRIEND SUSAN, WHO I HAVEN'T SEEN FOR ABOUT TEN YEARS AND FATHER STEVE FROM ST. FRANCIS, LBI WHO IS NOW AT SACRED HEART CHURCH IN TAMPA. HE SENDS HIS REGARDS TO EVERYONE.

IF YOU ARE EVER IN THE AREA, I CAN RECOMMEND THIS LITTLE JEWEL OF A RESTAURANT. THE OWNER/CHEF HAS PUT A FRENCH FLAIR (HER HERITAGE) ON SOME MENU ITEMS AND I CAN PERSONALLY SUGGEST THE APPLE CREPES. MAGNIFIQUE!



REAL ID Enforcement Pushed Back to 2025

The requirement for **REAL IDs** will not go into effect for another two years. According to the **U.S. Department of Homeland Security** (DHS), enforcement of the REAL ID will not begin until May 7, 2025—two full years after the previously set date of May 3, 2023. In the interim, this means people traveling domestically within the United States can continue to use their existing form of identification.

“Under the new regulations published to execute this change, states will now have additional time to ensure their residents have driver’s licenses and identification cards that meet the security standards established by the **REAL ID Act**,” the DHS said in a statement. “As required by the law, following the enforcement deadline, federal agencies, including the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), will be prohibited from accepting driver’s licenses and identification cards that do not meet these federal standards.”

This means, every traveler 18 years of age or older will need a REAL ID-compliant driver’s license or identification card, state-issued enhanced driver’s license, or another TSA-acceptable form of identification at airport security checkpoints for domestic air travel.

“Extending the REAL ID deadline is the right decision, and U.S. Travel appreciates DHS leadership for recognizing that with more than 100 million Americans still lacking a REAL ID, now is not the time to create significant travel disruptions. This delay helps give travelers the time necessary to get the credential needed to fly domestically,” said **U.S. Travel Association** Executive Vice President of Public Affairs and Policy **Tori Emerson Barnes** in a statement.

“It remains critical that DHS identify ways to modernize identification standards to make the entire travel process more efficient. We will continue working with our partners in the travel industry and DHS to advance these solutions and get the traveling public fully prepared for the implementation of the REAL ID Act in 2025,” she added.

The Real ID Act was originally passed by Congress in 2005 following the attacks on September 11, 2001. It was supposed to go into effect in 2008 before being pushed back to 2014 for certain federal agencies. All states have become compliant in the meantime but enforcement continued to be pushed back, first to 2021, then 2023 date and, now, 2025.

The Washington Post reports that just under half of Americans who have a license or state identification card have a Real ID-compliant document (identifiable by a star in the upper righthand corner).



Mistletoe Margaritas

Ingredients

1/2 c. whole cranberries
1/4 c. granulated sugar, divided
2 tbsp. kosher salt
1 wedge lime, for rim
2 c. cranberry juice
12 oz. silver tequila
8 oz. triple sec
1/2 c. plus 1 tbsp. lime juice, divided
12 c. ice
Mint, for garnish

Directions

In a medium bowl, toss cranberries with 1 tablespoon lime juice. Drain out lime juice, then toss with 2 tablespoons sugar. Pour onto a baking sheet to dry.

Combine remaining sugar with salt on a shallow plate and mix to combine. Using the lime wedge, wet rim of each glass, then dip in sugar salt mixture.

Combine cranberry juice, tequila, triple sec, remaining 1/2 cup lime juice, and ice in a large blender, working in batches if necessary. Blend until smooth.

Pour into prepared glasses and garnish with a sprig of mint and a couple sugared cranberries.

