

MSC Cruises Adds and Extends Family Offerings for Summer 2024



Today, MSC Cruises announced the expansion of its award-winning kids and family programming for guests travelling this summer.

For the first time, MSC Cruises is offering extended baby care services for infants as young as six months old. Parents will have more freedom to enjoy the ship while highly trained staff care for their children in Baby Club Chicco (previously, this service was only available to guests aged one year or older).

MSC Cruises is also introducing new family-friendly events. “Doremiland Open House and Party” is a program that invites parents to spend time with their children in the kids’ clubs during designated times each day.

Additionally, there will be a family party once per cruise for parents and their kids to have fun together, and opportunities to participate in MSC Foundation children’s activities, which will be dedicated to environmental issues.

In addition to the new offerings, MSC is extending and enhancing various family programming experiences onboard its ships. The always-popular family game shows are to be extended with two new options: a geography-based trivia game called “World Quest” and a spy game called “Caravaggio.” And following a successful trial run on select ships, MSC will be adding Guinness World Record activities to more ships.

Canadian Border Workers Vote for Strike, Warn of “Significant Delays”

Crossing the Canada-U.S. border could be a problem for travelers this summer.

Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) workers have voted 96% in favour of job action, according to a release from the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC).

Released on Friday May 24, the union statement warns that there could be “significant disruptions to the flow of goods, services, and people at Canadian ports of entry as the busy summer season approaches.”

More than 9,000 PSAC members have secured the strike mandate. Work stoppage could occur in June if an agreement is not reached.

The last time CBSA workers took job action was in 2021, which led to delays and long lines at border crossings.

The Government of Canada released a statement in response to the strike vote:

“The Government of Canada values the important work of border services employees, and we will do everything possible to reach a responsible and competitive agreement. However, in the event of strike action, Canadians should know that 90% of front-line border services employees are designated as essential, meaning they must continue providing services during a strike.

The best agreements are reached at the bargaining table. Rather than planning for disruption, PSAC should focus on negotiation so we can reach an agreement as quickly as possible that is fair to employees and taxpayers.”



GROUPS 2024 AND 2025



DECEMBER 7, 2024-ROYAL CLIPPER (round trip Barbados)

Would you like to climb the mast to the crow's nest 75 feet above the deck or visit the open bridge where you can help sail the vessel? If so, this tall ship adventure is your ticket. Casual and relaxes with top notch dining and less than 250 passengers. Have a tropical drink while you relax in the bowsprit netting while listening to a steel drum band on deck. Visit Grenada, St. Vincent, Bequia, Martinique and St. Lucia. Rate per person for an outside cabin, including current taxes, is \$2,475.00. Our special pricing also includes pre-paid gratuities and an on-board credit of \$200.00 per person.

FEBRUARY 26 to MARCH 4, 2025-ICELAND

Our annual Iceland adventure begins with flights on Icelandair round trip from Newark Liberty Airport to Keflavik. We will begin with a stop at the Viking World Museum for a heavy continental breakfast before heading to the Blue Lagoon for a sunrise cocktail. Our package includes four nights at Midgardur Center Hotel with a buffet breakfast daily, full day Golden Circle tour with a tomato soup lunch at Fridheimar Greenhouse, shared Northern Lights tour, optional tours will be available to the glacier and South shore black sand beaches and Sky Lagoon. Price per person double \$1,998.00 included all current air and government taxes. A few singles are available at a surcharge of \$650.00. Insurance is recommended and a valid passport is required.

OLD WORLD SICILY AND MALTA, NOVEMBER 5-16, 2025, with Collette Vacations. This is a small group departure for Home Town Travel with a maximum of 24 passengers on this adventure. These legendary isles are nestled amongst the deep blue water of the Mediterranean. Discover how ancient traditions blend into modern society as you travel along timeless Italian Maltese and Sicilian towns. This eleven-night tour begins with a four-night stay in Malta with a ferry to Sicily where you will stay three nights in Ragusa and three nights in Taormina. This package includes round trip transportation to Newark airport from our office, round trip air from Newark airport with an overnight flight to Malta, 10 breakfasts, 1 lunch and 4 dinners, professional escort throughout the trip and all accommodations and entrance fees. The rate per person based on double occupancy is \$5,399.00. Cancel for any reason insurance is optional and at a rate of \$549.00. Please call for more information.

NOVEMBER 25, 2025-ICONIC CHRISTMAS MARKETS ABOARD AMA REINA (Nuremburg to Budapest)

Travel back through centuries as you walk along cobblestone streets through grand cities and historic towns bedecked with twinkling Christmas trees and lined with wooden huts gleaming with handcrafted treasures. Nuremberg's festive Christkindlemarkt, the largest and oldest Christmas market in Germany, Regensburg's Artisan Christmas Market, one of Bavaria's most beautiful and romantic, Vienna with its impressive Christmas Market and Budapest where most products are handmade. Revel in a feast for the senses: sparkling lights, festive sounds of children dressed as angels singing carols and the enticing smells of hot-mulled wine, roasted chestnuts, sausages, and sweet treats of every kind. Rates start at \$3,699.00 per person double occupancy. Air fare and pre and post options will be available in early 2025. A deposit of \$400 per person is required.

Next week will have all our scheduled groups for 2025.

Cheesy Guava Empanadas

When we were growing up, my mother would serve us slices of guava paste with cream cheese on the side for dessert and my father would cut sweet jams with savory cheeses for breakfast. These components come together in this empanada recipe: the cream cheese adds creaminess and tang, while the saltiness of the queso duro balances out the sweetness of the guava. It's an *equipoise* and the result can be eaten for very casual, or as a sweet and savory snack.

Level: Easy

Total: 50 min

Active: 20 min

Yield: 10 empanadas

Ingredients:

Nonstick cooking spray, for the baking sheets

One 14-ounce package frozen white empanada wrappers (10 wrappers), partially thawed (see Cook's Note)

5 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature

10 ounces guava paste

1 1/4 cups grated queso duro or other salty, savory cheese such as sharp Cheddar, Gouda or Gruyère (about 3 ounces; see Cook's Note)

1 large egg

Directions:

1 Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Spray 2 baking sheets with nonstick cooking spray.

2 Put 3 or 4 of the empanada wrappers on a flat work surface. Spoon 2 teaspoons of cream cheese on the bottom half of each, then spread to create a half-moon shape, leaving a 1/2-inch gap between the cream cheese and the edge. Divide the guava paste into 3-ounce sections; depending on how the paste is packaged, you can either cut it into planks or scoop out about 3 teaspoons per empanada (using 3 teaspoons rather than 1 tablespoon will make the empanadas easier to seal). Finally, top each empanada with about 2 tablespoons of grated cheese.

3 Make an egg wash by whisking the egg in a small bowl with a splash of water. Brush the outer edge of each wrapper with the egg wash, then seal by folding each wrapper in half and pressing the edges together with your fingers. Arrange the empanadas on the prepared baking sheets, then crimp the edges of each with a fork, pushing down enough to seal but not enough to go through the dough. Assemble, seal, and crimp the remaining empanadas.

4 Brush the top side of each empanada with the egg wash, then bake until the outsides are dark golden brown and feel crispy to the touch, 20 to 25 minutes. Let cool for at least 5 minutes, then serve.



Everything You Need to Know About Baklava

What makes a baklava perfect? It depends on who you ask — and where you are.

The history of baklava spans several millennia. Some trace its origins to the 15th-century Ottoman Empire, when it was served at special occasions such as Ramadan. Others note a likely precursor to baklava in the unleavened breads stuffed with chopped nuts that were similarly prized in the Assyrian Empire in the 8th century B.C.E.

Today, inventive bakers throughout the Middle East, Turkey and Greece put their own spins on the sweet. In Turkey, there are more than a dozen varieties of baklava, many of which can be found abroad. While living in Istanbul, some of my favorites included traditional pistachio baklava and cold milk baklava — one of the trendier Turkish recipes today.

Most people will tell you that the perfect baklava has crisp layers and is not mushy at all. The key to obtaining this consistency is to wait until the syrup has cooled to pour it over the hot baklava. If the syrup is too warm, it makes the baklava soft and soggy.

Sweetness matters, too. Since the hot baklava gets drenched in syrup, there's no need to sweeten the filling too much. The source of the sweetness depends on what type of baklava you're making. For instance, Greek baklava syrup uses honey whereas the Turkish and Lebanese versions derive their sweetness from other ingredients. Be sure to follow the recipe when making the syrup and be mindful of how much you pour over the baklava: Too much syrup will make the baklava soggy and too little will make it dry.

Personal preferences can separate good from great baklava, whether you're sampling sweets at a Middle Eastern bakery or rolling out phyllo dough in your home kitchen. Whatever style you prefer and wherever you are, baklava makes everything sweeter.



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Best Greek Foods to Try In Greece

IF YOU'RE PLANNING A TRIP TO GREECE, BE SURE TO TRY SOME OF THESE POPULAR DISHES.

OLIVES AND OLIVE OIL

OLIVES HAVE A LONG HISTORY IN GREECE – MANY SAY THEY ORIGINATED FROM THE OLIVE TREE THE GREEK GODDESS ATHENA GIFTED TO THE CITY OF ATHENS. OLIVES HAVE GROWN IN GREECE FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, BECOMING A STAPLE IN GREEK CUISINE. LOCAL OLIVES, EITHER UNCURED OR SOAKED IN SEA SALT BRINE, OFTEN ACCOMPANY GREEK MEALS. MORE IMPORTANTLY, OLIVE OIL IS SO ESSENTIAL TO GREEK FOOD THAT IT'S USED IN MOST DISHES. FROM TOPPING SALADS, DIPS AND MAIN DISHES TO COOKING, OLIVE OIL IS A CONSTANT ACROSS THE BOARD.

WHILE YOU'VE LIKELY ALREADY TRIED SOME VERSION OF OLIVES OR OLIVE OIL, BE SURE TO TRY THEM AGAIN IN GREECE. THE GREEKS HAVE HAD THOUSANDS OF YEARS TO PERFECT THEIR CRAFT, AND THE FRESH, LOCAL PRODUCTS HERE ARE MORE AUTHENTIC THAN IN OTHER AREAS.

COURGETTE BALLS

COURGETTE BALLS, ALSO KNOWN AS KOLOKYTHOKEFTEDES, ARE FRIED ZUCCHINI BALLS OR PATTIES. THE DISH INCLUDES ZUCCHINI, FETA CHEESE, MINT AND OLIVE OIL, COMBINED AND FORMED INTO BALLS OR PATTIES. THE OUTSIDE OF THE COURGETTE BALLS IS CRISPY, WHILE THE INSIDE STAYS CREAMY. COURGETTE BALLS ARE SERVED HOT WITH COLD YOGURT OR TZATZIKI FOR DIPPING.

THIS APPETIZER IS A POPULAR CHOICE ON CRETE, ONE OF THE GREEK ISLANDS. HOWEVER, COURGETTE BALLS ARE ON THE MENU IN MOST GREEK RESTAURANTS, EVEN OUTSIDE OF CRETE.

DOLMADES

DOLMADES ARE A POPULAR APPETIZER, OFTEN SERVED ALONGSIDE OTHERS ON A MEZE PLATTER. THESE STUFFED GRAPE-VINE LEAVES CAN VARY DEPENDING ON WHO'S MAKING THEM. VEGETARIAN DOLMADES ARE STUFFED WITH RICE, SPICES AND HERBS AND COMMONLY FLAVORED WITH LEMON. YOU MAY ALSO FIND DOLMADES FILLED WITH RICE AND GROUND BEEF OR LAMB. ONCE THE GRAPEVINE LEAVES ARE STUFFED, THEY'RE ROLLED UP AND SECURED, THEN BOILED UNTIL TENDER.

TZATZIKI IS A CLASSIC APPETIZER DIP AND SAUCE THAT YOU CAN PAIR WITH MANY DISHES. WHILE MOST CHEFS PUT THEIR OWN TWIST ON IT, BASIC TZATZIKI RECIPES CONSIST OF YOGURT, CUCUMBER, GARLIC, DILL, OLIVE OIL AND LEMON JUICE. BECAUSE YOU CAN EAT THIS DIP WITH SO MANY DIFFERENT DISHES, IT'S A STAPLE ON MOST RESTAURANT MENUS. YOU'LL LIKELY ENCOUNTER IT WITHOUT EVEN NEEDING TO ASK!

TIROPITA IS A POPULAR GREEK DISH IS A CHEESE PIE MOST OFTEN ENJOYED FOR BREAKFAST OR AS A SNACK THROUGHOUT THE DAY. THIS CHEESY DISH CONSISTS PRIMARILY OF FETA MIXED WITH OTHER YELLOW CHEESES FOR ADDED FLAVOR. THE CHEESE IS WRAPPED IN PHYLLO DOUGH AND COATED IN MELTED BUTTER OR OLIVE OIL TO ENSURE A CRISP, GOLDEN CRUST WHEN BAKED. YOU MAY ALSO FIND TIROPITA WITH ADDITIONAL INGREDIENTS, LIKE CHICKEN.

PASTITSIO—IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR TRADITIONAL GREEK COMFORT FOODS, TRY PASTITSIO. PASTITSIO IS KNOWN AS A GREEK LASAGNA BECAUSE IT HAS A SIMILAR TASTE AND LAYERED INGREDIENTS. INSTEAD OF THE FLAT LASAGNA PASTA YOU MAY BE USED TO, PASTITSIO LAYERS TUBULAR PASTA IN A RED BEEF SAUCE. THIS DISH IS TOPPED WITH A THICK, CHEESY BÉCHAMEL SAUCE AND BAKED UNTIL THE TOP IS GOLDEN BROWN.

SOUVLAKI—SOUVLAKI, MEANING “MEAT ON A SKEWER,” IS A POPULAR TYPE OF GREEK STREET FOOD SIMILAR TO GYROS, ONE OF THE BEST AND MOST WELL-KNOWN GREEK FOODS. SOUVLAKI IS SKEWERED MEAT WRAPPED IN A PITA, TYPICALLY SERVED WITH TOMATO, ONION AND TZATZIKI. THE MEAT IS MOST OFTEN CHICKEN, LAMB OR PORK, THOUGH MANY GREEK PEOPLE REFER TO ANY PITA-WRAPPED MEAT AS SOUVLAKI.

SOUVLAKI IS ONE OF THE FIRST GREEK FOODS MANY PEOPLE THINK OF AND CAN VARY SIGNIFICANTLY FROM CITY TO CITY AND EVEN VENDOR TO VENDOR. EVERYONE HAS THEIR OWN RECIPES AND PREFERENCES FOR THE TYPE OF MEAT AND SAUCE THEY USE. WHILE YOU MAY FIND THEM IN GREEK FOOD TRUCKS AT HOME, THERE'S NOTHING LIKE THE AUTHENTIC SOUVLAKI YOU'LL FIND IN GREECE.

SPANAKOPITA IS A TRADITIONAL RECIPE FOR GREEK SPINACH PIE. YOU CAN EAT THIS DISH AT ANY TIME OF DAY, EVEN AS AN APPETIZER OR SNACK. SPANAKOPITA CONSISTS OF SPINACH AND CRUMBLED FETA CHEESE WRAPPED IN PHYLLO PASTRY DOUGH. OTHER COMMON INGREDIENTS INCLUDE ONIONS, DILL AND EGGS, WHICH HELP HOLD THE MIXTURE OF INGREDIENTS TOGETHER. ONCE THE FILLING HAS BEEN WRAPPED IN PHYLLO, OLIVE OIL IS BRUSHED OVER THE TOP, SO THE PASTRY TURNS CRISPY AND GOLDEN WHEN BAKED.

WHILE CHEESE AND HONEY MAY SOUND LIKE AN UNLIKELY COMBINATION, IT'S A MUST-HAVE WHEN VISITING GREECE. ALSO KNOWN AS “FETA ME MELI,” THIS DISH FEATURES FETA CHEESE WRAPPED IN PHYLLO DOUGH WITH A HONEY DRIZZLE AND A SPRINKLE OF SESAME SEEDS OVER THE TOP. WHEN BAKED, THE DOUGH GETS CRISPY, AND THE CHEESE GETS WARM AND CREAMY. THE SWEETNESS OF THE HONEY BALANCES THE SALTINESS OF THE FETA CHEESE TO CREATE THE PERFECT FLAVOR COMBINATION.

SWEETS ARE POPULAR IN GREECE, SO IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT BAKLAVA IS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR GREEK FOODS. BAKLAVA IS SURE TO IMPRESS, EVEN THOUGH THE DISH CONSISTS OF ONLY A HANDFUL OF INGREDIENTS. CHOPPED WALNUTS, SUGAR AND BUTTER ARE LAYERED WITH PHYLLO PASTRY DOUGH, BAKED UNTIL CRISPY AND DRIZZLED WITH HONEY SYRUP. THE CRISP PHYLLO SOAKS UP THE HONEY, CREATING A DELICIOUS TREAT YOU'LL FOREVER ASSOCIATE WITH YOUR TRIP TO GREECE.