



MSC steps it up with FANTASIA

MSC Cruises' largest ship to date is not only big: it also introduces a host of new features for the Italian family-owned cruise company.

By Mike Louagie

“The most beautiful ship in the world” said Pierfrancesco Vago at the handing over ceremony at STX Europe in France. Definitely an Italian straightforward way to express pride and satisfaction, acknowledged however by the first passengers who embarked for the first ever commercial cruise leaving St. Nazaire on a ship built in St. Nazaire. Instead of waiting until the last evening (the usual procedure), the French passengers started to frenetically take pictures even before having reached their cabins. “Incredible!”

Standing on the quayside, ready to embark, I could hear a father say to his sons (aged four and six) “boys, this is our ship”. They couldn’t get it. “Daddy, I only see a building, where’s the ship?”

The MSC FANTASIA is big indeed, some 44 per cent larger than MSC POESIA, delivered earlier in 2008. Even with four more ships under construction, the FANTASIA symbolises this Italian family-owned cruise company’s crown.

As with all other ships, the interior has been designed by De Jorio International with an important personal input from Mrs. Aponte, wife of the owner. Prior to the christening ceremony in Naples, she

was onboard during the final leg of the positioning cruise, and was seen everywhere checking workmanship and design.

A ship with two hearts

Depending on port infrastructure, passengers embark the vessel at the “Vele” main foyer, the very heart of the ship. (Vela, Vele= sails). It consists of an atrium, which has a well balanced space volume, not a huge gap in the ship but rather a cosy place to meet, listen to music, drink an espresso

or Prosecco, or spend some time around in one of the adjacent shops.

From the four elevators behind the atrium’s wall only two glass elevators are visible between deck 5 and 9. On some ships atrium elevators are an important visual element, made to impress. On MSC FANTASIA it’s more the four Swarovski covered stairs that have been assigned this role. Mass-market passengers need to be overwhelmed by the architecture, creating a pseudo-rich and luxurious environment, ▶



Facts & Figures

MSC FANTASIA

Gross tonnage	137,936	Pax cabins	1637 with
Loa	333.3 m 99 YC suites and 8 non YC Suites	
Beam	37.92 m 80% outside cabin	
Elevators	25 of which 15 for pax 43 disabled cabins	
Max speed	23,3	Crew	1325
.....(on trials 24+ was achieved)		5 generators 40 mW for propulsion,	
Pax	3274 (lower berth)	10 mW for onboard systems and	
..... / paxmax 3959		hotel	

► something perfectly achieved in the atrium. It's not only the Swarovski stairs but also the huge diamond shaped glass pieces on the ceiling, the overall golden-warm colours, the mirrors, the brass banisters, the marble, the transparent piano and, not to forget, the diamonds-all-over chandeliers above the reception that immerse the passenger into a sea of visual luxury. When arriving in this part of the ship one can only be impressed, despite the slight degree of compassion for the brass-cleaning crewmembers.

After having been onboard for a while passengers soon start to find a second "heart" in the ship, and with MSC being genuinely Italian this place could only have an outspoken Italian flavour. We talk about the Piazza San Giorgio (deck 6).

"This is definitely my favourite interior" says Gualtiero Togneri (General Manager MSC Benelux) "It really has all elements of a typical piazzetta, with the wrought iron chairs and tables, the black and white Genoese style walls, the fountains, the vaults, the brick flooring and of course the smell of Espresso and the irresistible view of home made gelatti. During daytime the ceiling appears as a summer blue sky, in the evenings it becomes a starry night".

Proud to be Italian, and European

The Piazza San Giorgio brings us to the ever ongoing discussion about styles. Is a ship American, or European? With MSC there is no doubt: one of the marketing strategies is more than ever to put the emphasis on being truly Italian and European. Hence the emphasis that MSC puts on the FANTASIA, as "The largest cruise ship ever built for a European cruise company". Some FANTASIA interiors could however be interpreted as "American", as the flamboyant orange

coloured Insolito lounge with its medusa shaped Swarovski chandelier. Another example is the Tex Mex "El Sombrero", with the vintage Cadillac at the entrance, the cactuses, the "Wanted dead or alive" posters etc... The same goes for the Sports Bar. Despite the Italian sportsmen orientated interior (with an MV Agusta 500 motorbike from champion Giacomo Agostini as the centrepiece) the place could just as well be found on any American ship.

Some interior decoration themes could however confuse people who don't know anything about history of art and architecture. The Cigar Lounge for instance, to be found in the Piazza San Giorgio area, has an extravagant design, with funnily shaped lights and curly lines in the ceiling. American? Not at all, the Cigar Lounge, only a small place in such a big ship, is a marvellous piece of Art Nouveau. It could have been designed by Victor Horta himself.

The same Art Nouveau influences can be seen in the Insolito Lounge.

And what about the aft swimming pool area, the Lido Catalano, and the covered I Tropic pool? The use of crazy combinations of shapes in the colourful mosaics is simply a perfect tribute to Catalan architect Antonio Gaudi, and a good appetizer for the Park Güell excursion. The modern Manhattan Jazz Club, a favourite with many passengers, is a fine example of contemporary design based upon abstract art. Chandeliers made of a multitude of Venetian glass bulbs, coloured lines, square and rectangular niches of colour make a contrast with the dark grey walls and sofas, echoing the architecture of Le Corbusier.

Is the MSC FANTASIA European? Definitely.

A maximum passenger capacity of

nearly 4,000 means a lot of hungry people. Dinner is served in two seatings in two main restaurants: the Cerchio d'Oro and the Red Velvet restaurant. Of a brilliant design based upon golden rings, the Cerchio d'Oro seemed unfortunately hard to find. Located on deck 6 at the very aft part of the ship it can only be accessed via deck 7 starboard side, because of the obstacles as galley (on 6) and the Tex Mex (on 7). During the cruise, extra signposts had to be added to help passengers find their restaurant.

Much easier to locate is the two deck Red Velvet restaurant.

An impressive buffet restaurant, both by dimension as by style, is located on deck 14, including the cafeteria L'Africana and the pizzeria Zanzibar. Despite its dimensions and seemingly endless repetition of food counters the area was quickly overcrowded, especially during the sea days of the maiden cruise. The phenomenon could be due to the time of the year, December, with nobody outside. The ship has however been designed for year round operations in the Med (hence the magrodrome covered pool). What did help a lot during the first cruise, which was a charter, was the all inclusive drinks deal. No waiting for the drinks from the bar. And having your coffee served at breakfast avoids having to turn the coffee machine area into a mess.

A nice feature is the high tables and bar stools.

The ship has two speciality restaurants. The restaurant L'Etoile, located on the upper deck aft, is the posh restaurant, with iconic dishes from the French cuisine (Foie Gras, Escargots, Frog Legs...), but also some surprising choices as John Dory. Of course the food comes with the "un-deux-trois et voilà" clothes.

The other one is the El Sombrero Mex



The Piazza San Giorgio



Built for year-round cruising in the Med, the MSC FANTASIA features a covered pool.



restaurant.

More food is available in La Cantina Toscana, an Italian wine and antipasti bar. Even in the Sports Bar some international dishes are available, as Grilled Yorkshire Ham, or Greek Shrimp Kebab.

Spa & Wellness

A large ship needs a large spa. With a surface of 1,615 square meters one might believe the Aurea Spa is like a supermarket for wellbeing. Honestly, sometimes the reception area was overcrowded with talking people reading the Spa menu, or waiting for their treatment. Once inside the authentic Balinese wellness centre one can only be impressed by the fine modern design, with a predominant use of Wengé wood.

MSC decided to manage the spa inhouse. According to Pierfrancesco Vago the reason was the hard selling attitude of the concessionaires. "People don't like to feel that they are being pushed to buy creams or other products after their massage".

Yacht Club

The big new thing for MSC is the Yacht Club, a concept which resembles NCL's Garden and Court Villas. Basically the 99 suites and some private indoor and outdoor areas form a ship in the ship. The idea behind it is to keep past passengers in the company, instead of having them upgrading to smaller five star ships.

Yacht Club members get a VIP service from the start, with priority check-in and a crewmember bringing passengers up to their cabins. All 99 suites are located forward, spread over decks 9,10,11,12,15 and 16. The two highest decks are the genuine Yacht Club areas, with only Yacht Club suites and the Top Sail Lounge. This is the headquarter for Yacht Club guests, offering the best forward panoramic view of the ship. A place where guests can have their breakfast, some fine snacks or a traditional afternoon tea, served by five star waiters.

In between the window seats touch screens provide the passenger with plenty of information, about the ports of call, conspicuous points of interest, navigational data etc... An innovative feature is the Stellarium function, showing a constellation

map in real time. Unfortunately the windows almost turn into mirrors when it's dark, which means it is hardly possible to see the stars. This, unfortunately, means the Stellarium is rather useless. Hopefully a solution can be found for the sister vessel.

Some other advantages for Yacht Club members: priority access on forward elevators (with cruise card); a private sundeck with bar, buffet, pool and tubs on the upper forward deck (which means only VIP guests can have a forward view on this ship); special access to Aurea Spa; 24h butler service; free drinks, wines and beers (not spirits) in restaurants; no surcharge in L'Etoile; Special excursions; Delicatessen menu in room (with Caviar etc...); Free tabloid size newspaper to be chosen from 600 titles; Pillow Menu etc...

The VIP guests of the first cruise were absolutely delighted by the product, and especially by the perfect service. "You could never believe we were the first guests. It was like if the crew had been onboard for ages." said one happy passenger.

Exterior

Even if some little boys took the ship for a building, the ship looks very elegant if you see it from a distance. It's the first MSC ship with a panoramic crow's nest, similar to the hallmark of Royal Caribbean. It houses the Liquid Disco, a rather cool interior with dripping fuchsia paint as decoration theme. During day time the space is used for aerobics, yoga etc... When it is disco time, people on the pool deck can see that the party has started. A prime location for a disco.

The whole area around the beautifully shaped funnel is dedicated to kids of all ages: Virtual World, the Formula 1 simulator, the 4D cinema, the I Graffiti teens area, the toboggan, and of course the kids club (with babysitters) Il Polo Nord.

The cleverly designed aft part of the funnel houses a sports area with tribune.

The main pool, named Aqua Park (the name H2O was no longer available) is more than just a pool. With 150 fountains and water jets it is made to amuse children and their parents by day, whilst in the evening it entertains by lighting up to the music.

People who want to flee the activity



Made to impress: the MSC FANTASIA's Swarovski stairs

can head for the Zen Area on the aft deck, providing a no-kids-allowed tranquil zone.

Eco Ship

Some hours before Sofia Loren christened the ship, MSC was given the Six Golden Pearls Award by Bureau Veritas for the eco-friendly policy, as energy saving, recycling, and advanced water treatment. The pax cabins monitoring system keeps the temperature at a comfortable level throughout the ship. This new system allows to monitor and adjust the climate in each single cabin, groups of cabins or in all of them, reducing energy consumption.

After some winter cruises to the Canary Islands MSC FANTASIA will offer classic seven-night cruises in the Western Mediterranean. MSC SPLENDIDA, the sister ship, is due to be christened in Barcelona on July 12. MSC's pace of growth is amazing. In 2012 the twelfth St. Nazaire built ship will be added to the fleet. Feels almost like STX Italy. ■

3 ships compared

CARNIVAL DREAM	130,000 GT	3,652 Pax LB
MSC FANTASIA	137,936 GT	3,274 Pax LB 3,959 PaxMax
VOYAGER OF THE SEAS	137,276 GT	3,138 Pax LB 3,840 PaxMax

ShipPax Database

A selection of suppliers MSC FANTASIA

- Information system in Top Sail lounge **ScanDisplay**
- Lifeboats & tenders **Umoe SChat-Harding**
- Engines **Wärtsila**
- TV's **Samsung**
- Cashier system **Micros**
- Minibar **Dometic**
- Galley equipment **Seaking**
- Dishwashers **Hobart**
- Outdoor pool screen... **Barco**
- Communication **Alcatel-Lucent**
- Elevators **Kone**
- Radar **Sam**
- Marble and granite **Testi Group spa**
- Fabrics **Testori, Careidi, Alcantara**