

**Press Release**

**MSC Cruises signs landmark agreement with Cruise Saudi to bring its ships to Saudi Arabian waters**

*Line to deploy MSC Magnifica and MSC Virtuosa to the region, two of its most innovative and modern ships*

*Move marks milestone in positioning Saudi Arabia as premier global cruise destination*

**Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and Geneva, Switzerland: 21 April 2021** – Cruise Saudi, a 100% Public Investment Fund-owned business that seeks to develop Saudi Arabia's cruise industry, and MSC Cruises, the world's largest privately-owned cruise line, announced today the launch of Red Sea cruises in the coming winter 2021/22 season.

Fawaz Farooqui, Managing Director of Cruise Saudi, and Pierfrancesco Vago, Executive Chairman of MSC Cruises, signed a landmark framework agreement in the Saudi capital city Riyadh to mark the beginning of the new partnership.

Under the terms of the agreement, MSC Magnifica will homeport in Jeddah, the commercial hub and one of the largest cities of Saudi Arabia, as well as the second-largest port in the Middle East with a historical centre that has been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Operating seven-day Red Sea cruises from November 2021 to March 2022, the vessel will visit a selection of ports and destinations in the region and three Saudi ports including weekly calls to the port of AlWajh, the gateway to the UNESCO World Heritage site of AlUla.

As the Kingdom prepares to host the inaugural Formula 1 Saudi Arabian Grand Prix 2021 on 5 December in Jeddah, MSC Magnifica guests will have the chance to follow this exciting global sports event during their trip aboard MSC Magnifica.

In addition to MSC Magnifica's Red Sea sailings, MSC Cruises' flagship MSC Virtuosa will see her winter 2021 programme in the Arabian Gulf enriched with calls in the port of Dammam, visiting AlAhsa oasis, another UNESCO World Heritage site.

MSC Virtuosa will call at this new exciting destination every week from December 2021 to March 2022.

Speaking on the signing of the agreement, Farooqui said: *"We are delighted to work with MSC Cruises and are keen to forge a long-term partnership. We look forward to exploring opportunities to increase the number and size of vessels operating on Saudi routes in the future. Saudi Arabia has a lot to offer visitors, and the new collaboration will open doors for intrepid travellers from across the globe to be amongst the first to experience the rich Saudi heritage and warm, hospitality. Meanwhile, through welcoming international tourists to these emerging destinations, it will create new sources of income for local communities."*

For his part, Vago said: *“Having witnessed at first-hand the richness of the local heritage, I am impressed with Saudi Arabia’s ability to preserve its traditions and culture and make them available for the world to see. I am delighted that MSC Cruises will be in a position to contribute to the Kingdom’s opening to international visitors through becoming a premier cruise destination and I look forward to helping tourists from all over the world as well as from the Kingdom discover the incredible wonders that this country has to offer, including the untouched beauty of its coast line and historical sites.”*

The two companies expect a total of up to 170,000 guests to explore Saudi Arabia’s historical, cultural and natural treasures on board the two MSC Cruises ships during the upcoming winter 2021/22 season. Saudi residents will also get the opportunity to spend their holidays in their home country and discover its wonders from the comfort that only a cruise ship can provide.

International guests will be able to reach Jeddah via direct flight connections from the most important European and international cities serviced by Saudia, the Kingdom’s flag carrier. Thanks to a dedicated partnership, for the benefit of cruise guests, flights will have their schedules modified to fit the two ships’ departure and arrival times to ensure smoother connections throughout.

**-Ends-**

#### **About Cruise Saudi**

Cruise Saudi is a 100% Public Investment Fund-owned business based in Jeddah, formed to develop the infrastructure and services required to scale a full-suite cruise market along the Saudi coastline. The company is responsible for the port development at key Saudi destinations as well as scaling cruise services, from marketing to Shorex coordination and vessel operations. Cruise Saudi works hand in hand with ministries and regulatory authorities to build the offshore and onshore cruise ecosystem with the aim of positioning Saudi Arabia as a premier global cruise destination.

Saudi Arabia’s coastline is the nexus between classic Mediterranean destinations and a multitude of Indian Ocean hotspots, offering a pristine maritime route for cruise-goers from around the world. Located a mere three-hour flight from 250 million people in Europe, Asia, and Africa, Cruise Saudi’s ports and routes along the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf will provide an ideal base for cruise passengers to discover the authentic treasures of Arabia and beyond. Cruise Saudi seeks to create 50,000 jobs in the cruise industry in Saudi Arabia by 2035.

#### **About the cruise division of MSC Group**

The Cruises Division of MSC Group, the leading privately held Swiss-based shipping and logistics conglomerate with over 300 years of maritime heritage, is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, and has two distinct brands within its structure - the contemporary and luxury brands.

MSC Cruises, the contemporary brand, is the world’s third largest cruise brand as well as the leader in Europe, South America, the Gulf region and Southern Africa with more market share in addition to deployed capacity than any other player. It is also the fastest growing global cruise brand with a strong presence in the Caribbean, North America and the Far East markets.

Its fleet comprises 18 modern vessels combined with a sizeable future global investment portfolio of new vessels and is projected to grow to 23 cruise ships by 2025 with options for six vessel orders in place through 2030.

MSC Cruises offers its guests an enriching, immersive and safe cruise experience inspired by the Company’s European heritage, where they can enjoy international dining, world-class entertainment, award-winning family programmes and the very latest user-friendly technology on board. To learn more about contemporary brand’s itineraries and experience on board its ships please see [here](#).

Meanwhile the soon to be launched luxury brand is set to start operating in 2023 with a fleet with the latest and most advanced environmental and maritime technologies available. The first of which will have a gross tonnage of 63,900 GT and feature 461 of the largest suites at sea, all with ocean front balconies or terraces. These luxury ships will introduce to the luxury segment a broad range of new guest experiences and other activities as well as generous ratios of public spaces, in addition to showcasing highly innovative design.

MSC's number one priority across all its operations has always been the health and safety of its guests and crew, as well as the communities at the destinations its ships serve. In August 2020, MSC Cruises implemented a new comprehensive and robust health and safety protocol to become the first major line to return to sea. To learn more about MSC Cruises' health & safety protocol please see [here](#).

MSC has long been committed to environmental stewardship with a long-term goal to achieve zero emissions for its operations. The Company is also a significant investor in next-generation environmental marine technologies, with the objective to support their accelerated development and availability industry-wide. To learn more about the Company's environmental commitment please see [here](#).

Finally, to learn more about the MSC Foundation, MSC Group's own vehicle to lead, focus and advance its conservation, humanitarian and cultural commitments please see [here](#).