



## **MSC SIGNS NEW FIVE-YEAR DEAL WITH CRUISE SAUDI DEMONSTRATING LONG-TERM COMMITMENT TO RED SEA AND ARABIAN GULF CRUISES**

- ***Preferential cruise berthing rights at port of Jeddah agreed to 2027***
- ***MSC Bellissima at the centre of the inauguration of new passenger terminal in Jeddah***
- ***MSC Foundation and Ba'a Foundation to join forces to advance coral restoration***

**Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 28 July 2021** – The Cruise Division of MSC Group has signed a five-year agreement with Cruise Saudi for preferential berthing rights at the port of Jeddah, a further sign of its long-term commitment to support the development of the local tourism sector by operating cruises in the Red Sea and Arabian Gulf.

The announcement was made in Jeddah as one of the Company's most modern ships *MSC Bellissima* celebrated the opening of the city's new passenger terminal with a commemorative event on board.

The new cruise terminal will welcome guests onboard for *MSC Bellissima's* highly anticipated inaugural season in the Red Sea with 3- and 4-night cruises from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia to both Egypt and Jordan until the end of October.

The special event today on board *MSC Bellissima* was hosted by Pierfrancesco Vago, Executive Chairman of MSC Cruises and Fawaz Farooqui, Managing Director of Cruise Saudi, for local dignitaries, senior officials from the Saudi Tourism Authority, Cruise Saudi, the Saudi Ports Authority – Mawani as well as members of the Saudi Arabian media and travel community.

The Master of the ship Captain Roberto Leotta, who will helm *MSC Bellissima* in the months ahead, exchanged crests with Fawaz Farooqui in a traditional maritime ceremony to celebrate a vessel's maiden port call.

Those on board today's special event were given guided ship tours, treated to a special show by MSC Cruises' award-winning entertainment team and also enjoyed fine dining in a range of the ship's outstanding specialty restaurants.

**Pierfrancesco Vago, Executive Chairman, MSC Cruises** said, *"This is a very special, historic day for all of us. The largest and most modern cruise ship to operate in the Red Sea has set sail from Jeddah's new terminal to mark a new beginning for cruising in Saudi Arabia and, more broadly, for its growing tourism industry."*

*“We can now allow our global guest base to come and experience our unique itineraries in this beautiful country with its historic UNESCO World Heritage sites and pristine shores. And with the new agreement in place, together with Cruise Saudi we will work in unison to develop this very special aspect of Saudi Arabia’s determined and sustainable growth in tourism which mirrors exactly our own strategy and ambition. And we will work together in attracting guests from all corners of the world as well as local markets for a Red Sea and Arabian Gulf holiday like no other on board our modern and environmentally high performing vessels.”*

**Mark Robinson, Chief Operations & Commercial Officer , Cruise Saudi,** added, *“This event marks a great milestone for Cruise Saudi, and indeed for the tourism industry in Saudi Arabia, in line with Vision 2030. The creation of Cruise Saudi, tasked with launching the cruise industry in Saudi Arabia, happened just six months ago at FII in Riyadh. Yet in these few months we have been able to work with international partners such as the Cruise Division of MSC Group and national bodies such as the Saudi Ports Authority, MAWANI, the Red Sea Gateway Terminal, the Saudi Tourism Authority, the Ministries of Transport, Culture, Health and Tourism, Saudi Customs and Immigration, the Saudi Border Guard, Jeddah Chambers of Commerce and many more such organisations to build Saudi Arabia’s first cruise terminal at Jeddah Islamic Port, and to mobilise the infrastructure, manpower and systems required to host global cruise lines for Saudi Arabia’s first full summer and winter cruise seasons. The remit of Cruise Saudi; to create 50,000 jobs by 2025, to facilitate the building of an additional five ports, with Jeddah as a homeport, and to welcome 1.5 million annual passenger visits by 2028; is an ambitious one, which will play a major part in strengthening the tourism industry in Saudi Arabia. It is a vision that we would not be able to accomplish were it not for our trusted business partners such as MSC.”*

MSC Foundation, the private non-profit organisation for MSC Group and the Ba’a Foundation, the non-profit organization in Saudi Arabia, announced today that they will join forces to advance coral conservation thus helping to safeguard marine ecosystems. Sharing a common goal to protect and preserve the oceans, the two Foundations are coming together to advance the practice and science of coral reef restoration, and importantly to disseminate the knowledge they acquire to a global audience. The partnership will aim to further the scientific understanding of the best practices for the functional restoration of coral reefs and to increase the area of reef habitat actively restored. The collaboration will initially focus on specific locations of the Caribbean and Red Sea where restoration efforts are most needed.

*MSC Bellissima* is one of the most innovative ships in MSC Cruises fleet and is fitted with a wide range of cutting-edge environmental features and innovative technology to reduce her environmental footprint. She also spearheaded the ultra-modern Meraviglia-Plus class of ships in the MSC Cruises fleet when she launched in 2019.

The ship will sail 21 Red Sea voyages from Jeddah between the end of July and late October with 3- and 4-night cruises to Safaga for Luxor, Egypt or Aqaba for Petra, Jordan before returning to her Saudi homeport.

The summer sailings will add to MSC Cruises’ previously announced winter 2021/22 Red Sea voyages from Jeddah starting in November. Her sister ship *MSC Virtuosa* launched this year will also make her debut in Saudi Arabia during winter 2021/2022 with calls in the port of Dammam.

**ENDS**