

MSC digital innovation brings latest customer-centric technology to the sea

After three years of working with over eleven of the world's leading digital, tech and behavioural science experts, MSC Cruises unveiled its fleet-wide digital innovation programme, MSC for Me, at travel show ITB Berlin.

MSC Cruises' holistic programme puts guests at the heart of every step of the development, design, and construction of its ships. The company envisions a fleet-wide rollout of the programme, to the 11 upcoming next-generation mega ships – to be built under its €9 billion, ten-year investment plan – as well as to its 12 existing ships.

MSC for Me will bring some of the very latest advances in customer-centric technology to the sea, in a programme designed to meet the needs of guests for years to come. It will debut on MSC Meraviglia, the company's first next-generation new mega-ship coming into service this June, which will be fitted with 16,000 points of connectivity, 700 digital access points, 358 informative and interactive screens, and 2,244 cabins with RFID/NFC access technology. The programme will next be rolled out on MSC Seaside in November.

MSC Cruises' Business Innovation team, supporting the vision and leadership of the company's executive chairman Pierfrancesco Vago, has overseen the integrated development, design and construction of the new ships. There will be three new classes of ships built from three new prototypes under the company's ten-year investment plan. As a result, MSC Cruises will ensure that state-of-the-art technology is fully incorporated into every step of the development process of each prototype, from conception and construction through to the coming into service of each individual ship.

Innovation at the core of MSC Cruises

Vago commented: "From day one, innovation has been at the very core of what MSC Cruises stands for. Each time we bring to the market a new class of ship we develop a brand new prototype, so that we can best address the evolving needs of guests. This distinct approach has led to over 800% growth over the first ten years since we entered the cruising business."

"The length and scale of our investment plan are unprecedented in the industry and it means that we aren't just planning ships and experiences relevant to our cruise guests in the next few years, but to those we will welcome on board as far out as 2030 and beyond. Technology at the service of the guest experience is advancing at a rapid pace and that is why we've already invested €20 million in the first two ships alone, to develop technology and infrastructure that is capable of meeting the needs of guests for years to come," Vago added.

The holistic and guest-centric programme is focused on connecting guests to their desired holiday experience through cutting-edge technology that is specially engineered to meet their every need, regardless of how they prefer to use technology when travelling.

Luca Pronzati, MSC Cruises' chief innovation officer, concluded: "This journey started three years ago and today guests are less than 90 days away to experience a whole new cruise experience. Together with over eleven of the world's leading digital, tech and behavioural science experts, among which Deloitte Digital, Hewlett-Packard Enterprise and Samsung, we are bringing some of their latest and most advanced solutions and technology on board our ships – in fact, this is where most of these will be available for the first time ever on a cruise ship. Like smart, connected cities, but with the added complexity of being at sea, our fleet will demonstrate MSC Cruises' commitment to true innovation today and for years to come, making our ships a holiday destination in their own right."

The need for more connectivity and digitally enhanced guest experiences

Guest needs have informed and driven MSC Cruises' investment in MSC for Me, directly shaping the cruise experience of the future. A research study carried out in partnership with Deloitte Digital identified some of the following key findings:

- Technology must enable our crew in providing an even better service to our guests and ultimately must enrich human contact.
- With 170 different nationalities sailing with us, the challenge for communicating effectively with guests is complex. There is a need to provide relevant information based on the guest profile, and the digital channels must facilitate the effective delivery of this information.
- To simplify and optimise planning before and during the cruise to help guests better understand all of the offerings available, leaving more time to enjoy their holiday.
- To enhance the experience beyond 'the life on board' by integrating the guest experience before and after the cruise as part of a complete customer journey.

Additionally, research showed that more than one in two guests are increasingly looking at customising their holiday experience both before and during their cruise (59%), with one out of six guests (17%) claiming to do so only once they're onboard. Furthermore, nearly three-quarters (73%) of guests claimed to be interested in a holiday at sea on a more connected ship. The research also identified that more than two out of three guests (69%) wish to use a smartphone on board, and more than one in three (36%) uses a tablet whilst at sea.



Samsung smart bracelets MSC for Me

In response to increasing demand for real-time flexibility, some of the innovative features that are available from MSC for Me are:

- **Navigation:** this digital way finder will provide guests on board with advice, guidance, and information on what's on. The technology is similar to smart maps and helps them find their way on the 300+ metre long ships with a five-metre precision. It also allows guests to locate their children, as needed.
- **Concierge:** allows guests to easily book services, restaurants, excursions and more in real time, 24/7.
- **Capture:** digital immersive discovery through virtual reality to preview excursions and a gallery with interactive screens showing the unique story of a guest's trip, which they can share in real time.
- **Organiser:** a planning tool for guests to check in with their mobile device, book trips, seats for shows, or the best dinner table, before embarking or when on board.
- **TailorMade:** this digital, personal advisor will provide tailored recommendations, based on preferences. Intelligent face recognition will help staff take care of guests in a highly personalised way. Interactive bracelets will connect guests' to the ship's services and will activate geo-located suggestions through 3,050 bluetooth beacons.

Overall, MSC for Me will provide guests with over 130 smart features geared toward a fully optimised holiday experience. These include a dedicated app to help guests tailor their holidays at any point on their journey, whether they are booking their excursions prior to embarkation or a specialty restaurant whilst relaxing by the top-deck pool. This will improve the overall guest experience, while also freeing up more time to enjoy one's holiday at sea.

MSC Cruises as the Company will celebrate the christening of MSC Meraviglia in Le Havre on 3 June and MSC Seaside in Miami on 21 December. Two more ships, MSC Seaview and MSC Bellissima are currently under construction and will come into service in June 2018 and March 2019, respectively.