

# Seed change

Cruising with kids is easier than it sounds, finds Juliet Dennis on MSC Preziosa

**M**y two six-year-olds eyed me suspiciously when I told them we were going on a cruise for our family holiday.

"But where will we sleep?" asked my son Joe, slightly bewildered, the concept of beds on a ship far too much for his brain to comprehend. "And will there be a swimming pool?" Nina quizzed me, matter-of-factly.

The easiest way to explain was to show them a picture of

a cruise ship and dig out the atlas so they could see where we were sailing: from Genoa to Marseille via Civitavecchia, Palermo, Valletta (although we were diverted to Palma due to bad seas) and Barcelona, on the 4,345-passenger *MSC Preziosa*.

For any family planning a holiday, a cruise may not be the first option that comes to mind. Yet this trip around the Mediterranean ticked most



**Joe and Nina formed a clan with other kids and showed off their dance moves to many a bemused passenger**

boxes on our wish-list: a safe environment, swimming pools, play areas, kids' clubs, any-time dining, places to visit, day and evening entertainment, and a short flight time. For clients with tight budgets, an all-inclusive cruise is comparable or even cheaper than a land-based break.

With any luck, Joe, Nina, my husband Nick and I would all get something out of this holiday - all we needed was some sun.



**FIRST STEPS**

After a hassle-free flight and transfer, we arrived port-side at Genoa. Joe and Nina stared with amazement and trepidation at the sight of our enormous new home for the week. Our balcony cabin included a sofa bed which Joe and Nina shared and was ample for our needs: with all the activities on board we didn't plan to spend much time in our cabin.

Even the muster drill was greeted with yelps of excitement by our two, who had never tried on a life-jacket before.

Like many big ships, it took time to become familiar with *MSC Preziosa*, so a schedule proved crucial for making the most of our time on board. We disembarked at easily accessible ports - the 90-minute coach trip from Civitavecchia to Rome felt a bit too far for short attention spans - but in Palermo, Sicily, we bought a hop-on, hop-off bus tour through Cruising Excursions (£25 per adult, £12 per child). This proved an economical and easy way to explore a city heaving



with history, not to mention traffic and street vendors touting for tourist trade.

Similarly, Palma in Majorca was family-friendly; we could easily explore the cathedral grounds and quaint streets and enjoy the street entertainment from one of the city's many cafes.

**DECK PLANS**

With excursions sorted, we focused on how to spend our days on board, which included time in the kids' club, covered by the cruise price. MSC caters for four age groups: the Miniclub for Sailors for three to six-year-olds; Juniors Club for Pirates aimed at seven to 11-year-olds; a Young Club for 12-to-14s; and Teens Club for 15 to 17-year-olds. In addition, there's a baby-care service for one to three-year-olds.

In port, the kids' club runs from 9am to 11pm, while at sea the hours are 9am-1pm, 2.30pm-5pm and 6pm-11pm. There's even an evening parade, so you may find yourself raising a glass to your child as they conga past.

While there wasn't a sports court



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→ on *MSC Preziosa* for our football-mad son to practise his goalie skills, he was soon absorbed in activities ranging from arts and crafts to Lego and balloon volleyball.

The highlight was a talent contest in the 1,603-seat Platinum theatre, in which girls and boys vied for glory in contests ranging from Lego-building to bouncing balls (girl power won the day, should you be interested), and danced with mascot Doremi in front of proud parents.

It's worth telling clients that the mix of nationalities on board means kids' club leaders speak several languages, and the mix of children ranges from French and Italian to German, English and Russian. Our two were quick to point out there weren't many English children in the club, not that it stopped them from having fun (and gave us time to enjoy a much-needed Balinese massage in the ship's Aurea Spa - definitely worth a visit).

But for Joe and Nina it was the outdoor water park, the Doremi Castle Aqua Park, that won the day. The area is ideal for young children, with

water slides and ladders plus well-placed water cannons where Joe and Nina took never-ending pleasure in drenching each other, while we looked on from nearby sun-loungers.

The Vertigo water slide for older children - the longest single-rider water slide at sea - soared above their heads, skimming over the side of the ship.

There was no children's pool, so we swam with Joe and Nina in one of three main pools - not including a fourth pool open to Yacht Club members - although they preferred floating in the warm bubbles of the Jacuzzis.

Other activities included a small indoor play area for toddlers, table tennis, table football, indoor bowling, 4D cinema, F1 simulator and a virtual games arcade.

Our all-inclusive drinks package meant food and drink on tap, without worrying about the cost, and it wasn't long before Joe and Nina got into the swing of cruise life, sipping fruit cocktails and enjoying Italian ice-cream.

## ▶ AFTER DARK

Most evenings, we opted for the 6.30pm sitting in the Golden Lobster restaurant, where the kids struck up a friendly rapport with the waiters, especially on the Italian-themed night, when diners were encouraged to get up and dance round the restaurant. We also tried speciality restaurant Eataly.

The kids' club disco organised one evening was a hit. Joe and Nina's only complaint? They wanted a kids' disco every night. Instead, they formed a clan with like-minded youngsters, and showed off their dance moves to many a bemused cruise passenger.

For a first-time reasonably priced family cruise, this was just the job. It had a distinctly European feel - we didn't come across many Brits on board - but there was enough to keep young minds entertained and Joe and Nina enjoyed their fill of new experiences.

After our holiday it came as no surprise when Joe said: "Can we get a table tennis table like the one on the cruise ship?" And any day now, I'm fully expecting Nina to ask for a Jacuzzi in the back garden. **TW**



A seven-night cruise in October costs £1,536 for a family of four - adults £649 and children £119 - for a balcony cabin on **MSC Preziosa**, including flights and transfers.

The cruise departs Genoa on October 16, calling at Civitavecchia, Palermo, Valletta, Valencia and Marseille. The all-inclusive drinks package is £20 a day.

[msccruises.co.uk](http://msccruises.co.uk)



## KIDS' VERDICT



**Joe:** "I loved the water cannon and table tennis. The kids' club was awesome, but there weren't many English children."

**Nina:** "I liked the water park and disco, and I loved the children's show. In the kids' club, we made Lego masks and I made pizza and ate it. And I loved the Jacuzzi, it was like a nice bath!"



**ABOVE:** The kids' talent show on *MSC Preziosa*

**LEFT:** Juliet and family on deck and at the water park