

Show and tell

Is bigger always better? Jane Archer tests out two of this year's big ship launches

High-flying acrobats and side-by-side racing simulators? Or low-key decor and high-class dining? MSC *Meraviglia* and Silversea's *Silver Muse* launched earlier this year, each offering some key innovations compared with the lines' previous vessels. But which clients will they appeal to, and what are their unique selling points? *Travel Weekly* finds out what MSC Cruises and Silversea have got to shout about.

"It's an evolution" is how he puts it – and certainly, many of the facilities on *Meraviglia* are familiar from other MSC ships, but are taken to a new level here. For instance, where its Fantasia-class vessels have one Formula One simulator, *Meraviglia* has two, side by side, so drivers can race each other. They are in the Sportplex, a new area with a 4D cinema and Flight Simulator, where two people at a time are strapped in and spun around and upside down.

TRIED & TESTED

MSC Meraviglia

The statement, "We do not build big", might seem strange coming from the boss of a company celebrating the launch of a cruise ship that can hold up to 5,714 passengers.

If it is nothing else, MSC Cruises' new ship *MSC Meraviglia* is big – in fact, it's the largest vessel built by a European ship owner. But as chief executive officer Gianni Onorato is keen to stress, its size just means MSC has space for more amenities.

The Polar-themed aquapark is far superior to any water feature MSC has offered before, with three waterslides and a ropes course. Likewise, the kids' club is bigger and better than on other MSC ships. The huge space caters for all ages, providing play areas for babies, a Lego room for youngsters, a hangout for 15 to 17-year-olds and a family activity studio with karaoke and movies.

The Yacht Club, a private area accessible only to passengers in the highest-grade accommodation, has been redesigned so the restaurant is within its exclusive walls, instead of being at the other end of the ship, as it is on the Fantasia-class vessels. ➔



LEFT:
MSC
Meraviglia

RIGHT: Kaito
Teppanyaki
Restaurant &
Sushi Bar

BELOW:
MSC Yacht
Club Deluxe
Suite –
Wellness



➔ A CLASS OF ITS OWN

But there is also a lot that's new on *Meraviglia*. This is the first MSC ship offering a Japanese teppanyaki restaurant and US-style steakhouse – with prices from €26 for an 8oz filet mignon to €84 for a 38oz tomahawk steak for two, it is not cheap, but the steaks are quality cuts and the



Ristorante Italiano has a Chef's Table, where 12 people can dine together, and even create their own menu

food is cooked fresh to order.

There is a Ristorante Italiano on a couple of other ships but the one on *Meraviglia* has a Chef's Table where up to 12 people can dine together, and even create their own menu if they give 24 hours' notice.

In a move away from MSC's usual two-sitting dining arrangements, passengers onboard *Meraviglia* can make a booking for the time of their choosing each evening (traditional dining, with a pre-allocated table and set time to eat, is still available).

Table reservations are made using MSC for Me, a digital customer-service device that passengers wear on their wrists and can also use to open their cabin door, check in, book excursions, sign for drinks and find their way around the ship. The technology, which also enables staff to recognise passengers and thereby offer a more personal service, is only on *Meraviglia* for now, but will be rolled out across the rest of the fleet.

Sure, there are a few niggles: the brown decor in the cabins made the rooms look stark; the Top 18 solarium reserved for passengers booked on MSC's Aurea and Wellness packages was bare and uninviting; and, strangely, there is open access between the teen club and adult-only Attic Club. But these

are small when set against the positives.

▶ SELL AT SEA

The plus points include the spa's thermal suite, which has saunas, steam baths, whirlpools and a walk-through Water Paradise that showers bathers with different temperatures of water. New family cabins, featuring bunk beds tidily stacked in an alcove, can be linked to other cabins, providing accommodation for groups of up to 10 people. There are 20 watering holes, including an English pub serving 47 beers, lagers and ales.

Meraviglia also has the first *Cirque du Soleil* show at sea – performed by a cast of 30 in a lounge with a circular centre stage (seats cost about £12) – and a spectacular two-storey promenade lined with restaurants, shops and bars that cuts through the middle of the ship.

It is topped by the longest LED dome at sea, which mimics an upmarket shopping mall by day and offers light shows after dark. One evening it even transformed into an aquarium, giving a realistic impression of fish swimming above our heads.

Book it: From £699 per person cruise-only for a seven-night sailing from Barcelona, which visits France, Italy and Malta, departing October 27.

msscruises.co.uk





LEFT:
Pool deck



RIGHT:
La Dame

➔ **TRIED & TESTED**

Silver Muse

It's lunchtime on Silversea's *Silver Muse* and I am torn between indulging in either a burger or a pizza by the pool grill. First-world problems, I know, but deciding where to eat is trickier on *Muse* than on most ships because it doesn't have a main dining room.

Instead of being able to rely on a table being available every evening at whatever time they wish to dine, passengers have to think ahead and make reservations in whichever dining venue they fancy.

It's no different from what people do in a resort, but it is a bold move that other lines have tried and failed to implement because cruise traditionalists didn't like it - even if it meant they had more dining choice.

That is certainly the case on *Muse*, which offers eight places



Silver Muse is the biggest ship Silversea has built, although 'big' actually means just 596 passengers

to eat in the evening including Asian, Italian and a surf-and-turf steakhouse. There's Japanese teppanyaki in Kaiseki, while epicureans can indulge in a six-course food and wine dégustation menu in La Dame (both restaurants charge a \$60 per person supplement). For casual dining, the pool grill turns into Hot Rocks in the evening, and diners sit outside and cook their own meats on sizzling volcanic stones.

▶ **BIG IS BEAUTIFUL**

Silver Muse is the biggest ship Silversea has ever built, although

'big' in Silversea's world actually means just 596 passengers. In terms of looks, the cruise line has shunned glitter and sparkle in favour of a light wood and beige palette, topped off with silver handrails and splashes of colour. It sounds dull, but it's a classic luxury look and it works.

The ship has two large lounges, Dolce Vita and Panorama, while passengers seeking a more personal place to socialise should head for the slightly bohemian Arts Cafe, a new venue that serves drinks and snacks. Silver Note pairs live jazz and tapas.

In the spa, treatments start with a visit to the new low-lit Mood Room, where passengers choose the scents and scrubs they would like their therapist to use. Treatments cover everything from massages to detox wraps and Botox.

All cabins on *Muse* are suites and all have a balcony, bar six rooms on deck four (these are counted in the ship's capacity

but are not sold; instead they are used for guest lecturers and entertainers). Suites have walk-in wardrobes, TVs within the mirrors and bathrooms with a separate shower and bath. A choice of branded toiletries is proffered on a silver platter on arrival.

▶ **THE SUITE LIFE**

All suites come with a butler, whose duties cover everything from unpacking and packing suitcases to making spa, dining and tour reservations. As Silversea no longer provides a bottle of Champagne on arrival, butlers will serve a glass of fizz - or other drinks - to suites on request. Alcoholic and soft drinks are included in the price, as are gratuities and Wi-Fi (the number of free minutes varies, depending on suite grade).

Book it: From £3,600 per person for a seven-night cruise from Civitavecchia (for Rome) to Venice departing May 29, 2018.

silversea.com

PICTURES: FILIPPO VINARDI/IVANSAFATIK.COM

