

# Cruise and Port special

(Promotional content)



The MSC Yacht Club Deluxe Suite room of MSC Bellissima MSC CRUISES

## More international travelers take to the sea

### In Asia, cruise lines shift to singles and families as industry plans rebound from crippling pandemic

For people seeking to visit Japan, there are two ways to get to this island country: by air or sea.

In modern times, the sea has been relegated to second place. According to an August report by Cruise Lines International Association, demand for cruise ship travel across Asia is among the lowest in the world and has been trending downward.

But the association expects a global uptick in the popularity of cruises by a shift in focus to young singles and multigenerational families. Major lines like Princess Cruises are already betting on the country embrac-

ing sea travel, with more departures and an extended travel season planned for 2026.

Even now, there are plenty of cruise ships departing Japan for foreign destinations. From Taiwan to Busan in South Korea — often with a stop in Japan along the way to such destinations as Okinawa or Kyushu — Japanese cruise ship tourism is picking up because of all the advantages that sea travel offers over air travel.

At the larger end, cruise ships are akin to floating cities full of metropolitan amenities and services, like the MSC Bellissima operated by MSC Cruises, which made its first port of call in Japan in 2018 and received the 2023 Cruise of the Year Award from the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transportation. Ships like the Bellissima may be slower than using air travel, but that extra time can be spent relaxing in the wide selection of restaurants, cafes or bars. Passengers who take a 14-day cruise from Yokohama toward Taiwan on Holland America Line's MS Noordam also get access to a pool, gym, spa,

casino and even a live-entertainment stage.

Cruise ships additionally offer something more important: peace of mind. Cruises provide alternatives for people uncomfortable with flying and include comprehensive baggage services. They also eliminate the stress of packing, as everything passengers would ever need is readily available on the ship. That being said, one of the highlights of going on a Japanese cruise is getting to explore the ports and areas they visit.

Yokohama is one of Japan's main departure ports for cruises and it sets the tone immediately, thanks to its main terminal at the stunning Osanbashi Pier. Offering unparalleled views of Yokohama's waterfront, the terminal building is nicknamed the "Whale's Back" for its uniquely curving and undulating shape that brings to mind a whale gracefully appearing out of the water. The rooftop deck and lawn are great places to relax before the trip or admire the city's skyline.

Nagasaki is also a popular port of call. When entering the city, ships pass under the



Yokohama at sunset as viewed from Osanbashi Pier GETTY IMAGES

so-called Venus' Wings bridge, which looks otherworldly beautiful when it's lit up at night. It's a short walk from Nagasaki Port to the historic part of the city full of shopping and sightseeing destinations.

With affordable economy courses also available for budget-minded travelers, cruise vacations have a real chance to make a splash in Japanese outbound tourism. If the current trends continue, it could be smooth sailing for the industry from here on out.

Sponsored by MSC Cruises Japan

## Cruise line takes luxury to Japan and abroad

### MSC Bellissima has been declared Asia's Best Cruise Ship for its onboard offerings and quality tours

Taking a cruise on the luxury liner MSC Bellissima is like visiting a dream city where everything that satisfies the needs for gastronomy, leisure, culture and relaxation can be found just outside one's room.

Established 16 years ago, owner and operator MSC Cruises Japan is part of the MSC Group, a global logistics, transport and cruise company with 54 years of history.

President Oliviero Morelli recently spoke with The Japan Times about the long and successful history of the MSC Group and how its local office can promise a one-of-a-kind experience to passengers in Japan.

"The cruise business is only a part of MSC Group, which began in 1970 with a small cargo ship," Morelli said. The company, headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, has grown into a global enterprise with over 200,000 employees in 155 countries, representing 75 nationalities. It also covers a wide range of ocean and inland transport, port infrastructure and other operations as well as cruise line and ferry services. "The cargo division of MSC Group has about 850 vessels worldwide, and by 2025 the cruise division will have 24 vessels, two of which are from our Explora Journeys luxury

cruise line," Morelli said.

The MSC Group has been a family-owned business since its foundation. "The advantage of a family-owned business is the strong leadership and quick decisions, which is why we are one of the fastest-growing companies in the world. I have worked for MSC Group for almost 20 years, and it really feels like a family," he said.

Morelli came to Japan to lead the Japan office in 2014. "When I first arrived, it was a small office of only five people. The Japan office did not have its own ship back then, so our job was to take care of Japanese guests who wished to go on a cruise from other ports across the world such as Rome, Naples, Miami and Southampton that MSC ships used," he said.

In 2018, the Japan office was able to dedicate a ship to Japan. "Now we have a product that we can showcase. Ever since the ship arrived, our position in the Japan cruise industry rose every year," Morelli said.

Last year, the tour around Japan hosted by MSC Bellissima, which has been sailing Japan's waters for three years, received the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transportation's 2023 Cruise of the Year Award.

"We became the best cruise line both in the number of guests, over 110,000 a year, and the quality of our services," Morelli said, proudly noting that the Japan office has grown into a multinational team of 40.

In July, MSC Bellissima was awarded the title of "Asia's Best Cruise Ship" at the Asia Cruise Forum in Jeju, South Korea, where Morelli received the award from the South Korean Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries.



The Galleria Bellissima promenade MSC CRUISES

"It is the biggest and most eco-friendly ship to sail in Japan, measuring 315 meters long and 65 meters tall. Its main feature is a long promenade called Galleria Bellissima, which extends almost 100 meters. It is filled with shops, bars and restaurants on both sides," Morelli said. It is paved with Italian limestone and has a domed ceiling covered with LED screens whose changing images give wonder and pleasure to the eyes of the guests.

The high-quality service is made possible by a diverse international crew of about 1,600 that works around the clock. It is a significant number considering the fact that the maximum number of guests the ship can accommodate is 5,655.

"This diversity supports the multinational culinary experiences that we offer to our guests with 12 restaurants and 20 bars and lounges," Morelli said.

Sightseeing and activities at different



MSC Bellissima, winner of the 2023 Cruise of the Year Award MSC CRUISES

ports of call are other highlights of cruises and are things MSC Cruises Japan strives to excel at.

"We always include a few new ports to our cruise so that our repeat customers can enjoy new experiences," Morelli said, adding that, for example, visiting a local fish market in the port of Sakaiminato in Tottori Prefecture is an experience entirely different from taking a coordinated group tour around large and crowded fish markets in big cities. In addition, visiting picturesque rural ports can be full of excitement and discoveries for guests while contributing to the revival of Japan's regional economies.

MSC Cruises Japan cooperates with municipalities and other stakeholders at each potential port to ensure that they and

the surrounding areas are ready to accept the vast number of guests who disembark so both guest and host can enjoy and benefit from the encounters.

Last year, the company launched a round-trip cruise from Naha, Okinawa Prefecture. The cruise visits Keelung in Taiwan, as well as the small Okinawan islands of Ishigakijima, Miyakojima or both.

"Usually winter is a low season for cruising, but this cruise brought 60,000 guests on board in just one winter," Morelli said, noting that the Okinawa cruise will also be in service this winter.

"Starting with Japan and South Korea, we look forward to offering unforgettable cruising experiences to guests of diverse generations in Asia," Morelli said.



MSC Cruises Japan President Oliviero Morelli ARK COMMUNICATIONS CO.