



MSC Virtuosa, Portland Port, 22nd May 2021. Credit: Portland Port

## Portland Port welcomes first UK cruise port-of-call visit in 14 months

It has been 14 months since the COVID pandemic hit the world and the global cruise industry went into voluntary suspension. Now Portland Port has become the first port of call as cruising re-starts with the arrival of the beautiful MSC Virtuosa this morning. Ian McQuade, General Manager Commercial said “this is a very exciting day not just for Portland Port but for the whole industry. We are delighted and honoured that MSC have chosen to include Portland Port in their inaugural itineraries for this beautiful new vessel”.

Several cruise lines made use of anchorages along the south coast to wait for the opportunity to welcome guests back on board. During this time, the sight of up to ten cruise ships anchoring in Weymouth Bay became a tourist attraction and Portland Port was able to offer its services and berths in support.

From Monday 17th May, UK Government guidelines changed to allow greater movement and freedom which MSC embraced on 20th May by becoming the first cruise line to set sail with passengers from Southampton.

This milestone is also the inaugural cruise for MSC’s Virtuosa. The Virtuosa is MSC’s newest ship, with her

name paying homage to the skill and expertise of the MSC Cruises architects and shipyard partners who designed and built her. This new cruise ship is one of the two largest in MSC Cruises' fleet, along with her sister ship MSC Grandiosa. The ship boasts an impressive array of features for its guests, as well as being one of the most environmentally friendly ships at sea.

The Virtuosa departed Southampton on the 20th and spent a day at sea, with her passengers being able to enjoy the amazing facilities on board. She docked at Portland Port at 0830 this morning and was welcome into Portland Harbour with a water canon display from the port's newest tug, named in memory of its most influential director, Rupert Best.

This inaugural visit from the Virtuosa marks the first of many scheduled throughout the season, combined with several other cruise lines that have chosen Portland Port as a destination for their domestic cruise itineraries.

The cruise lines have gone above and beyond in their effort to provide the safest possible environment, using the latest technology, the most up to date testing and a whole host of new safety policies and procedures. Under the latest UK Government guidance, any passengers wishing to see the wonders of the Jurassic Coast and Dorset's beautiful countryside, can go on ship organised tours which will maintain the cruise ship's "bubble" at all times.

Mr. McQuade commented that "the port has worked closely with MSC and our local port health department for many weeks to plan for the re-start of commercial cruise operations. A lot of work from all sectors of the cruise industry and Government has gone in to making this possible and we are proud to be part of an industry which has shown such solidarity in these unprecedented times."

Portland Port prides itself on the warm reception that the cruise lines and their passengers receive, from its multi-lingual Welcome Team, musical entertainment and friendly staff to the loud canon fire upon departure from the Nothe Fort Artillery Volunteers. Unfortunately, these services cannot be present during this first cruise call, however preparations are well under way for when the circumstances are appropriate and they can return.