The new MSC Virtuosa vessel set sail from the port of Southampton today (20 May) marking the resumption of cruising in the UK following a 14month hiatus due to the impact of the coronavirus (Covid-19).

MSC Cruises took delivery of its new flagship MSC Virtuosa ship on 1 February 2021.

As reported, MSC Cruises took delivery of its latest environmentally conscious ship on 1 February 2021. The four-night sailing which departed today marks the start of MSC Virtuosa's maiden season at sea.

The MSC Cruises' flagship will be the first ocean liner to sail in British waters since the global cruise industry came to a voluntary halt in March 2020 as a result of Covid-19.

MSC Cruises was the first major cruise line to **resume sailing international waters in August 2020** when MSC Grandiosa began weekly cruises in the Mediterranean. This followed approval by a range of European authorities for an **advanced health and safety protocol** that has since effectively set a new standard for the industry.

Boasting 1,168sq m of retail space, comprising 11 different boutiques and 250 brands at the heart of the Virtuosa promenade, MSC Virtuosa matches MSC Grandiosa in having the largest retail space at sea.

DECKS NAMED AFTER FAMOUS COMPOSERS

The MSC Virtuosa ship has 19 decks named after famous composers; 21 bars, four main restaurants, five speciality restaurants, two new restaurants and one new speciality bar.

MSC Virtuosa boasts 1,168sq m of retail space, comprising 11 different boutiques and 250 brands located at the heart of the Virtuosa Promenade. Credit: Ivan, Sarfatti.

A 945-seat theatre offers different large-scale productions each night and the ship comprises five swimming pools, including a magrodome pool on deck 15.

Adrian Pittaway, Head of Retail, MSC Cruises said: "We are truly delighted to restart cruising once more in the UK with the newest and largest retail offering at sea.

"It is a moment of great pride for me in the hard work from our retail manager Stefi and all our onboard MSC retail team who have worked tirelessly, passionately and professionally through a number of challenges caused by the current situation, to present to our guests a true retail masterpiece at sea.

"We are more than ready to give our British guests a truly wonderful shopping experience onboard MSC Virtuosa that I am sure will be such an enjoyable part of their cruise.

MSC Cruises is ready to give its British guests a truly wonderful shopping experience onboard MSC Virtuosa, according to Adrian Pittaway, Head of Retail, MSC Cruises. Credit: Ivan, Sarfatti.

Gianni Onorato, CEO, MSC Cruises added: "We are very proud that MSC Virtuosa's first ever sailing marks the resumption of cruising from British ports after an enforced break of more than a year and effectively heralds the next phase of restart for our industry. MSC presents 'true retail masterpiece at sea' on maiden UK Virtuosa voyage

"Our shipping prowess led the way last August with a health and safety protocol designed to protect our guests and crew, as well as the destinations that our ships visit.

"The data, knowledge and experience we have gleaned since our initial restart in the Mediterranean has helped us to drive forward with our plans to have nearly half of our fleet back at sea during this coming summer, with more to follow in other key markets around the world.

"Since our restart last August in the Mediterranean thousands of guests have had a safe and enjoyable cruise holiday on board one of our ships and we look forward to many more having the same well-earned relaxing breaks with their friends and families in the weeks and months ahead as more of our ships return to water in the UK, across the Mediterranean and Northern Europe."

The MSC Cruises' flagship is the first ocean liner to sail in British waters since the global cruise industry came to a voluntary halt in March 2020.

MSC Virtuosa's UK cruises add to MSC Grandiosa's and MSC Seaside's current sailings in the Mediterranean, as MSC Cruises finalises its preparations to restart five more ships across East and West Mediterranean and Northern Europe in the coming weeks.

This is after receiving the go-ahead from from relevant authorities to resume the company's 'safe and responsible operations.

MSC Cruises is also waiting for US authorities to allow Caribbean voyages to resume and other markets the company has traditionally served.

SUMMER AVAILABILITY

The new MSC Virtuosa vessel will be available during the summer for British residents only and guests of all ages who are either waiting for a Covid-19 vaccine or who have already been vaccinated.

A new MSC Starship Club featuring the world's first humanoid robotic bartender is available on board MSC Virtuosa. Credit: Ivan, Sarfatti.

All guests are tested before they embark the ship and non-vaccinated guests are also required to show proof of a negative test conducted up to 72 hours prior to embarkation.

Other pre-boarding and onboard protective measures also apply to guests and crew, in line with MSC Cruises' health and safety protocol. This was developed last year with input from international health experts, including MSC Cruises' 'Covid-19 Blue-Ribbon Expert Group', and in close cooperation with national and regional health, transport and safety authorities throughout Europe.

Many of MSC Virtuosa's 1,150 crew have received Covid-19 vaccines as part of MSC Cruises' fleet-wide vaccination programme for all crew members which started at the beginning of May.