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SHIP REVIEW:
Phil Davies took his family to experience Disney Magic ahead of its return to the Mediterranean

» MICKEY MAGIC IN THE MED

The powerhouse Disney brand is carving out an increasingly popular niche in cruising and is bringing *Disney Magic* back to the Mediterranean next summer.

Employing the expertise behind the group's global film, theme park and TV interests, the iconic US entertainment giant has been quietly building up a ship-based operation that now stretches across a four-strong fleet.

There are very few holidays where high-class entertainment is combined with really engaging facilities for children, let alone on board a cruise ship.

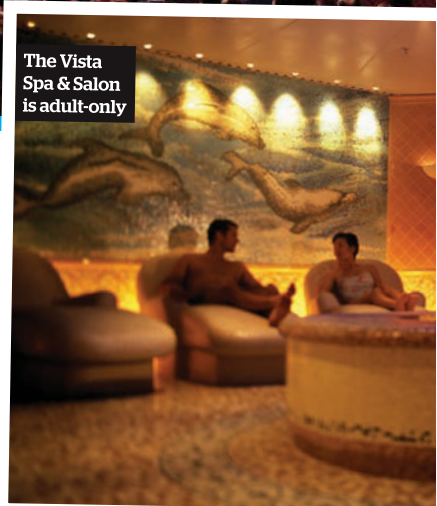
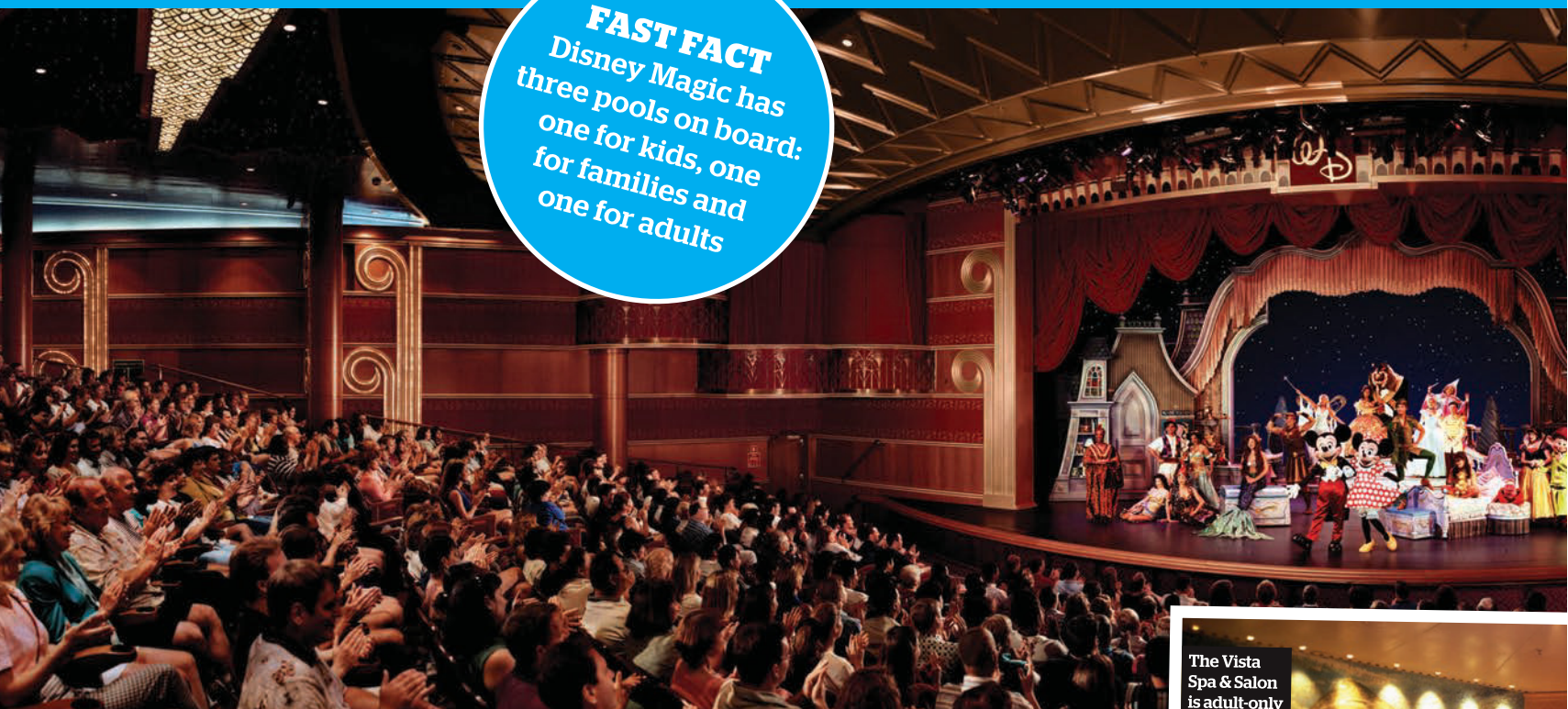
It's a mix that's difficult to achieve, but Disney has all the expertise required to pull this off – and does so in a fashion that's equally enthralling to children and adults alike.

While still a relative minnow in an ocean of mega-cruise lines, Disney Cruise Line has sought to reflect the style of classic liners of the 1930s with a string of modern touches such as water slides, all-action activities, world-class stage shows and 3D movies. ▶

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FAST FACT
 Disney Magic has
 three pools on board:
 one for kids, one
 for families and
 one for adults



The Vista
 Spa & Salon
 is adult-only



It is this style that distinguishes mid-sized ships such as the 875-cabin *Disney Magic* from the tower-block scale of its more modern rivals. This style and attention to detail – a hallmark of the group's theme parks – is reflected on board, together with an attentive crew spanning more than 50 nationalities.

● **ELEGANT AND ENERGETIC**

Disney Cruise Line likes to describe its ship-based experience as 'elegant and energetic', a formula that is returning to Europe in summer 2013 after a year's absence.

Disney Magic, the line's first ship, is being redeployed to the Mediterranean for a series of new fly-cruises from Barcelona.

The vessel, which has been operating from New York to the Bahamas and New England this year, will introduce new ports of call in Europe including Venice, Dubrovnik and Kusadasi in Turkey. Shorter itineraries of four nights have been added to standard seven and 12-night voyages, to appeal to first-time cruisers.

US holidaymakers are expected to make up at least half of the passengers when Disney brings the 2,700-passenger *Magic*

back to the Med. However, the company hopes that Britons will account for between 30% and 40% of the passenger mix.

Disney Magic carries a 977-seat theatre with a main stage, which is claimed to be five times more technically advanced than its counterpart on Broadway, staging *Phantom of the Opera*.

The vessel also runs *Pirates of the Caribbean*-themed pool parties complete with fireworks fired from the deck and ample opportunities for children to meet the famous Disney cartoon characters at regular appearances.

● **SLEEPING AND EATING**

Disney Magic provides a wide range of spacious balcony cabins with split bathrooms, one with a toilet and wash basin, the other with a shower and basin. Although rather cramped, this arrangement certainly helps when mums and dads are preparing for breakfast or dinner and need to get children ready at the same time.

There is an unusual dinner arrangement where the serving staff 'follow' diners each night around the three main restaurants, so they get to know passengers' likes and dislikes. It's quite disconcerting to find yourself sitting at the same numbered

SAMPLE PACKAGE

Virgin Holidays Cruises

offers a four-night cruise on *Disney Magic* from Barcelona, departing on June 8, from £1,099 per adult and £749 per child, for a family of four sharing an inside cabin on a full-board basis. Price includes flights and transfers.

virginholidayscruises.co.uk
0844 573 4398

table irrespective of the venue – the Caribbean-themed Parrot Cay, the colourful Animator's Palate or the more refined French-styled Lumiere's – being served by the same staff every night. However, the idea works and makes for a friendly and relaxing atmosphere in familiar surroundings.

Launched in 1998 and the oldest in the fleet, *Disney Magic* is beginning to show signs of wear and tear in the cabins and some public areas but a major refurbishment is planned at the end of the summer 2013 season.

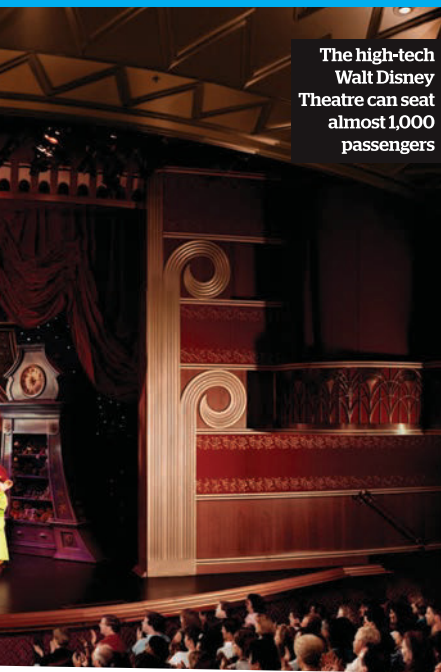
The vessel's main Topsider buffet lacks space and the

two family pool areas get exceptionally crowded on sea days. The poolside fast food outlets mainly produce fried chicken and burgers with Goofy's Dog House disappointingly not serving the hot dogs it purports to offer. The child-free zone at the front of the ship, comprising a pool, spa, gym, beauty salon and cosy Starbucks-style cafe, is the calmest deck area on board. On the upside, cabins are spacious and the art deco style of the ship is appealing to adults.

● **FUN FOR THE KIDS**

A major bonus for families with young children is the extensive – and extremely well-supervised –





The high-tech Walt Disney Theatre can seat almost 1,000 passengers



Animator's Palate is one of the three main restaurants on Disney Magic



Goofy meets the kids



An Oceanview stateroom with veranda

different clubs for ages up to 17. The Vibe teens' club is especially impressive, decorated like a New York loft space in the forward false funnel complete with wide screen TVs, sofas and a sound system.

The security arrangements for checking young children in and out of the clubs is reassuringly safe. Parents are issued with mobile 'wave' phones which enable club 'counsellors' to immediately contact parents wherever they are on the ship if their little ones need to be taken out. Children can also be left on the ship to allow parents to take shore excursions.

The four clubs operate extended hours, some

with meal service included. Given that the ship has an adult-only swimming pool, child-free Italian speciality restaurant Palo (with a \$20 cover charge), and over-18s nightclubs and bars, it's entirely possible to be without children throughout most of the cruise as the clubs for kids operate between 9am and midnight – hours claimed to be among the longest available at sea. For those with toddlers, a nursery is provided at a cost of \$6 an hour and \$5 for siblings.

But that would mean robbing the little ones of the frequent opportunities to have their photos taken with Disney characters such as Goofy, Pluto, Donald Duck,

Minnie and, most important of all, Mickey Mouse, as well as the great theatre shows and films shown in a high-tech 277-seat 3D cinema plus a giant pool-side screen.

While there are always queues of excitable youngsters seeking pictures and autographs, the daily character appearances around the ship give children more chance of meeting their Disney favourites than in the vast theme parks.

● **DISNEY MAGIC VERDICT**

Disney Magic is not the newest or biggest ship afloat, and the food is sometimes lacklustre compared with others in the mass market sector of the cruise business. Deck

ASK THE KIDS



Tilly Davies (age 10)

"I tried the children's club and it was OK. I had to put my face in chocolate sauce and cream and then find M&Ms in a bowl of popcorn. We watched the new Disney movie *Brave* and met Belle from *Beauty and the Beast*. My favourite thing was seeing a *Cinderella* show, which was really good. I played in the pool and on the water slide as well as getting my nails done in the spa. I managed to get autographs from Cinderella, Chip 'n' Dale, Mickey and Minnie Mouse, Goofy and Pluto."



Hal Davies (age 7)

"I loved meeting all of the characters, particularly Mickey and Chip 'n' Dale. The cabin was comfortable and I slept really well. I spent a lot of time on the water slide and in the pool and learned all about trading Disney pins [badges] with my new-found friends and crew members."



space is at a premium when the ship is not in port and there is an overemphasis on fast food outlets, free fizzy drinks and ice cream on deck during the day.

However, if you have clients with young children who want to combine a taste of entertainment in inimitable Disney style while meandering around the Med, then a cruise with Mickey and his chums is well worth recommending. **TW**

