

Cruising through Abu Dhabi

More calls, bigger ships, the return of an industry giant, infrastructure improvements and sharpened appetite for Arabian Gulf itineraries promise record-breaking results during 2015/16 winter season for Abu Dhabi's burgeoning cruise industry

Previous records for Abu Dhabi's cruise sector are set to be eclipsed over the next season as major developments and a spike in global 'Cruise Arabia' marketing begin to bear fruit with an estimated 220,000 passengers from 113 ship calls expected to experience the emirate's popular cultural, heritage and leisure attractions.



For the first time, the UAE capital's Zayed Port will welcome seven rotational Arabian Gulf callers - the highest ever number of seasonal weekly arrivals - which are set to propel ship arrivals for the 2015/16 season beyond 100 for the first time with the addition of Royal Caribbean's 16 calls to the emirate.

Costa Cruises' return with two vessels for the season - the Costa neoRiviera mainstay of its Gulf packages being joined by the return of Costa Fortuna. TUI cruises will extend its commitment of positioning a ship in the Gulf for a second season with a 16 call itinerary for Mein Schiff 2, and MSC will introduce the 2,500 passenger capacity Musica for 13 calls.

Royal Caribbean International, the largest global cruise line, will return to the Gulf with 16 round-trip sailings for its 2,000 passenger Splendour of the Seas from December 2015 to March 2016 on a seven-night itinerary that will also call at Dubai, Khasab and Oman's capital Muscat.

Celebrity Cruises will meanwhile deploy a luxury vessel on a homeport basis from November 2016.

Celebrity Constellation, with a capacity for 2,170 guests in 975 staterooms on 13 decks, will sail nine-, 12- 14- and 15-night cruises covering five ports-of-call between November 2016 and the end of January 2017. During the three-month season, Celebrity will attract approximately 15,000 guests to Abu Dhabi on six luxury cruises of the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean.

And for the first time, Seabourn will make two calls to Abu Dhabi's new dedicated cruise beach stopover on Sir Bani Yas

Island.

With the opening of the permanent cruise terminal at Zayed Port, Noble Caledonia's Island Sky making her Abu Dhabi debut and repositioning calls from Holland America Lines (Rotterdam), Hapag Lloyd Cruises (Europa 2), Phoenix Reisen (Artania), Oceana Cruises (Nautica and Insignia), Regent Seven Seas Voyages (Seven Seas Voyager) and Plantours Kreuzfahrten (Hamburg), the future for the capital's cruise sector looks extremely buoyant.

The appeal of Abu Dhabi's extensive shore excursion (shorex) opportunities and the UAE capital's ease of access are also clear factors in cruise lines' decision to visit the emirate, according to Jean Martins, TCA Abu Dhabi South Africa Country Manager.

"We are confident that an array of pre- and post- cruise excursions will encourage passengers to extend their cruise experience and we will work hand-in-hand with our airline and tour operator partners to package engaging tours to the cultural sites of our heritage heartland of Al Ain and of the stunning deserts of our western region," explained Martins.

"Activities which encapsulate the rich heritage and depth of cultural experiences that can only be found in Abu Dhabi emirate, such as visits to the oases and UNESCO world heritage attractions of Al Ain are high on this list. We are particularly looking forward to introducing Louvre Abu Dhabi and Saadiyat Island's other world-class museums in future itineraries."

The UAE's new multiple entry cruise visa, costing just US \$55, introduces the concept of Arabian Gulf cruising to a wider pool of South African travellers, and this, aligned with our collaborative efforts to boost the region's cruising potential are expected to attract visitors from around the world.

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