



## RIVIERA TOUR as the first travel agency in Europe to restart post-covid group tours on MSC CRUISES ships

- \*organized tours with Covid-19 related safety procedures
- \*comfortable traveling in smaller groups with a higher quality service
- \*we enable clients to enjoy their vacation even in the post-covid period

Currently from MSC SEASIDE, SYRACUSE 11.5.2021 Italy

Travel agency RIVIERA TOUR started a very special project that expands options for group traveling and operation of travel agencies even in times of necessary restrictions and procedures related to the Covid-19 pandemic. We asked the CEO of RIVIERA TOUR, Pavel Číž, how this project works and what stands behind this idea.

### Could you predict that a pandemic would come? What effect did this situation have on RIVIERA TOUR?

„None of us could predict Covid. Yes, there were the occasional possible threats of a pandemic, but they were all handled quickly. When Covid came, it was literally a disaster for tourism. Everything had to halt, and things were even more complicated for RIVIERA TOUR, a company specialized in cruises, because we could not come up with an alternative offer for our clients during the summer. We prepared tours worth 140 million CZK for season 2020 and we only carried out around 10% of them. We worked on all these tours a year or two beforehand and suddenly all this work was gone. We first assumed that the restrictions would last until September 2020 – this assumption was correct, because MSC Cruises restarted their operations with their own Health and Safety Protocol on MSC Grandiosa and MSC Magnifica in summer. Thanks to that we were able to sell and prepare tours for autumn and winter, but we still could not carry them out mainly because of the situation in Czech Republic, which once again set us back with populist politics and government restrictions.

### When did you get the impulse to restart cruises with bus transport and tour leaders?

We were not sitting at home or the office waiting. I was traveling around the world, checking the situation in Greece, Croatia, or Italy and mainly on MSC Cruises ships. I took part in several cruises on MSC Grandiosa and for example the cruise before Christmas left me speechless. When I saw the disaster that was happening in our country, the people falling into depression, despair and resignation, I decided that I need to do something about it. That we need to get people back onboard, so that they can visit theatres, restaurants, bars and talk to their friends once again. I did not want to just wait for the pandemic to end, I needed to find solutions and opportunities for people to get back to the MSC ships. I need to say that MSC Cruises was an immense help and support for me during these times – I especially appreciate getting help directly from Mr. Angelo Capurro, Executive Director of MSC Cruises. Our joint discussion in Italy really energized me and gave me the courage to begin this challenging project.

### How did you prepare for this project? Was it financially challenging?

First, we needed to process all the information regarding government regulations in Czech Republic, Italy, and our transit operation countries. Right from the beginning we were forced to rule out Slovakia where we could not pick up clients due to restrictions. Then we discussed the situation with doctors to fully understand and prepare for the process of safe transportation to the port and back. Naturally, a legal analysis of our plans followed and based on all these indications we were able to plan the whole project. The MSC Cruises Health and Safety Protocol that was already at work was a huge help as well. We worked around this protocol and adjusted it perfectly to our and our clients' needs. A big advantage was that transport to the port is provided by our sister company RIVIERA TRAVEL, so we were able to prepare the buses according to the highest standards including disinfection, air conditioning filters, testing of the drivers etc. This project cost us hundreds of thousands czech crowns.





## What vision did you have for this project?

First of all, we tried to make sure everything inconvenienced our clients as little as possible. That is why a big part of the protocol is prepared by our agency – the client should not feel any major changes even if it means that the transport fees will be higher.

Because of this we needed to regulate the price of cruise tours. Even though everything seems really complicated when you read the conditions for the first time, complying with the regulations is not that inconvenient for the clients. In the end it is not that much different from everyday regulations that we all face in the times of this pandemic.

## So what exactly is this project of safe tours to MSC Cruises ships?

The actual project is a safety process, and we need to divide it into a few parts:

### Before departing for the cruise -antigen testing

The only extra thing we require from the clients is getting copies of a negative antigen test taken 24 hours before departure in the English language. Everything else is taken care of either by us or MSC Cruises. Clients get a physical copy of all the necessary information and forms needed for a successful transit through Austria and Italy in mail. These forms are all pre-filled so the only thing the clients need to do is fill out their name and sign them.

### Departure for the cruise – sanitation and testing

Before departure for the cruise our buses get a complete sanitation. All the drivers and tour leaders are regularly tested. We have boarding places all over the country so that our clients can avoid using public transport as much as possible. When we meet our clients at the boarding places, we check everyone's temperature and get them tested one more time with a swab test.

Based on the results we then send the clients to their assigned seat in the bus. Clients have seats in the bus depending on their cabins – that means the one cabin is sitting together and between all separate cabins there are empty spaces to abide by the safety protocol. This way bus capacity is limited to 50% and naturally that raises the transportation costs considerably. During the transport we limit stops as much as possible and only make stops at bigger safe spots. Other than that, the clients get a regular service of snacks and drinks free of charge from us.

After arrival to the port of embarkation the bus stays parked in the port and the drivers embark along with the rest of the group, which ensures an uninterrupted chain of the safety protocol of the whole group including tour leaders and drivers. During embarkation, all clients get their temperatures checked and undergo another swab test. If everything goes well, the group embarks.

## So far it is not that complicated, but what happens if a client gets tested positive at the port?

All the regulations are put in place to lower the risk of a covid infection; however, we cannot entirely rule out the possibility of a client getting infected. If any client tests positive at the port of embarkation, they will repeat the test for error elimination, and if the client tests positive again, they will be excluded from the cruise along with everyone they share a cabin with. Therefore, it is important to adhere to social distancing during the bus transport – if everyone abides by the safety protocol, the other clients from the bus should stay unaffected. Then we will take care of the positive client and his family in a collaboration with MSC Cruises – we will ensure their isolation, transport, and any necessary treatment. This is why it's crucial that every client has a valid covid insurance.

## What about restrictions onboard?

Once again it is just like everyday life during an epidemic. You need to wear face masks in all shared spaces, in the theatre and while embarkation and disembarkation. Your temperature gets checked when you are going for breakfast and dinner, but it is a very quick process and does not inconvenience the clients much. You do not need to wear a face mask while sitting at a table in bars and restaurants, which is very pleasant while conversing with your close ones.





## And the visited destinations and ports?

So far, this is probably the biggest issue for our clients. Right now, it is necessary for all clients to purchase safe excursions from MSC Cruises to be able to visit the destinations. This is a problem especially because of a language barrier, because MSC Cruises do not offer excursions in the Czech language. That is why RIVIERA TOUR works on preparing special tours that have these MSC safe excursions in every destination already in the price, including our tour leaders that provide translations into Czech. During all other cruises we send out the offered excursions to our clients and our tour leader joins one of these excursions as a translator. However, we are expecting a gradual release of restrictions so that the clients can enjoy every destination with a plan tailored to their own taste.

## What will happen if the epidemiological situation gets worse in one of the destinations?

That can also happen and recently it happened to us in Sicily. Health is always a priority so if the situation does not allow it, clients will not be able to visit the destination. If that happens, clients will either get a substitute itinerary or they will be able to enjoy service onboard of the MSC ships.

## What happens if the client gets infected during the cruise?

As I already mentioned, abiding by the health and safety protocol ensures that the risk of infection is minimized, but we can not rule out this possibility especially since the incubation period can be different for everyone. That is why it is important to check everyone's temperature and put them through a complete set of tests as soon as they start showing signs of an infection. In case a client tests positive during the cruise, their whole cabin will be quarantined, and they will begin with necessary treatment. Right away the company starts evaluating the possibility of transport to a hospital and then to Czech Republic. I would like to specify that the client will be transported to Czech Republic separately based on the current guidelines and regulations. We will try our best to assist our clients even in this situation. Once again, this is a situation where you need a valid covid insurance.

## How does the transport from the port back to Czech Republic work?

A day before embarkation, all clients get tested onboard, and they will receive the test results in a written protocol. This is a sufficient document for transit to Czech Republic. If any clients need an extra PCR test, they can order it onboard for a fee. We will have all the documents and forms needed for disembarkation and transit ready and after leaving the ship, we continue the return to our homes. The transit back home abides by the same protocol on the way back as on the way to the port.

## How are the sales of these tours going?

Very well. Due to the health and safety protocol the bus capacity is limited to 50% and that means that the demand exceeds supply. That is why we recommend making reservations as early as possible.

## What are your expectations for the future regarding cruises?

Before the pandemic RIVIERA TOUR was the biggest cruise producer of groups in Czech Republic and we intend to keep it that way. We are preparing 29 groups until the end of 2021 and we plan on preparing around 70 groups in 2020. We will do our best to prepare everything we can for our clients so that they can enjoy a vacation of a high standard with complete service. Just like Mr. Aponte says, MSC Cruises are all one big family, and we are very proud that RIVIERA TOUR belongs to this family too. I am convinced that especially thanks to our collaboration with MSC Cruises, we can expect better days ahead of us...

Currently from MSC SEASIDE, SYRACUSE 11.5.2021 Italy

Here you can find detailed information about our post-covid cruise tours:

<https://www.rivieratour.cz/cs/caste-dotazy/plavba-nejbezpecnejsi-dovolena>

