

Travel & Arts

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Jasmine Forsberg of Broadway's 'Six' will headline Winter Park Arts Weekend

TIARAS AND TAPESTRIES



Matthew J. Palm

THE ARTISTIC TYPE

This year's Winter Park Arts Weekend will come with Broadway sparkle, thanks to a headlining performance by Jasmine Forsberg, a Central Floridian who has performed in the musicals "Six," "Stephen Sondheim's Old Friends" and "Here Lies Love" in New York City.

The 2026 Winter Park Arts Weekend will, as usual, offer free admission to art museums and spotlight musical performances — but this year, you can get a jump on the festivities by participating in the community tapestry project.

That project, which allows community members to lend a hand toward creating a tapestry, inspired the theme of this year's celebration of all things arts and cultural — officially designated Winter Park Arts



Organist Colin MacKnight will play for the Bach Festival Society of Winter Park. JIYANG CHEN/BACH FESTIVAL SOCIETY

Weekend ~ A Tapestry of Experiences. It's hosted by the city's Arts & Culture Alliance, and presented by the Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation and AdventHealth on Feb. 5-8.

But before those dates, try your hand at weaving with four separate tapestries, each with a different theme, available throughout the city — and waiting for you to add your creativity.

The locations and themes of the four tapestries currently underway are: Winter Park History Museum, 200 W. New England Ave. (history); Winter Park Library, 1052 W. Morse Blvd. (literacy); the Center for Health & Wellbeing, 2005 Mizell Ave. (connection); and Hannibal Square Heritage Center, 642 W. New England

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An ongoing community tapestry project will reach its culmination during the Winter Park Arts Weekend. WINTER PARK ARTS & CULTURAL ALLIANCE



MSC Grandiosa is docked at Ocean Cay, MSC Cruises' private destination in the Bahamas. PATRICK CONNOLLY/ORLANDO SENTINEL

REVIEW

MSC Grandiosa increases cruise line's Florida footing



Patrick Connolly

CENTRAL FLORIDA EXPLORER

How does MSC Cruises stand out in an increasingly competitive cruise market? They offer a value proposition that rivals that of Carnival Cruise Line, enticing guests with inexpensive fares and new ships with plenty to do on board.

MSC Cruises started

sailing year-round in North America in 2014, making it far newer to this market than Carnival, Royal Caribbean or Norwegian. The cruise line finally debuted a ship at Port Canaveral in 2021 and has

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Nominations now open for 2026 Orlando Sentinel Foodie Awards

By Amy Drew Thompson
ORLANDO SENTINEL

Last year was an interesting one in the Orlando Sentinel's annual Game of Foodie, with the Readers Choice winners mirroring the Critic's Picks more than ever before. Let's see if the trend continues as we explore and adore old and new favorites. Armed with your local expertise, you can nominate your favorites every day in 50 categories.

Your nods mean everything to the folks working hard on the line, behind the bar and out front. And in an increasingly delicate business climate, a win can spark a real impact on a restaurant's bottom line.

Your nominations also mean a lot to Orlando locals and visitors who count on your intel for their choices when dining out. Let's continue to show them that Orlando eats mean so much more than chains and theme parks. Let's give them a list they can live by all year long.

QUICK OVERVIEW

The nomination process will be open until 11:59 p.m. on Feb. 11. The top three restaurants in each category — those with

the most nominations — will then move on to the voting round, Feb. 12-25. Award winners will be announced online and in the Orlando Sentinel's Calendar section on March 6.

Nominate your favorites once a day at OrlandoSentinel.com/FoodieAwards to give them the best shot at making it to the top three spots in all 50 categories.

Restaurants: Tell your followers.

Foodies: Tell your friends.

Most votes = Moving to the next round and a guaranteed Top 3 spot!

Thanks in advance for your participation in making the 2026 roster the most voted on yet — and for helping to keep our city delicious.

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Orlando Sentinel
FOODIE
AWARDS





"Sweets" is one production found in the Carousel Lounge on MSC Grandiosa.



The main pool deck is expanded on the Meraviglia Plus-class MSC Grandiosa.

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continued to increase its Florida presence ever since, especially with last year's addition of MSC World America sailing out of PortMiami.

The Meraviglia Plus-class MSC Grandiosa continues the trend, accommodating more than 6,300 passengers at full capacity as the larger of MSC Cruises' two ships at Port Canaveral (the other is the MSC Seashore). The 181,000-gross-ton Grandiosa is two years newer and 50 feet longer than the Meraviglia, opening up room for additional dining spaces and an expanded main pool deck.

The Grandiosa arrived at Port Canaveral in December for its North American debut after several years sailing the Mediterranean and then two seasons in South America. The ship will sail week-long Caribbean itineraries for the winter sailing season before heading to the Mediterranean for the summer and returning to Port Canaveral in the fall for an extended stay.

Here's a firsthand look at what it's like to sail aboard MSC Grandiosa, as experienced during a recent hosted media sailing.

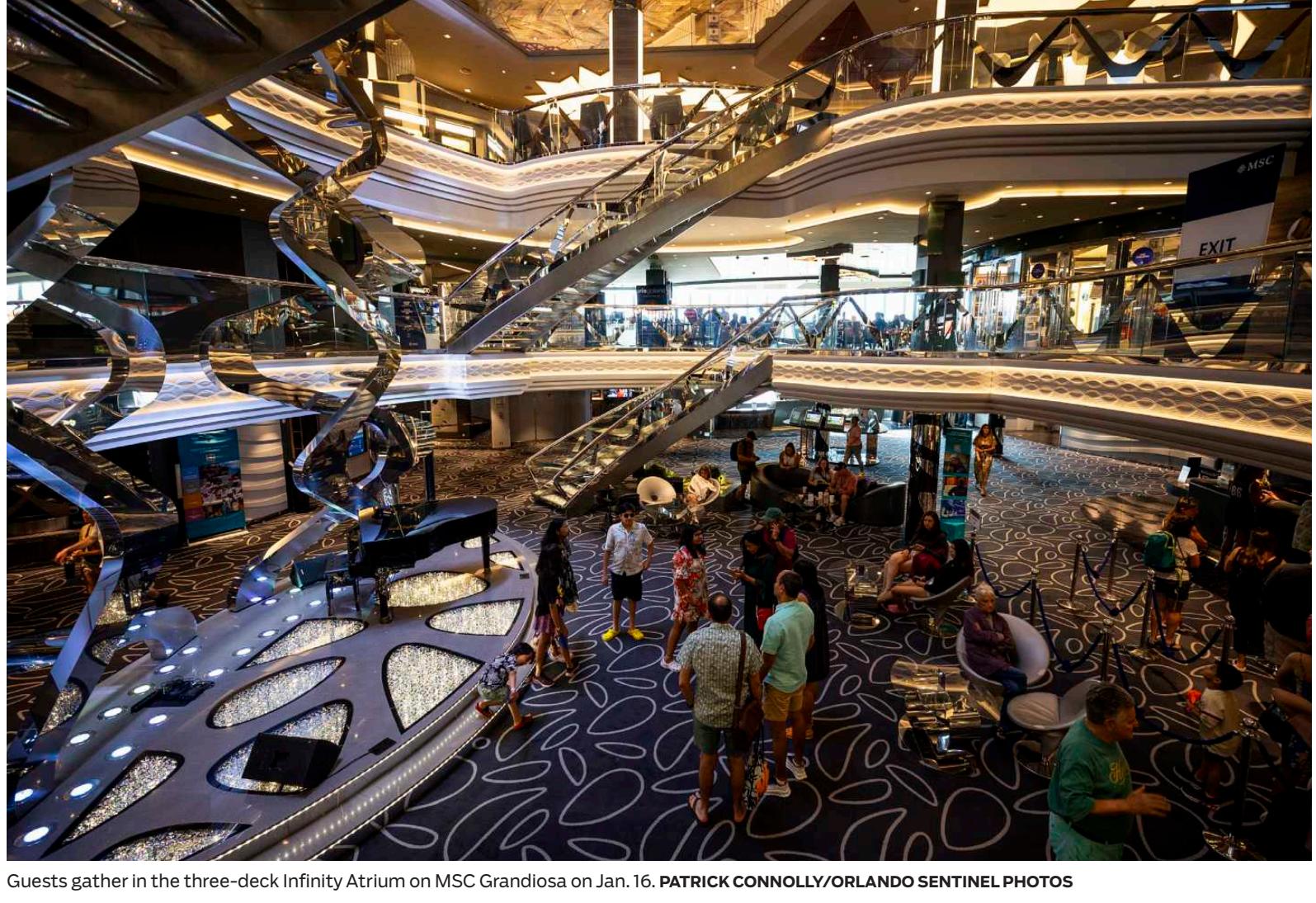
When embarking, guests are first greeted by the 323-foot-long Galleria Grandiosa, a European-style promenade with brick facades and stone-looking archways and columns. While these might conjure images of Old World Rome, the central hub of the ship has a decidedly high-tech LED screen on the ceiling that changes throughout the day. This is where the ship's specialty dining venues, bars, gelato, chocolate and shops can be found.

Heading toward the aft of the ship from the promenade, the three-deck Infinity Atrium opens up with signature sparkly staircases and a piano lounge at the bottom on Deck 5. It's the shiny touches and mirrors that abound that make the ship feel sleek and modern.

Heading toward the upper decks, guests find the expanded pool deck with daybeds by the water and room to spread out on chairs in the sun. Duck inside the Marketplace Buffet at the aft of the ship or move forward to the Safari Pool, which is housed within a retractable roof solarium.

On Deck 16, find family activities from bowling to basketball and arcade games. Step outside to find a walking track and the Horizon Pool at the aft of the ship, or step inside to visit a gym that overlooks the main pool deck.

Deck 18 houses space designed for children and teens, or visit the comfort-



Guests gather in the three-deck Infinity Atrium on MSC Grandiosa on Jan. 16. PATRICK CONNOLLY/ORLANDO SENTINEL PHOTOS

able and classy Sky Lounge for drinks overlooking the pool deck. Heading up to Deck 19, explore more outdoor family activities or exclusive areas reserved for MSC Yacht Club and Aurea guests.

EXPERIENCES

Cruise Critic's 2025 Best in Cruise Awards named MSC Cruises as the best ocean cruise line for families, noting expansive kids clubs, varied menus and "multigenerational charm."

While MSC Grandiosa isn't the first ship to have a ropes course, a splash pad or waterslides, those are all features of the ship that appeal to families when exploring outdoor options for play on board the ship.

Inside, the bowling alley, F1 simulators, VR maze, sportsplex and Lego-themed kids club are all sure to be a hit.

While the Grandiosa doesn't have areas of the ship dedicated exclusively to adults, there are places to get away and relax. MSC Yacht Club and Aurea guests can enjoy an exclusive sun deck and whirlpool with great views on Deck 19. Yacht Club guests have even more exclusive privileges with a dedicated pool, sundeck, whirlpool and bar located forward on the top deck.

The thermal area of the spa is also a great place for adult cruisers to unwind without the kids. Access saunas, steam rooms and whirlpools for full relaxation.

The best experience MSC Cruises has to offer isn't on the ship. Private destination Ocean Cay MSC Marine Reserve feels



The Himalayan Bridge ropes course is a fun activity for families on MSC Grandiosa.

more serene and natural than what other cruise lines offer in their theme park-esque private islands. Step off the ship and onto an island that was once exploited for sand excavation, one that has now been transformed into a pristine natural paradise. There are myriad bars, beaches, shops, cabanas, food and excursions to explore.

ENTERTAINMENT

Part of what differentiates the Grandiosa from other ships is its unique entertainment lineup. Full-length shows take place in the main stage Théâtre La Comédie and the Carousel Lounge.

"Rouge" is a cabaret-style show on the main stage, featuring music from over the decades, lively dancing, juggling and some light audience participation. It's a worthwhile watch with fun song-and-dance numbers and a little

something for everyone.

At the aft of the ship, visit the Carousel Lounge for Cirque-style shows that cost \$18 but include a cocktail. The theater is built and well-utilized for aerial acts and is complete with a rotating stage. Of the two shows, "Sweets" is the better offering with sugar-themed songs, juggling, impressive stunts and high energy.

"Strings" is a puppet-themed offering that attempts a heartfelt plot but falls short in its execution. While the aerial acts have moments where they impress and some moments that tug on the heartstrings, it's the slower and sappier of the two shows.

FOOD

As a ship that hails from Europe, MSC Grandiosa packs international flavor with a chocolatier, macarons, gelato and crepes that

satisfy sweet teeth.

Among specialty dining options, the L'Atelier Bistro is a French restaurant concept that's new to MSC Grandiosa. The escargot was a satisfying appetizer with plenty of garlic and butter. The best part about the experience was the decor and ambiance.

The Butcher's Cut, the steakhouse concept found on multiple MSC Cruises ships, has a \$60 menu that includes an appetizer, an entree, sides and a dessert. The lobster bisque was a great way to kick off, and the Wagyu beef was a worthwhile \$30 upgrade with an extremely tender cut.

Teppanyaki is always worth a visit on board any MSC Cruises vessel that has the option. Dinner and an entertaining show from a hibachi chef works for couples and families alike, with delicious options for steak and seafood with

multiple price options.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

With cruise fares on the Grandiosa starting from \$359 per person for seven nights, MSC Cruises presents an attractive option for travelers on a budget. That fare might not include any frills or a balcony, but it still gets you a vacation at a fraction of the price of other cruise lines.

MSC Cruises is also seeing its share of Carnival converts, at least in part due to changes to Carnival's loyalty program announced last year. In a whirlpool on the ship, a visitor from Georgia shared that he had switched to cruising with MSC Cruises after Carnival changed its program to remove lifetime loyalty status. In order to entice passengers from other lines, MSC Cruises has a status match program to enroll in MSC's loyalty program at a similar tier using the company's "internal conversion rates."

Cruise passengers eating in the main dining rooms and at the buffet have complained about the quality of food and service, but it seems like MSC Cruises is in the U.S. market to stay. As the cruise line prepares to introduce the massive MSC World Atlantic to Port Canaveral next year, the company will have to continue enhancing the onboard experience to entice new passengers and retain others. But with some of the lowest fares in the U.S. market, who wouldn't at least give them a shot?

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Ave. (heritage).

There are materials on hand at all locations, but would-be weavers are encouraged to bring their own small items to add and make the resulting artwork truly community-based. Suggestions for items that can be woven into the tapestries include ribbon, yarn, string, dried flowers, feathers, small poems, tiny secret messages, buttons and small photos.

Get creative and get creating!

A fifth tapestry will be

created from noon to 3 p.m. Feb. 7 in Central Park during Art in the Park, one of the festival's keynote events. Performances and interactive arts activities will also be featured.

Other keynote events include the free concert by Forsberg, who grew up in Central Florida before making it big on Broadway.

You may have been lucky enough to have seen her dynamo performance when the national tour of "Six" stopped in Orlando; it was just announced that she will rejoin the musical on Broadway on Feb. 16.

During her concert on the Central Park main

stage, presented by Central Florida Vocal Arts, she'll be backed by a live band. Showtime is at 7 p.m. Feb. 6; bring a blanket or lawn chairs.

Another big event is at 6 p.m. Feb. 5 when Dalouge Smith presents "Weaving Art and Science for Healthy Young Minds," an interactive presentation that uses personal experience as the starting point for understanding how music, dance and other arts add to young people's positive mental health.

Hosted by the Winter Park Health Foundation and the Pabst Steinmetz

Foundation, the event takes place at the Center for Health & Wellbeing. It's designed for the whole family, with activities and performances for young people.

On Feb. 8, from 1-4 p.m., the Polasek Museum & Sculpture Gardens will have free admission and display a special piece of American history in honor of the nation's sesquicentennial or 250th birthday, which we're celebrating this year.

On view will be Albin Polasek's Sesquicentennial Relief, the original sculpture selected for the official copper dollar created

for the nation's 150th anniversary at the 1926 Sesquicentennial Exposition in Philadelphia.

Both the historic sculpture and the official commemorative coins will be unveiled and displayed together for the first time at the event, which will also include a family-friendly educational activity in which visitors can create their own patriotic coin relief.

Other spots to see art for free all weekend include the Rollins Museum of Art, Caudé School of Art galleries and the Morse Museum of American Art. A free organ concert at

Rollins College's Knowles Memorial Chapel by award-winning musician Colin MacKnight will serve as a prelude to the Bach Festival Society of Winter Park's 91st fest.

The concert, made possible by Rollins College through the Faith Emeny Conger '54 Visiting Organist Concert Series, will be at 7:30 p.m. Feb. 6.

Find the full schedule of Winter Park Arts Weekend - A Tapestry of Experiences events and more information at wpinspires.org/artsweekend.

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