

TRAVEL

The French Riviera

Côte d'Azur





Picasso, Matisse, and Chagall were fascinated by its glorious light and stunning landscape while Scott Fitzgerald swooned over the mansions and villas of the Cap d'Antibes. But you don't have to be particularly creative to experience the extraordinary charm, old school glamour and magnetism of the Côte d'Azur (also known as the French Riviera).

Set in the southeast of France, this beautiful Mediterranean coastline of white beaches and sparkling blue sea stretches from Massif de l'Esterel to Menton, a town near the Italian border. Here you'll find glamour in the form of celebrity-filled Cannes, Monaco, Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat (do visit the fantastic Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild), and Saint Tropez as well as natural beauty in the lavender fields of Grasse. You'll also find a fascinating medieval legacy in Eze and modern magic in up-and-coming Marseilles.

There are plenty of hot spots but turn the page for some of the most talked-about destinations this year...



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SAINT-TROPEZ

It's impossible to mention the Côte d'Azur without a nod to the original celeb hang-out, Saint-Tropez. Former film star Brigitte Bardot was one of the crowd who brought the pretty coastal resort to prominence. The luxury yachts and their wealthy passengers did the rest. Pampelonne Beach is ideal for perfecting your tan and being seen. While for culture check out the modern art collections at the Annonciade Museum. When it comes to dining, there's no shortage of Michelin-starred restaurants.

ANTIBES

Picasso lived and worked here just after WW2, his home now the Musée Picasso and one of the town's most-visited locations. Wander through the colourful Provencal food market, the Cours Masséna and make sure you visit the medieval Le Fort Carré in the picturesque old town.

CANNES

This city's wonderful old quarter is enchanting, with its pastel coloured homes at Le Suquet. There you'll also find a medieval fortress overlooking the sparkling blue marina. Go inside and be impressed by the ethnographic art at the Musée des Explorations du Monde. Stroll along the grand La Croisette boulevard, the annual home of the Cannes Film Festival. To get away from the crowds take a short ferry ride - and picnic - to the island St Honorat with its pretty working monastery and forest groves.

GRASSE

In keeping with the quiet theme, the medieval village of Grasse, nestled between Cannes and Nice, has much to entrance. There are the beautiful fields of lavender to photograph and marvel over, for instance, and you can tour the world-famous perfumery Fragonard. Visit in August and join in the three-day celebrations for the Jasmine Festival.

ÈZE

Sitting 1400 feet above sea level, this medieval village boasts beautiful stone houses and winding alleyways stretching back to the 14th century. Its medieval fortress appeared in Hitchcock's movie *To Catch a Thief*. Today, it'd be an injustice not to visit the exquisite Jardin Exotique.

MONACO

Famously a playground for the very well-heeled (you can't fail to notice the luxury yachts in the splendid harbour), Monaco has much to offer in a cultural sense too, thanks to Fort Antoine, the Prince's Palace and the Cathedral. Finish the day with a bet or two at the famous Monte Carlo casino.

MARSEILLE

The country's second biggest city after Paris, Marseille is vibrant, exciting and the new go-to destination for the young and wealthy. Its beautiful harbour at the Port Vieux is filled with luxury yachts, while the area is dotted with wonderful seafood restaurants and trendy wine bars. Formerly a European Capital of Culture and a favourite cruise-stop destination, Marseille really is not to be missed.

OLD TOWN, NICE

Culture and beauty abound in Nice's pretty Old Town. Its labyrinthine streets are filled with smart restaurants, galleries, cafes and artisan shops. Shop for food and antiques at the outdoor market Cours Saleya then stroll along the Promenade du Paillon where you can admire the beautiful botanical blooms. Visit the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art or people watch at the Promenade des Anglais where you're also guaranteed beautiful views of the bay.



Where to stay

Grand-Hotel du Cap-Ferrat

This luxury hotel, owned by the Four Seasons group and a favourite of Elizabeth Taylor in the 50's, dates back to 1908 and sits just 2.8 km from Paloma Beach. Rooms all boast terraces, while the penthouse has a hot tub and steam bath. There's a celebrity swimming instructor and the ubiquitous Michelin-starred restaurant.

Cap d'Antibes Beach Hotel

Nestling beside Les Pêcheurs Beach, this grand 19th century mansion turned contemporary hotel is a mere 3 km from the Musée Picasso. Enjoy the food while overlooking the sea at the upmarket restaurant, or enjoy a cocktail on the private beach. Then again, while away an hour or two in the heated infinity pool and Sisley spa.

Hotel Sezz - Saint-Tropez

A champagne bar and beautiful Michelin-starred restaurant terrace are two favourite hang-outs for residents of the Hotel Sezz. Sitting just 8km from the wonderful Plage de Pampelonne beach, the rooms are wood-panelled and high-ceilinged with a very modern outlook. Luxury villas have private pools. A shuttle service takes guests into town and the beach at will.

Hôtel du Couvent - Nice

Set in the heart of Nice's Old Town, this hotel was, as its name suggests, originally a convent. It's now owned by hotelier Valéry Grégo and is perfect for exploring the traditional parts of Nice. But if you don't want to wander then exploring the two beautiful gardens - traditional and tropical - are lovely way to pass some quiet time without distractions. This hotel is more about preservation and the environment than glamour and bling.

Carlton Hotel, Cannes

More than a century old, this grand dame of a hotel has been refurbished by the Regency Group. It still retains its Art Deco looks but with modern additions, such as the largest infinity pool in the city and 37 luxury residences for those who fancy staying in Cannes for more than a couple of nights.

What to eat & drink

Throughout the Côte d'Azur you'll find a blend of French, Mediterranean, and Italian cuisine. Expect to sample plenty of fresh fish, olives, olive oil, thyme, lavender, dried fruits and nuts, lemons, garlic, and tomatoes.

Specialities include ratatouille, salad nicoise, bouillabaisse (fish stew) and chichis chichis frégi (a churros-type delicacy). Anise-flavoured Pastis is refreshing aperitif while the white wines are always chilled and crisp.

When to visit

You're pretty much ensured warm weather all year round but arriving during the shoulder seasons of May, June and September will ensure you get sunshine without the crowds.

How to get there

Fly to the Côte d'Azur Airport near Nice or to Marseille-Provence. Both airports have good train, bus and hire car connections. Or, make a grand arrival by yacht. Once there, why not hire a vintage car and give your holiday some mid-century glamour?