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MONACO'S MOMENT

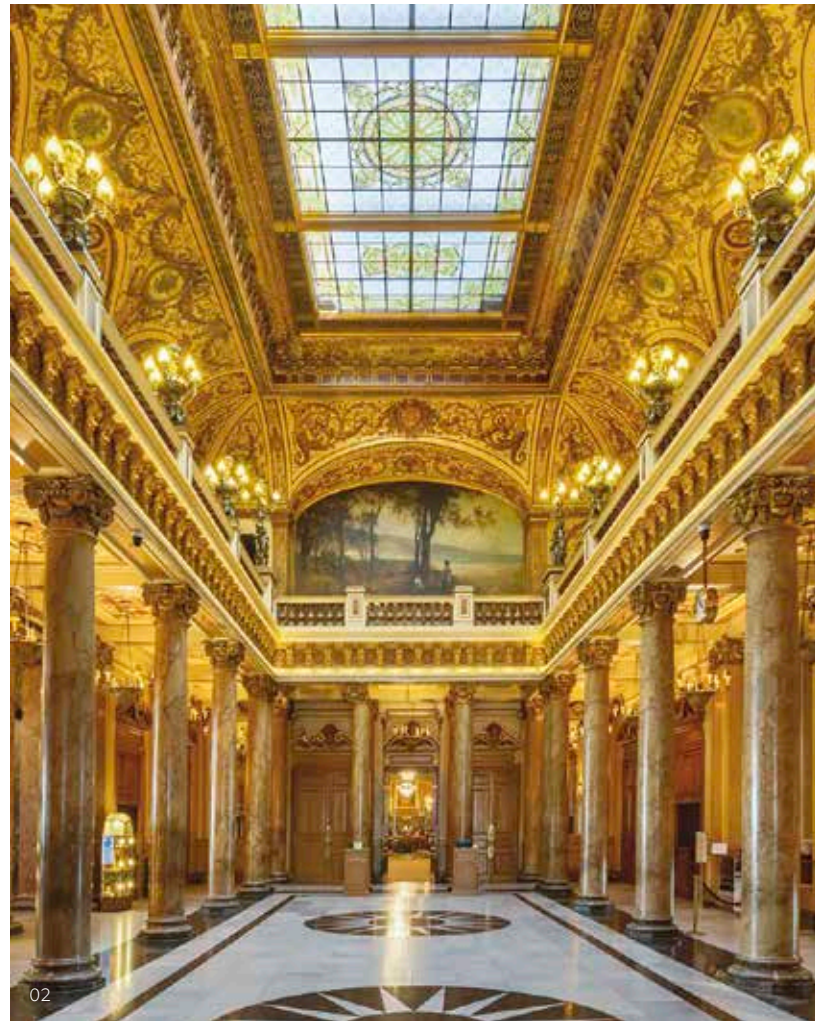
Glam and green, the independent city-state of Monaco leads the European charge when it comes to ensuring a sustainable future, writes Natasha Dragun.

Mention Monaco and most people picture unabashed luxury: a harbour studded with private yachts, a nearby airport (Nice) equally busy with private jets, hotels dripping in gilded this and marbled that, Michelin-rated restaurants sporting more stars than a Hollywood red-carpet gala ... Measuring just two square kilometres in size along a postcard-perfect stretch of the Côte d’Azur, this country – the second smallest in the world, behind Vatican City – packs a lot of glamour into its petite borders. But for all the style, Monaco has ambitions to become one of the most sustainable places on the planet.

To be fair, the country has long been forward-thinking when it comes to the environment, with a large part of its green ethos nurtured by the efforts of billionaire-cum-Hollywood royalty, His Serene Highness (HSH) Prince Albert II, the son of Prince Rainier III and American actress Grace Kelly. Over the 12 years since its establishment, his charitable organisation – the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation – has been responsible for everything from funding climate change studies in Antarctica to establishing renewable energy projects across Africa, in addition to a multitude of ventures on home soil. Much of the Prince’s work over the years has been guided by the legacy of his pioneering ancestors, including great-great-grandfather, Albert I, dubbed the ‘Explorer Prince’ given his penchant for sailing the world in the late 19th century, seeking ways to preserve the oceans.

But it’s in recent years, when global conventions have demanded higher awareness and more significant actions, that Albert II has stepped up the country’s commitment to conservation, establishing strict guidelines and enviable goals that will likely see Monaco hit targets such as carbon neutrality by 2050. This is no easy feat, given that the country has no heavy industry and no easy environmental wins.

In addition to spending millions of euros annually on preservation projects, the Prince has been savvy in enlisting board members with global knowledge and influence, notably Australian conservationist and author



01 Glamorous Monaco is committed to a green future © karamysh/Shutterstock.com
 02 The Atrium at Casino de Monte-Carlo 03 Sustainable seafood at organic Michelin-starred Elsa Restaurant 04 The Monte-Carlo Bay Hotel & Resort will install solar panels on its rooftops 05 Hôtel Hermitage Monte-Carlo. Images 02-05 © Monte-Carlo SBM

Tim Flannery. “I was inspired by the Prince’s passion for protecting the environment,” Flannery says of his motivation to become part of Monaco’s sustainability pledge. “With his position as Head of State, and the resources of the foundation, I feel real progress can be made.”

Going green

While many other countries across Europe suffer from an increasingly concrete outlook thanks to urban sprawl, Monaco’s green space has actually increased from 50,000 to 270,000 square metres over the last 60 years. Today, some 20 per cent of the principality is public and private parkland home to more than 23,000 plants, from the Princess Grace Rose Gardens to the Exotic Garden of Monaco, an extraordinary botanic

06 Views from Thermes Marins Monte-Carlo 07 Terre de Monaco is one of the largest private city farms in the world © Terre de Monaco/ Patrick Aventurier 08 Diamond Suite at Hôtel de Paris Monte-Carlo 09 Terrace of Elsa Restaurant. Images 08-09 © Monte-Carlo SBM



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garden clinging to the cliffs. And then there's Terre de Monaco, one of the largest private city farms in the world. In addition to facilitating organic fruit and vegetable gardens on rooftops across town, the project hosts workshops to educate locals and visitors on the importance of sustainable agriculture.

The Prince is also an advocate for green energy, with the country an early adopter of electric, hybrid and biofuel transport. So while the high-octane Formula 1 Grand Prix still draws crowds, Monaco now also hosts an all-electric Formula E Grand Prix and a biannual eRally dedicated to promoting new energies.

The country boasts a fleet of electric vehicles, including the Mobee car-sharing system, with ample free

charging stations. If you do decide to swap your Lamborghini for something more efficient, you'll be handsomely rewarded: residents get paid up to €9,000 (about \$14,000) when they buy an electric vehicle. Endeavours like this are helping the government reach its goal of deriving at least 20 per cent of energy from renewable sources by 2020, reducing greenhouse gases to 30 per cent of 1990 levels.

Wastewater is treated and recycled; a road with built-in solar panels has been trialled; reusable seawater is used for the cooling towers of major buildings; garbage is converted into energy-producing fuel for municipal needs; and even luxury hotels have come on board, with more than 80 per cent achieving

environmental certification. Most now employ 'Green Teams' to facilitate eco-friendly projects; The Monte-Carlo Bay Hotel & Resort, for example, recently committed to installing solar panels on its rooftops.

Marine charter

"The Prince Albert II Foundation does a great deal of work in Monaco, but its impact is even greater across the Mediterranean," says Flannery. "And of course it is active in oceans globally. The Prince understands oceans are interconnected: the work done on protecting monk seals in Greece, for example, or enhancing the conservation of marine reserves in Italy will inevitably enrich the waters around Monaco."

Despite only having four kilometres of coastline, the Bay of Monaco currently includes two protected areas: the Larvotto and Spelugues reserves. Active biodiversity preservation laws here have seen a significant increase in species such as grouper, which was nearly wiped out back in the 1990s.

Much of the country's marine legacy is detailed at the Oceanographic Institute, housed in an extraordinary Baroque Revival building with sea creatures built into the façade. Conceived by Albert I in 1911, it was headed for 30 years by Jacques Cousteau, the French adventurer, marine conservationist and documentarian. Today, it's the base for Ocean Week, an impressive roster of workshops, exhibitions, film screenings and conferences held for the first time in April 2017 to complement Monaco's national week raising awareness among children for environmental protection as a whole.

"We work towards fighting climate change, preserving biodiversity in the Mediterranean and preserving the oceans," says Flannery. "The Prince has played a huge and courageous role in leading the battle." ♦

Travel file

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