

TRAVEL EUROPE

48 hours in Monaco

Yes, there are superyachts and superb restaurants, but there's much more to the city-state, writes **Tony Davis**.



So you're in Monaco for the yacht show and you happen to have 48 hours to spare. Why not start with an early morning walk? After all, there aren't many countries you can stroll around in their entirety before breakfast.

Few people are likely to be around. Nightlife seems to eclipse morning life in Monaco, so there will be a smattering of joggers, cyclists, dog walkers, and people washing down outside tables and cleaning up restaurants for the day ahead.

My walk was a few weeks ago, in a particularly fierce mid-summer, but the sun was low, it was still pleasantly cool and there was a beautiful light bouncing off the Mediterranean, and there's a surprising amount of foliage squeezed between the high-rises, overpasses and ancient stone walls. In the early hours, the loudest sound is the birds in the trees, except when the very occasional kamikaze motorcyclist bursts through the serenity.

There are fragrant gardens too, and not just the bigger, better-known ones. Pocket-sized ones are plentiful.

Along the Plage du Larvotto—the principality's rather pebbly Bondi—the white umbrellas of the private beach clubs were newly up, and the mattresses being laid out on the lounge chairs for the guests expected in a couple of hours.

Then it was past the Maretrerra reclaimed land project. This controversial \$US2.4 billion (about \$3.5 billion) development, due to open in 2025, will add six hectares to Monaco's two square kilometres (a 3 per cent increase).

The hoardings around it are covered with real estate ads drawing your attention to this extraordinary opportunity. The super-upmarket car dealerships opposite offer the fastest, widest cars on the planet to the people with the narrowest, most congested roads. But business is booming.

The tunnel is next, the one the Formula 1 cars scream through each year en route to Port Hercules. This famous harbour is why you are here—it's the site of the Monaco Yacht Show (September 28 to October 1), but every day is a yacht show here.

It's a place to sit and observe. Various apps help identify the famous owners of some of the most elaborate and expensive private boats you'll see anywhere. One app reported that the largest, which seemed to be on a completely different scale to anything else that day, belonged to British property developer Nick Candy and his



Australian actress wife Holly Valance. Skirt around the Rock of Monaco, for now, and you are in Fontvieille, a "suburb" built on reclaimed land in the 1960s and 70s. There are walkways along the waterfront and through the Princess Grace Rose Garden.

Monaco isn't large but it is hilly, and there are many interesting diversions. So maybe leave the upper regions for the next day, and find a café for an espresso and croissant.

Then head up to the Rock, site of the Palace, the Old Town and the spectacular Oceanographic Museum. This neo-Baroque pile rises over the water from one side of the Rock, its ceilings decorated with reliefs of sea creatures. The new Polar Mission Exhibition (it runs until June 4, 2024) gives the then, now and possible future of the two poles via traditional and interactive exhibits.



Clockwise from main: Port Hercules, site of the Monaco Yacht Show, starting on Wednesday; fresh seafood at La Môme; the Monte Carlo Casino from the gardens of the Hotel de Paris; and early morning quiet on a pretty cobbled street.



The ends of the earth are a particular obsession of the ruling Grimaldi family, and a focus of the Prince Albert II Foundation, which is engaged in environmental causes. "Prince Albert is still the only head of state to have visited the two poles, and not just flying over—real expeditions," says foundation chief executive Olivier Wenden.

"What's going on up there or down there is exactly what's going on over the globe in a much faster way: ice melts, loss of biodiversity, sea-level rise."

Getting hungry? According to residents, the chic Maya Jah restaurant on Avenue Princesse Grace is a hot tip for a Michelin star. It serves "Mediterranean cuisine with oriental flavours" and its Moroccan chef, Mustapha El Hajraoui, has also worked in India, France, Italy and Spain.

Lunch was a thoroughly surreal

experience, though not for the obvious reasons. Smoke started coming out of the apartment block next door and the street turned into a major emergency site, drawing every fire engine and rescue vehicle in the city-state. We were told to stay put, so as to not get in the way.

The food kept coming, even as firemen and police dragged gasping people out of the building and deposited them next to the glass window right in front of us, and waiters ran outside with trays of bottled water for people suffering the effects of smoke. Was the food good? Yes, probably.

Possibilities for the first afternoon include a trip to the principality's only distillery, a cocktail and a lie-down at a beach club, then dinner at Yoshi at the Metropole Monte-Carlo, a hotel that takes up almost a whole block near the casino. This restaurant,

Waiters charge around with elaborate dishes held high, yet somehow find time to stop and sing along en masse.

which already has a Michelin star, is primarily Japanese, though with a fair bit of fusion, and tables are set up next to the outdoor swimming pool. It's a magic place on a warm, clear night.

The sommelier offers 20 types of saké, some as high as 20 per cent alcohol, though there are plenty of conventional wines too. The food is as fine in presentation and taste as you'd expect at the location and price. The house speciality is baked black cod, marinated for 72 hours in miso and then finished in the oven and wrapped in a Japanese leaf (€71, or \$105, a serve). It is very complex in flavour and the flesh has the texture of lobster.

You might want a slightly quieter day on Sunday. I started again with an early walk and added a drive along the coast in a French-built electric sports car, plus snorkelling in the Med, an incongruous brush with street art at the UPaint Festival and some other things I can't fit in here (OK, it wasn't quiet, but how often do you go to Monaco?).

It finished with dinner at La Môme open-roof restaurant, then only a month old.

La Môme looks down at the floodlit marina and up to the tallest buildings. The décor is inspired by *To Catch a Thief*, the Grace Kelly-Cary Grant caper set in Monaco, and a piano player and chanteuse runs through a Brel-to-Winehouse repertoire of sultry songs (and a few upbeat ones), while waiters charge around with elaborate dishes held high, yet somehow every so often find time to stop and sing along en masse.

The sense of theatre extends to the food. A cavalcade of dishes arrived, at one stage a massive veal chop on a grill over hot coals was placed in the centre of the table, then returned magically carved, while a flaming fish held place of honour. About 11.30pm, the roof started closing after an extraordinary all-staff rendition of a version of *Besame Mucho*.

Then it was back to the Novotel and, the next day, back to the real world. **L&L**

The author was a guest of Visit Monaco.



City-street bounty at L'Orangerie.

SPIRITS OF MONTE CARLO

L'Orangerie was founded just five years ago, yet it's the first legal distillery in Monaco.

It's the brainchild of Irish businessman (and Monaco resident) Philip Culazzo, 41, who had reflected that the one thing the principality lacked was a distinctive dish or tipple. "It's a mix of Italian and French," he tells us, "so I thought it would be great to make something that really comes from here. Not just put Monaco on the label to sell it, but actually try and make something that was good."

His solution lay with the 600 bitter orange trees growing along local streets. "They produce anywhere

between 10,000 and 15,000 kilos of fruit every year. The trees are incredibly well looked after, there are no pesticides [yet], and between 85 per cent and 90 per cent of that fruit was going to waste every year."

Given permission to harvest some oranges for experimentation 10 years ago, Culazzo eventually came up with the drink he calls L'Orangerie.

"It's 30 per cent alcohol, a digestive a little bit like Cointreau or Grand Marnier, but with one-quarter the amount of sugar," he says.

A combined distillery and shopfront, named after the drink, opened in 2017, with the tiny operation doing almost all its labour by hand. The second drink was Carruba, from Monaco's carob trees.

Then came Gin aux Agrumes, a gin using bitter oranges plus various citrus products from a little further afield (though all within 20 kilometres of L'Orangerie). "The whole idea," says Culazzo, "was to create products that express what's around us."

In the summer, 1000 bottles of Vodka de L'espoir ("vodka of hope") were produced, with Philip paying three teenage Ukrainian refugees to label and package them in their country's national colours. The suggested price was a donation of €60 to €100, with all proceeds going to humanitarian relief.

L'Orangerie's products will arrive at a small number of Dan Murphy's stores in Australia in the run-up to Christmas. **TONY DAVIS**