

# HOTEL METROPOLE

MONTE CARLO

Superstar chef Joel Robuchon's leading lieutenants are in the kitchen, the idle and beautiful are sunning by the first-floor saltwater pool, beyond which stretches a Karl Lagerfeld-designed glass mural dedicated to Homer's Odyssey. Cars arriving at the porte-cochere are long and low and shiny. Chauffeurs and tinted windows rule, unless the vehicle is a breezy, see-me convertible, in which case the elaborately waved hair of motorists looks snap-frozen and bling most definitely is the thing.

The principality of Monaco is its own bubble of luxury and within this inflated universe, Hotel Metropole Monte-Carlo, opened in 1886, has long been a favourite meeting place. Close to Place du Casino, where tourists gawp at the rich and recognisable, the property sits back from the street, down a lovely drive, its archway flanked with Egyptian columns, well-trimmed gardens dotted with cypresses and palms. It's the sense of sheltered enclave that makes this family-owned hotel of 126 rooms (including 64 suites) less showy than its rivals; the building also enfolds about 40 private apartments so the scale of accommodation is much more homely and boutique than its grand proportions suggest.

You won't get a big view unless you score a top Mediterranean-facing suite, but the Jacques Garcia-designed guestrooms are ultra-spacious, in French country-house style with honey-coloured varnished wood, plush bedheads, chandeliers, and floral fabrics that look inspired by an ancestral chateau in the Loire Valley. Oversized Carrara marble bathrooms are equipped with soaker tubs and brim with orange-scented Hermès toiletries.

The double lobby consists of an entry hall, adorned with Italian silver-plated mirrors and pedestal tables, leading to a lounge salon and bar where solemn portraits of four of Monaco's princes hang, including Rainier III, husband of Grace and father of the incumbent, Albert II. Light meals are served in this drawing room-like space of tub chairs, fringed ottomans and button-back sofas. It has a sociable feel, almost like a piazza, with an extravagant canopy ceiling inspired by the Pitti Palace in Florence, an 18th-century Gobelins tapestry on the rear wall, stone floors and Persian silk carpets. There is a lot of elaborate air-kissing in this fashionable flow-through salon where flowers, signature drinks and even staff uniforms change with the seasons. This northern summer it's all fresh yellow orchids and pineapple-flavoured cocktails. "Exotic chic" is the label and the whole hotel is spritzed with an almost-mesmerising fragrance of amber and vanilla.

Also on the ground floor, with a terrace beyond, is Robuchon's Michelin two-star restaurant, open for three meals a day. But in warm weather, head to Odyssey, the poolside restaurant, for a casual breakfast under white umbrellas. On a bright blue morning, it's possible to make-believe you are on a yacht about to set sail on the Med. Robuchon oversees the menus – "Riviera salads", sunny south-of-France flavours and the devilish likes of cocoa and mascarpone tiramisu – at Odyssey, too, as well as at Michelin one-star Yoshi, a restaurant of Zen simplicity designed by Didier Gomez. There's a tiny garden of pebbles and miniature maples, bento boxes as beautifully composed as Japanese woodcut masterpieces, and not a soupçon of Monte Carlo excess in sight.

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Clockwise from left: the reception, Restaurant Joel Robuchon, a Prestige suite, the facade, and poolside with mural designed by Karl Lagerfeld



## DINING

Restaurant Joel Robuchon, with executive chef Christophe Cussac at the helm, is a knockout, with velvet-upholstered chairs, gathered curtains, floor lamps and chandeliers. Drawcard dishes include caramelised quail stuffed with foie gras and, of course, a side of the chef's famous mashed potatoes, pureed with butter and full-fat milk and perhaps a touch of truffle oil. If a table is not available for dinner, consider lunch (book the canopied terrace in summer) with a good-value set-price menu. For more Michelin grandeur, Alain Ducasse's three-star Le Louis XV is at Hotel de Paris, across from the casino; the property's refurbished accommodation and public areas are not due to reopen until September 2018; but, in the meantime, the restaurant is in full gilded swing beneath frescoed ceilings in a glorious space that could perhaps be termed Versailles-on-Sea.

## EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT

Odyssey by Night, until September 25, is an annual dining-under-the-stars concept at Hotel Metropole that includes a ritzy barbecue in Lagerfeld's "haute couture" poolside setting. From 7pm; bookings essential, chic Riviera togs advisable.

## STEPPING OUT

It's a stroll to the famous belle-epoque Casino de Monte-Carlo; doors open at 9am for self-guided tours of the embellished halls before gaming starts at 2pm and proceeds into the witching hours. Do not miss the excellent Taba Naba exhibition of indigenous art from Australia and Oceania at Musee Oceanographique de Monaco; it's on until September 20. Head to the roof for fabulous views of the Med and a stroll across a 574sqm floor artwork of a sea turtle, its shell and legs patterned with marine creatures.

## HOT TIPS

The Metropole Spa includes a Bastien Gonzalez nail studio for the most forensic manicures and pedicures imaginable; the 2000sqm facility also features 10 treatment rooms, fitness studio, a hamam, sauna, caldarium and ice fountain. There is a private beach club, too; ask to venture there in the hotel's jaunty Fiat vintage convertible customised with rattan seats. Drop by for afternoon tea at the lobby lounge – worth it alone for a look at the Robuchon pastry trolley piled with pastel-coloured macarons, berry tarts, and candied fruit cakes. Add a flute of fine fizz for the full, fabulous effect.

## ESSENTIALS

A Junior Suite Experience package for two persons includes a helicopter ride from Nice, VIP hotel transfer, full breakfasts and unlimited wi-fi access. From €980 (\$1440) a night, taxes included, minimum three-night stay in August and September. Seasonal specials also available from Leading Hotels of the World. More: metropole.com; lhw.com.