

GOLDEN GLOW

ON THE CÔTE D'AZUR, PLAYGROUND OF THE RICH AND FAMOUS, VISITORS ARE SPOILT FOR CHOICE BETWEEN STORIED HOTELS, RESTAURANTS AND BEACHES, WRITES **KENDALL HILL**.



“Let me tell you about the very rich. They are different from you and me.” F. Scott Fitzgerald’s words never rang truer than on the Côte d’Azur, the carefree Mediterranean coastline shared by France, Monaco and the world’s ruling classes.

The multimillion-euro villas that command its capes and sunlit slopes are home to the most recognisable names of our times – Bono and Elton John, Paul Allen and Bill Gates, and King Salman of Saudi Arabia, whose seafront palace at Vallauris basks behind a boom gate and high walls on busy Avenue des Frères Roustan. (Local authorities obligingly close the beach below when His Highness is in residence, figuring the economic boost from a cashed-up royal entourage of 1000 Saudis is more valuable than locals’ right to sunbathe.)

The unmistakable lure of money, power and celebrity has attracted the aspirational castes to the Riviera since former English chancellor Lord Brougham built the first villa at Cannes in the 1830s. But what soon becomes clear to visitors, no matter how high their hopes, is that unless they are rock or real royalty – or a Russian oligarch – they will never breach the Côte d’Azur’s inner circle.

While money won’t buy you access to the Riviera elite, it most certainly will buy you happiness. From Cannes to Monte Carlo there are storied hotels whose sole purpose is to pamper your inner aristocrat, starred restaurants to seduce the most discerning appetites, and private beach clubs offering the full VIP treatment for those with enough ballast in the bank balance.

Whether arriving by commercial airline or private jet, you’ll disembark at Nice, a promised land of sunshine and balmy breezes perfumed with pine and wild herbs.

Head first to Cannes, the smallest of the Riviera’s prestige *plages*. Its population is just 75,000, but there are some 120 hotels and more than 300 restaurants catering to both the leisured classes and the convention crowds who descend year-round.

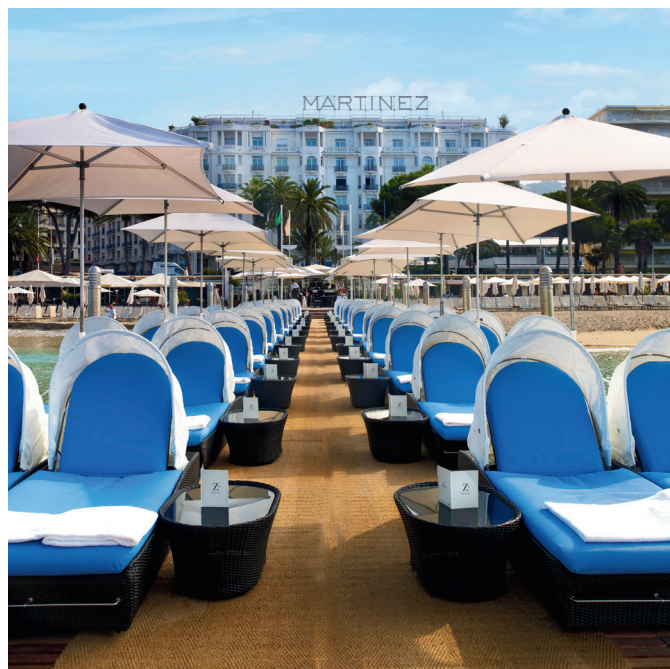
The next best thing to a private villa is a suite at the Grand Hyatt Cannes Hôtel Martinez, Cannes’ largest hotel and the inn of choice for Jessica Chastain and Will Smith during this year’s film festival.

Its vast seventh-floor penthouse spans 1670 square metres and includes an extravagant terrace with 200-year-old potted olives and sparkling panoramas of La Croisette, the seafront boulevard. But even standard rooms shine after a 2017 makeover by designer Pierre-Yves Rochon that continues until next summer. The hotel’s art deco styling is enhanced with cheering marine blues and sunny yellows.

As Cannes’ only two-starred restaurant, La Palme D’Or at the Martinez promises the odd celebrity sighting, a dreamy terrace above the bay and chef Christian Sinicropi’s winning ways with spider crab and wild Atlantic turbot cooked on the bone.

The resort city’s largest private beach club, Zplage, is also, conveniently, attached to the

OPPOSITE PAGE: Port de Fontvieille in Monaco.
RIGHT: Cannes’ waterfront boulevard, La Croisette.
BELOW: Sunbeds on the exclusive Zplage pier at the Grand Hyatt Cannes Hôtel Martinez. BOTTOM RIGHT: Cobblestone village streets add to the fairy-tale atmosphere of the Côte d’Azur.



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hotel. Anyone fortunate enough to have a reservation can gather under its sea of white umbrellas and snack on ceviche and crisp calamari – perfect with a Provençal rosé and the sound of waves lapping metres away – but only hotel guests can book the coveted sunbeds lining Zplage’s privileged pier.

The Croisette’s other two addresses of note are the Carlton Hotel with its whimsical belle-époque facade and curving marble staircase – both listed monuments – and the Hotel Majestic Barrière.

The Carlton is one of the brightest stars in the Riviera firmament – this is where Grace Kelly first met Prince Rainier III in 1955, and Elizabeth Taylor holed up here with each one of her husbands – but its rooms could use a refresh and will no doubt get one now that the Martinez has been restored to gleaming art deco glory. At the Majestic, the pick of the accommodation are the two penthouse suites (one designed by Christian Dior) arranged inside the hotel’s East Dome.

When the Croisette’s constant parade of supercars and wannabe supermodels

palls, take a 20-minute ferry to the Lérins Islands, officially part of Cannes city but a world apart. On Ile Saint-Marguerite, hike among the umbrella pines and birdsong to the royal fort, a 17th-century prison whose most famous inmate was the mysterious Man in the Iron Mask. Below lies La Guérite beach club, a favourite of the superyacht set. On nearby Ile Saint-Honorat, Cistercian monks tend to eight hectares of vines and offer wine tastings to day-tripping pilgrims.

A 30-minute drive east along the coast road (past King Salman’s pile) lies Antibes, home to an annual jazz festival, the fabulous Picasso Museum and Cap d’Antibes. Along with Roquebrune-Cap-Martin and Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, this pine-clad peninsula is one of the Riviera’s most exclusive pockets – all exorbitant villas and stately gardens behind high walls so reclusive Russians can sojourn in peace above the gilded shoreline known as Millionaire’s Bay. (Roman Abramovich is reputed to have two villas at Cap d’Antibes – one of them was once a sanctuary for the Duke of Windsor and Wallis Simpson – and >



sometimes has three mega-yachts moored in the bay to accommodate his retinue.)

The non-resident rich put up at Hôtel du Cap-Eden-Roc, a white citadel secluded among century-old Aleppo pines on the tip of the cape. Regulars swoon for its seafront cabanas, saltwater infinity pool and Sisley Spa. Besides its 118 rooms there are also two villas in the extensive grounds, Villa Les Cèdres and Villa Elena, the latter with its own pool.

Swim at La Garoupe Beach, immortalised in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* (he and Zelda were once regulars here), and be seen at the très chic Plage Keller. But please, no selfies – they're banned on the beach to maintain standards of decorum.

Some special restaurants to note in the black book: the two-star Mirazur, in fashionable Menton, occupies a 1930s rotunda beside the sea and the Italian

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TOP: The fashionable Riviera resort town of Menton. ABOVE: Fine dining at Alain Ducasse's three-Michelin-starred Le Louis XV restaurant in Monaco. LEFT: The Monte Carlo Casino.

border. It is ranked fourth in the World's 50 Best Restaurants list, thanks to the talents of Argentine chef Mauro Colagreco, a protégé of the Alains Passard and Ducasse. Try his anchovy fillets served on their fried bones and doused in Menton lemon juice.

In the medieval village of Eze, La Chèvre D'Or is a fairy-tale hotel of terraces with magnificent Med views and a two-starred restaurant. A lazy al fresco lunch here, grazing on artichokes with Oscietra caviar and €100 (\$150) bouillabaisse, is the stuff of dreams.

In Nice, starred chef Jan Hendrik van der Westhuizen marries Mediterranean fare with staples from his native South Africa at Jan.

In the late 19th century, the undisputed queen of Nice was Victoria Regina, a regular visitor who rhapsodised about the "paradise of nature" that is the south of France. Today the reigning queen is the Hôtel Negresco, a belle-époque confection of frolicking angels, bellboys in breeches and plumed postilion hats, and a 16,800-piece Baccarat crystal chandelier (one of only two in the world – the other is in the Kremlin).

It is a special address for many reasons, not least the fact it is still privately owned and run by the formidable Jeanne Augier: animal lover, arts lover and proprietor of one of the world's most singular hotels.

Madame Augier still lives in-house and her guests, who include everyone who's anyone, stay in 124 unique rooms and suites decorated with more than 6000 artworks, marbles and tapestries dating from the 15th century to today. At signature restaurant Le Chantecler, Nice's only two-star establishment, diners gather among the Corinthian columns, 18th-century oak panelling and hot pink tablecloths to savour chef Jean-Denis Rieubland's veal sweetbreads with chorizo.

The exuberant interior of the hotel's Brasserie La Rotonde combines a carnival carousel with prancing horses beneath a striped circus ceiling, while Le Relais Bar's 17th-century tapestries and leafy views of neighbouring Massena Palace are more suited to champagne cocktails and a little Gironde caviar on the side.

Further down the seven-kilometre Promenade des Anglais, Le Méridien lacks the outrageous class of the Negresco but does have enticing sea-facing balconies and a smart roof terrace for sunset cocktails and blessed visions of the Bay of Angels and La Colline du Château, the ancient citadel.

From Nice aerodrome it's a seven-minute airlift to Monaco. The smart set fly with Monacair, the Casiraghi family's luxury helicopter service. Keen royalists will recall the late Stefano Casiraghi was Princess Caroline's second husband but the family's royal ties extend to commerce, too – since 1999, Monacair has been the official carrier of the princely family and the government of Monaco. Passengers are torn between admiring the cream leather armchairs and alligator-hide wall panels inside the helicopters and gawking at the scalloped shoreline, the chiselled peaks of the Estérel Massif and blue



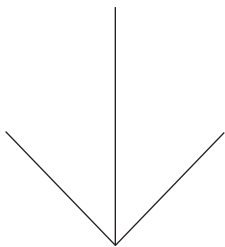
sherbet swirls of the Mediterranean below.

Waiting limousines transport passengers to their chosen destination. Ordinarily that should be the magnificent Hôtel de Paris, the famous landmark that, along with the Monte Carlo Casino, first put this rocky peninsula on the radar of the idle rich.

But, like many great dames here, she is having a comprehensive face lift (scheduled to be complete in 2018), so direct the driver instead to the more intimate Monte-Carlo Beach, a 40-room sanctuary sequestered from the madding crowd. With its breezy cabanas, Olympic saltwater pool and organic fare at the Michelin-starred Elsa restaurant, it feels more like a (very) private club than a public hotel.

Have the concierge make two reservations, both at the Hôtel de Paris. Some of its rooms may be out of service, but the restaurants are most certainly open because Monaco would not be Monaco without Le Louis XV.

Alain Ducasse's showpiece restaurant, the first ever awarded three stars by the Michelin guide, is breathtaking in its attention to detail, from handpicked tableware pieces by Carlo



ABOVE, FROM LEFT: Deluxe sea view room at Hôtel Negresco; the Nice hotel is a belle-époque charmer.

Alessi and Cristallerie Royale de Champagne, to the Jean Mus-designed gardens. A scented table here on a summer's evening, dining on classic Provence vegetables with black truffle and shellfish sourced from the waters below, and with one of the planet's largest private cellars at your disposal (more than 400,000 bottles, including a handful of 1929 Chateau Margaux, according to head sommelier Patrice Franck), is one of those close-to-heaven moments.

Another of those moments awaits on the hotel's eighth floor at Le Grill, where walls of glass, luminous balconies and a retractable roof give diners the sensation of floating on air above the richest little city on Earth.

Bask in the sun-drenched glamour, order anything from the wood-fired grill (Aristotle Onassis had it installed for his barbecue-loving lover, Maria Callas) and treasure the glittering prize of the principality below.

Surely the very rich can't be all that different from you and me. ☒

Kendall Hill travelled as a guest of Qatar Airways, Côte d'Azur Tourism and Visit Monaco.

FLY IN STYLE

Given Qataris own the landmark Martinez and Carlton hotels in Cannes, their national carrier seems a natural fit for a Côte d'Azur escape. But for Australians the more compelling argument is one of convenience: Qatar Airways flies non-stop to Doha from Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, Adelaide and, from 2018, Canberra, with direct onward connections to Nice.

Qatar was named airline of the year in the 2017 Skytrax survey of almost 20 million frequent flyers, and its A380 business-class cabin provides ample evidence why. The indulgence of a cocktail lounge at 37,000 feet always steals headlines, but it's the less showy moments that impress most: the window seats angled for maximum cloud action, enough seat-side storage to stow a small child, the anything's-possible service, the "dine on demand" menu (the smoky, complex chicken biryani is hands-down the best airline meal I've eaten all year).

At Doha's Hamad International Airport, the Al Mourjan business-class lounge offers a hectare of hangout space cleverly configured into discrete zones. The mezzanine-level restaurant has a persuasive selection of self-serve dishes but also caters to individual appetites with, for example, a plate of Norwegian smoked salmon or pasta à la minute.

On the main floor, passengers can power nap in quiet zones, freshen up in stone-lined showers (be quick – there are 20 showers for the 1000-seat lounge), host a small conference, eat healthily at The Deli, pray, watch TV or test their track skills on a Formula 1 simulator. On the downside, you will, eventually, have to leave. qatarairways.com **KH**