



Fame and Fantasy: A Riviera Weekend



Find out why this quick getaway is the choice of the rich and famous

Discovered by aristocrats, revelled in by royals and gilded by movie stars; the Riviera is a place where centuries of sophisticated travellers have dipped their toes in the Mediterranean. If you've business to attend to in London, Rome, Paris or any other European city, a weekend stop-over gives you time to leave your shoes on the quayside and find out why so many of the rich and famous have been drawn to its charms.

You can leave the office after the day's business on Friday and be boarding your yacht later that evening. Nice airport is within a 1½ hour flight of most European cities and the major carriers fly frequent and convenient timetables. Last September we had six guests aboard our sailing yacht *DreamCatcher*, two of which flew in from London, one from LA, two from Amsterdam and one from Geneva!

Whether you're sailing or motoring and no matter what the size, a yacht is most definitely the way to see the Riviera. Ashore the roads can often be busy (especially in mid-summer), parking impossible and travelling time-consuming but a private yacht gives you the freedom to reach the most beautiful places whilst topping up your tan and relaxing with a cold drink. You'll also feel much more of a sense of participating in Riviera life, rather than merely spectating. However, the coast's reputation for style and gracious living may be legendary but, like anywhere else, you need to know where to look and a knowledgeable crew can help ensure you don't miss out.

On arrival at Nice it's a brief, twenty minute taxi ride to board your yacht at Antibes, the largest yacht harbour in Europe and an ancient city still with the remains of its ramparts and fortifications. Used as a trading port by the Greeks then the Romans, it was the wild and secluded *Cap* (headland) that first began to attract wealthy foreigners at the beginning of the 20th Century. Luxurious villas were soon built to accommodate European royalty whilst neighbouring Juan-Les Pins was becoming a fashionable resort frequented by the likes of Rudolph Valentino, Picasso and Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. The Cap d'Antibes rapidly became something of a party destination with the Fitzgeralds in particular renowned for their outrageous and often eccentric behaviour; the police had to intervene on one occasion to prevent Fitzgerald and his drinking partner Charlie MacArthur from sawing a barman in half in order to settle an argument!



One of the great strengths of the Riviera is its extensive programme of events. A huge variety of concerts and performances take place throughout the year and the Cap d'Antibes is particularly noteworthy for the Juan Les Pins International Jazz festival. Since 1960 many famous names such as Louis Armstrong, Ray Charles and Ella Fitzgerald have appeared and each year the list of performers sparkles with both new and established talent from around the world. If you're a jazz fan, the time to come is mid-July.

On Saturday morning you can take a leisurely start to the day before sailing across the Bay of Angels and around one of the world's most exclusive pieces of real estate - Cap Ferrat. The pretty little town of St Jean lies on the Eastern side of the Cap. It was once a major fishing port and one corner of the marina is still crowded with brightly painted fishing boats like a shoal of tiny tropical fish alongside the sleek yachts. The calm bay is ideal for a refreshing swim before lunch. Here, the view ashore from a yacht is truly magnificent; velvet green gardens, sculptural umbrella pines with their contorted silver grey trunks, gracious palms and neatly manicured cypresses standing guard against the pristine blue sky. Elegant villas peep from behind the lush landscape dropping hints about the luxury within and colourful climbing plants tumble over private terraces and steep cliffs towards the sea. If you wanted to shoot a movie about the *Belle Epoque*, this is your location.

It's well worth a trip ashore to visit the Villa Ephrussi. This pastel coloured palazzo was built in 1905 by Baroness Ephrussi de Rothschild. Married to a wealthy banker, she devoted her considerable fortune to building sumptuous residences and amassing a huge collection of priceless *objets d'art* and paintings. At Cap Ferrat she also commissioned the design of seven gardens, each inspired by her travels. Go in the late

◀ **Villefranche-sur-Mer** (opposite page)
One of the deepest and easiest anchorages to defend on the Riviera, protected by its very imposing citadel built in 1557 by the Duke of Savoy



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About the Writers

Michelle Blore and Alan Oliver both quit successful careers in London to move to the French Riviera. They now run Dream Sailing (www.dreamsailing.co.uk), a yacht brokerage specialising in luxury crewed yachts, including their own 55ft sailing yacht, *DreamCatcher* of London. alanandmichelle@dreamsailing.co.uk

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afternoon when it's quieter and stroll along the narrow paths which meander about the hillside. Each corner you turn offers another spectacular coastal vista, framed by clever planting and graced here and there by a statue or a stone pillar. There are terraces, fountains and pools, with everything on a scale that gives it the feeling of a very private piece of paradise.

Afterwards, a gentle cruise takes you back around to the Western side of the Cap to one of the most famous harbours on the coast - the *Rade de Villefranche*. The marina is a short walk from the town centre so it's more convenient to anchor in front of the quayside. Here, you can dine in privacy but you won't miss out on any of the lively atmosphere.

Villefranche-sur-Mer is one of the deepest and easiest anchorages to defend on the Riviera, protected by its very imposing citadel built in 1557 by the Duke of Savoy. At that time it was not part of France but the Kingdom of Piémont

flickering candlelight made the good people of Villefranche quicken their step.

On a Sunday morning in Villefranche you'll awaken to discover that a treasure chest has been opened on the quayside. Take a browse around the '*brocante*' or flea market before you leave. The tables are spread with all manner of antiques and novelties, some of value and others not. It's a great way to find an unusual souvenir of your visit and an entertaining experience, even if you don't see anything that takes your fancy.

From Villefranche, we sail towards the *Cap d'Ail*, or Garlic Cape, under the towering cliffs where high above us the medieval village of Eze clings impossibly to the rock face. Believed to have been originally established by the Phoenicians and later occupied by the Romans, Eze is a must for a visit later in the evening.

The Cap d'Ail is again dotted with beautiful villas, including one once owned by Greta Garbo. We're heading for a spot known as Mala Plage, a



Citadel built in 1557 by the Duke of Savoy



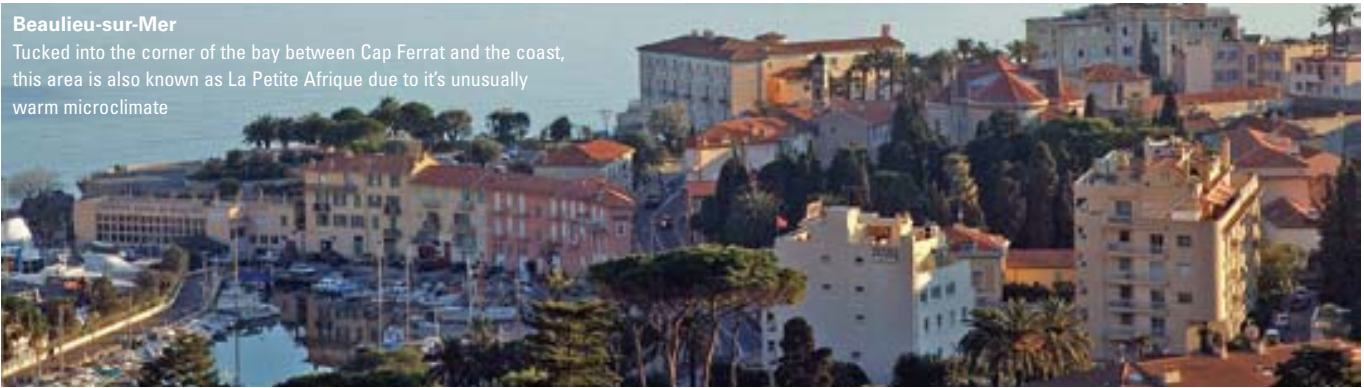
which included Nice and a large part of the Alpes Maritimes stretching North East to Turin. In the 17th and 18th centuries the British anchored their naval ships here so that they could defend their trading interests in Nice from a safe haven. The town has also played host to the Russian and American fleets and would often be virtually taken over by the crews of whichever warships were occupying the harbour. Still intact, it has a unique character and the narrow streets rising steeply from the quayside include one which is completely covered – described by author William Sansom as “...truly a tunnel, a good place for a knifing, and nicely called the Rue Obscure.” It's quite safe today of course but it's easy to imagine a time when the shadows cast by

quiet anchorage in a true Mediterranean grotto. Here the charming beach can only be reached on the land side via a long flight of steep steps and so, as always, the best way to visit is by yacht. Perfect for lunch either on board or at the beach restaurant (their launch will collect you from your yacht), the cove offers you the novelty of being able to swim into caves underneath the steep cliffs.

At the end of an afternoon of swimming and sunbathing, or indulging in some more energetic water sports such as water skiing, there's nothing better than sailing lazily back to port with a brightly coloured spinnaker full of the evening breeze overhead. All on board have cast off their cares and relaxed, the air is soft and

Beaulieu-sur-Mer

Tucked into the corner of the bay between Cap Ferrat and the coast, this area is also known as La Petite Afrique due to its unusually warm microclimate



warm and voices muted. On a Sunday evening in late September spare a thought for those in more northerly climates, donning their winter hats and gloves before venturing outdoors.

Now you're beginning to understand why this part of Europe has been the summer and winter playground of choice for the aristocracy, movie stars and wealthy individuals since the 17th century. This evening we're heading for another of their favourite neighbourhoods – Beaulieu-sur-Mer. Tucked into the corner of the bay between Cap Ferrat and the coast, this area is also known as La Petite Afrique due to its unusually warm microclimate. The first luxurious villas were built by the Romans and during the *Belle Epoque*, Beaulieu accommodated some of the most celebrated royals and aristocrats of the era. American visitors were first led here by Gordon Bennet, founder of the New York Herald Tribune and, famously, the man who commissioned Stanley to go in search of Livingstone. The legendary hotel 'La Reserve de Beaulieu' has a sparkling guest list including Bob Hope, Charlie Chaplin, Frank Sinatra, Clark Gable, Yul Brynner, Lauren Bacall and Elizabeth Taylor amongst others.

Beaulieu has preserved its calm and refined atmosphere and has a beautiful seafront lined with palms and luxuriant gardens with the mountains hung as a backdrop. Take a look around La

Chapelle Sancta Maria de Olivio where local artists exhibit their work but leave yourself time to change and leave early for dinner.

It would be difficult to create a more theatrical portrayal of a medieval village than Eze but it really is the genuine article. Dining at the Village's famous Chateau de la Chevre d'Or is an experience as much as a gastronomic event and the Chateau Eza provides a lesser known alternative in just as stunning a location. But before you rush to the table, allow yourself about an hour or so to dawdle about the alleyways in Eze and climb up to the very summit of the village. A network of paths curls around the hilltop between the stone houses that look as if they grew out of the rock. There are blind alleys hung with iron lanterns, tiny shops with swinging signs and remember to take a peep inside the church; it's beautifully painted and gently crumbling interior glows in the candlelight – for a small donation you can choose your own candle to light if you wish.

The views will make your pulse quicken. Climb right to the top of the exotic gardens amidst the ruins of the 12th century castle which crowns the village; it's sometimes possible to see as far as Corsica. There's no more appropriate place to watch the sunset over the Riviera at the end of a weekend that we're sure will take its place amongst your favourite memories. ☺



'Brocante' or Flea Market ▲

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Information

DreamCatcher of London charters from \$9,936 per week in the Mediterranean, for up to six people. In the winter, she is available for charter in the BVIs. Contact: Dream Sailing, info@dreamsailing.co.uk or www.dreamsailing.co.uk

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