

The Three Corniches: Menton to Nice

Just west of Italy begins that 20km swath of Mediterranean hyperbole that represents the favourite image of the French Riviera, where the landscapes are at their most vertical and citrus fruits flourish against a backdrop of snow-topped Alps.

Menton, famous for lemons, is a perfect little sun-trap, rivalled only by Beaulieu a bit further along, the only place in France where bananas ripen naturally. Superb villas and gardens that once belonged to dukes and kings are scattered along the shores of St-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, Roquebrune and Cap Martin. High in the mountains hang spectacular medieval villages, including La Turbie, where the Romans erected a 'trophy' to celebrate their final victory over the Ligurian tribes who until then had effectively kept the Empire from the sweet delights of Provence.



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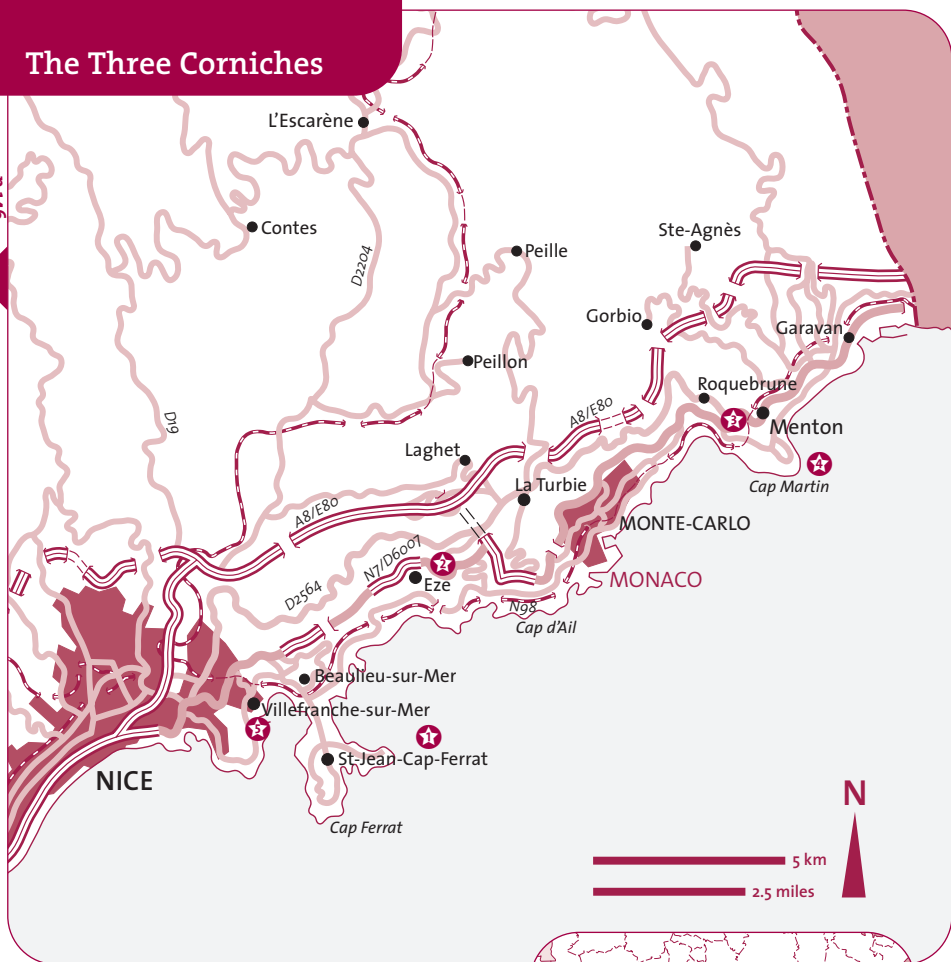
Don't miss

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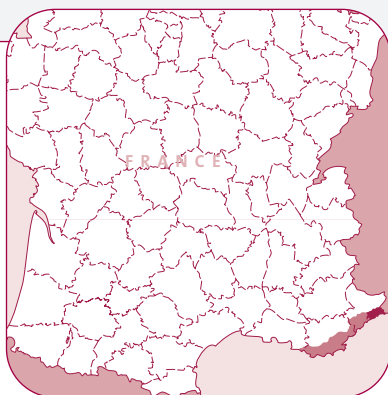
The Three Corniches

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Don't miss

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*A calcined,
scalped, rasped,
scraped, flayed,
broiled, powdered,
leprous, blotched,
mangy, grimy,
parboiled country,
without trees,
water, grass, fields
– blank, beastly,
senseless olives
and orange-trees
like a mad
cabbage gone
indigestible.*

Swinburne

Although first tamed by the Romans, this easternmost and tastiest morsel of the Côte d'Azur long remained a world apart, ruled until the mid-19th century by the Grimaldis of Monaco, and noted above all for its lemons and poverty. Bad relations with the French over Napoleon brought the first English and Russians, with their titles and weak lungs, to winter here, just outside France, in spite of the difficult roads. They built hotels, villas and casinos in the grand, fulsome, rococo-spa style of the period, and to this day the spirit lingers, a slightly musty violet perfume in a semi-tropical climate. Ian Fleming summed up the bygone spirit in writing about the fate of Monaco, where high class has gone high-rise: 'Part of the trouble with the Monte-Carlo rooms is that they were built in an age of elegance for elegant people, and the gambling nowadays has the drabness of a Strauss operetta played in modern dress... what used to be a pastime has now become a rather deadly business of amassing tax-free capital gains.'

Even if most of the old glamour has faded, the scenery is as breathtaking as ever, one mighty mountain after another plummeting into the sea, traced by hairpinning corniche roads that zigzag on ledges over vertiginous drops. Here, Continental hormones traditionally go into overdrive as the rich and famous in dark glasses and sporty convertibles race down to 'Monte', although not so much to gamble these days as to visit their bank managers. And the only racing that really happens is the Monaco Grand Prix; the traffic is nearly always slow – a fact that doesn't prevent some would-be James Bonds from contributing to an appalling accident rate. The worst traffic jams inch along the lowest road, the **Basse Corniche** (N98/D6098), through the seaside resorts; most of the frequent buses that ply the coast use this road, which runs parallel to the railway. To relieve the traffic, already choking in the 1920s, the most dramatic of the roads, the **Moyenne Corniche** (N7), was drilled through the rock and hung sheerly through the hills, making it the favourite for car-chase scenes. Higher up, along the route of the Roman Via Aurelia (also called Via Julia Appia), Napoleon built the **Grande Corniche** (D2564), with the most panoramic views of all.

Menton

The Côte d'Azur starts halfway between the fleshpots of Paris and Rome, at Menton, right on the Italian frontier. Its history starts here as well, with the earliest traces of Riviera humans – folk who a million years ago already had the good sense to settle where a wall of mountains, still crowned with snow in April, blocks out the cold so that lemon trees can blossom all year.

Beaches from Menton to Nice

The beaches of the eastern Riviera are not renowned for their beauty. The shore is rocky – beaches are shingle, or in some cases artificial pebble. But lack of sand is more than compensated for by the spectacular settings of many beaches, backed by 650ft cliffs, palm trees and some of the world's most expensive real estate. Nonetheless, prepare to be underwhelmed by the tiny sandpits that characterize many of the 'private beaches'.

The **best beaches** in this eastern strip are:

Monaco: chic and sharp; safe swimming.

Beaulieu (Plage des Fourmis): backed by palms, with a view across to Cap Ferrat.

Villefranche-sur-Mer: the trendiest beach in the region, and also one of the best for kids as it's shallow, right by the train station and has very fine shingle that is almost sand.

St-Jean-Cap-Ferrat (Plage du Passable): popular, sloping beach with views to Villefranche.

Despite this early start, the Menton area wasn't inhabited again until the 10th century, when settlers clustered around the Annonciade hill, where they felt safe from Saracen pirates. The town first belonged to the counts of Ventimiglia – little better than pirates themselves – then briefly joined Provence before it was sold to Charles Grimaldi of Monaco in 1346.

The Grimaldis became rich from taxing Menton's citrus fruit and continued to enjoy the fruits of this wealth until 1848, when the town and its neighbour, Roquebrune, declared their independence. Unlike most of the revolts in Europe that fateful year, this puny one succeeded, and the Free Towns of Menton and Roquebrune endured until 1861, when the people voted to unite with France, and Charles III of Monaco sold his claim on the towns to Napoléon III for four million gold francs.

The following year, one Dr J. Henry Bennet wrote *Menton and the Riviera as a Winter Climate*, a book that soon attracted a community of 5,000 Brits to the town, led by Queen Victoria herself in 1883 – her bust glowers regally from a fountain tiled like a municipal swimming pool on the Quai Bonaparte. During the Second World War the Germans wrecked Menton's port and, when they were chased out, lobbed bombs on to it from the Italian side of the border. The damage wasn't repaired until 1956.

Nattering nabobs of negativism claim that Menton has a poor beach and as much atmosphere as your grandmother's anti-macassar, a town where 30 per cent of the population are retirees (the highest percentage in France) and most of the rest are poodles. Yet Menton is magnificently situated, sprinkled with some of the coast's finest gardens, and has a healthy attitude to relaxation compared with the hardened glamour-pusses to the west. A recent influx of families and young people, mainly from nearby Italy, has begun to liven up the beaches and main streets.

Jean Cocteau, Love, and Lemons

Menton is squeezed between the mountains and a pair of

Getting to and around Menton

By Train

TER (St-Raphaël–Ventimiglia), www.ter-sncf.com, and all other Nice–Italy trains, stop in Menton (Menton-Centre), Rue de la Gare. There's another station – Menton-Garavan – behind the port. SNCF, t 0891 70 3000 (€0.23 a minute).

By Bus and Taxi

Buses (nos. 100, 110) from Nice (via Roquebrune-Cap-Martin and Monte-Carlo) arrive frequently (usually every 15 mins) at the **gare routière** on Esplanade du Careï, northeast of the train station. Tickets from Monte-Carlo with the SETAM and RCA (www.rca.tm.fr) bus companies, t 04 9385 6444, are valid on both. Other bus services go to Ventimiglia, Castillon and Sospel and to Ste-Agnès, Gorbio and Castellar, often in *navettes* (minibuses).

All local Menton bus lines pass by Esplanade du Careï.

There is a taxi rank outside the Menton-Centre SNCF station, or call t 0820 90 89 80.

shingle-beached bays: the **Baie de Garavan**, on the Italian side, where villas and gardens overlook the yacht harbour, and the **Baie du Soleil** (the Roman *Pacis Sinus* or Gulf of Peace), stretching 3km west to Cap Martin.

In between these two bays stands a little 17th-century harbour bastion looking out to sea that Jean Cocteau converted into the **Musée Cocteau** in the late 1950s, and which is decorated with grey and white mosaics made from seaside pebbles. The hallway is dominated by an enormous bloodthirsty tapestry, Cocteau's first, *Judith et Holoferne*, in which Judith seduces Holofernes, general of the enemy forces, in order to save her city, and then decapitates him in his sleep and slinks out looking vicious. Niches on the upper level, each with their own pebble-mosaic floor and a Cocteau-designed display case, hold the playful *Animaux fantastiques*, which Cocteau created in a burst of admiration for the colourful ceramics that Picasso was making in Vallauris in the late 1950s. Picasso's work also inspired the series of coloured pencil drawings, *Les Innamorati*, portraying the happier love affairs of the Mentonnais.

This theme of Menton's lovers was first explored by Cocteau in his decorations for the 1957 **Salle des Mariages**, in the Hôtel de Ville, five minutes' walk northwest on Rue de la République. At the entrance, gilt mirrors are painted with a blowsy *Marianne*, symbol of the Republic, who French law insists makes it to every French wedding. The interior resembles a louche nightclub: carpeted with leopard-skin, upholstered with plush red velvet and lit with sinuous tulip-shaped lamps. A lemon-picker weds a fisherman amid rather discouraging mythological allusions: on the right wall there's a wedding party in Saracen costume, referring to the Mentonnais' Saracen blood, although among the company we see the bride's frowning mother, the groom's jilted girlfriend and her armed brother. The other wall shows Orpheus turning back to see

Musée Cocteau

t 04 93 57 72 30;
open 10–12 and 2–6;
closed Tues;
adm

★ Salle des Mariages

t 04 92 10 50 00;
open 8.30–12.30 and
2–5; closed Sat
and Sun; adm

if his beloved Eurydice is following him out of Hell, and thereby condemning her to return there forever, while, on the ceiling, Love, Poetry (on Pegasus) and Science (juggling planets) look on.

Menton will soon have even more Cocteau. Severin Wunderman (1938–2008), watch-maker, art-collector and philanthropist, made just one request when he decided to bequeath 1,525 masterpieces by Cocteau to the city of Menton: that construction should begin on a new museum building before the end of 2008. A day later, and the deal was off. Menton managed to break ground just in time: the foundation stone of the new museum was laid on 28 December 2008, and is due to be open to the public in 2010.

Like Cocteau, the original Riviera inhabitants were very interested in love, and in Cro-Magnon times sculpted the little Venuses now housed in the **Musée de la Préhistoire Régionale**, a couple of blocks north on Rue Loredan Larchey. An earnest series of dioramas re-creates the area's cave interiors from the time when the furry animals people lived alongside were mammoths rather than poodles, but the star exhibit is the 30,000-year-old skeleton of Menton Man (found just over the border in Grimaldi), buried in a bonnet of seashells and deer teeth long since calcified into the bone; note, too, rock carvings from the Vallée des Merveilles, high above Menton in the Roya valley of the Alpes-Maritimes.

The 1909 **Palais de l'Europe**, west of the Salle des Mariages, on Avenue Boyer, was once the casino, but is now an exhibition hall and the tourist office. In front of it is the exotic **Jardins Biovès**, the most tidied, kempt, combed and swept bit of green space you're ever likely to come across, where the elderly sit in the sunshine dressed in beige and grey to match their poodles, watching life pass by. Here the fantastical lemon-studded floats of Menton's *Fête du Citron* are parked at Carnival time.

A kilometre west of the town centre, the faded pink and white summer home of the princes of Monaco, the Palais Carnolès (1717) at 3 Av de la Madone is now an art museum, the **Musée des Beaux-Arts du Palais Carnolès**. It holds a Byzantine-inspired *Virgin and Child* from 13th-century Tuscany, Ludovico Brea's luminous *Madonna and Child with St Francis*, several oils attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, and all the previous winners from Menton's very own Biennale of painting, some of which are so awful that you can only wonder what the losers were like. Other works were donated by the English landscape and portrait artist Graham Sutherland, who lived part of every year in Menton from 1947 until he died in 1980. In the grounds, a piercingly fragrant citrus fruit orchard (try to make it in the spring) doubles up as a contemporary sculpture garden; among the mixed bag of 40 pieces are Max Siffredi's languorous *Aegina* and Guy Fage's dreamy marble *Rêverie*.

Musée de la Préhistoire Régionale

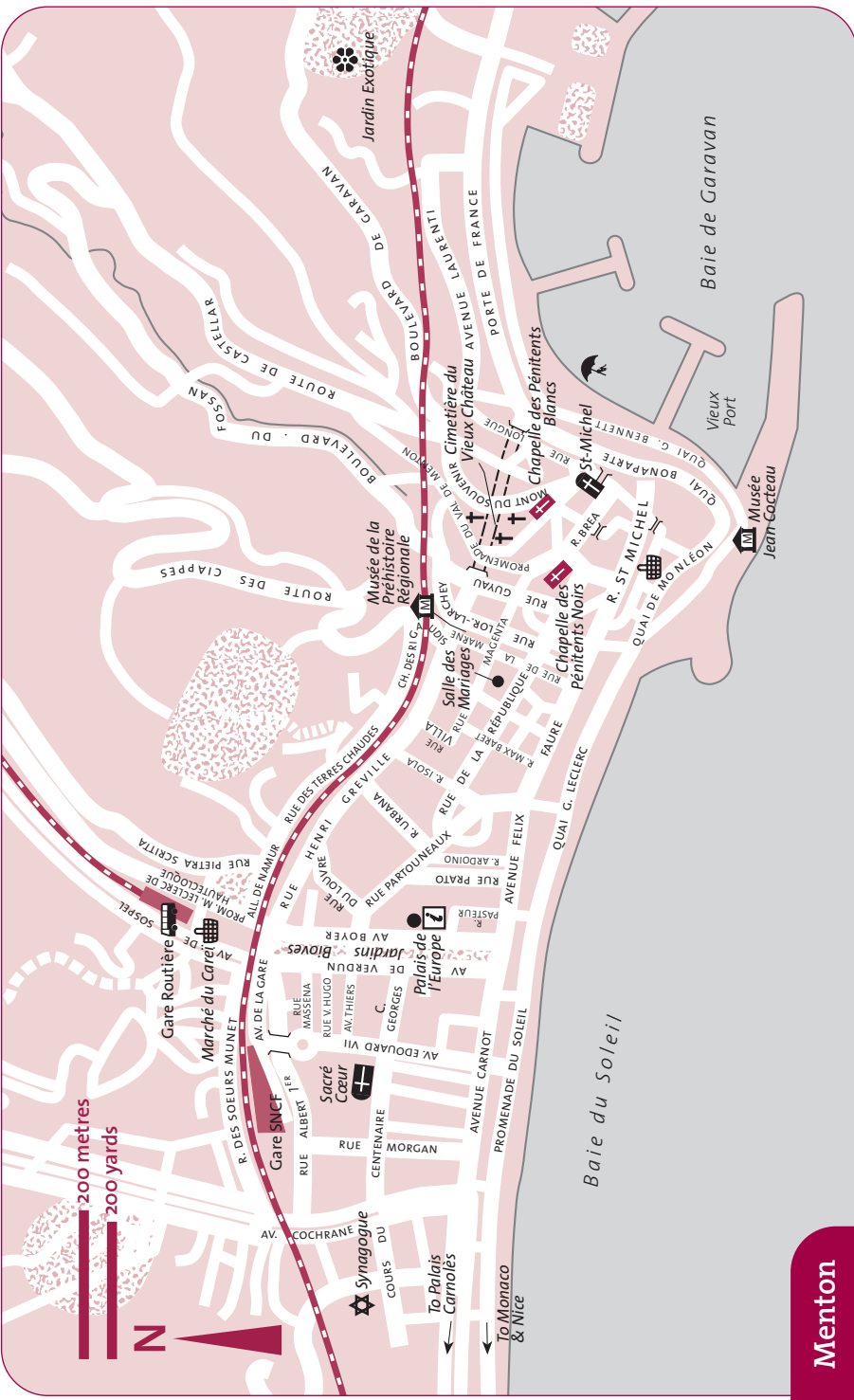
t 04 93 35 84 64;
open 10–12 and 2–6;
closed Tues

Palais de l'Europe exhibition hall

open Wed–Mon 10–12
and 2–6; closed Tues

Musée des Beaux-Arts du Palais Carnolès

t 04 93 35 49 71, buses 3
and 7; open
Wed–Mon 10–12 and
2–6; closed Tues; free



200 metres
200 yards



Jardin de la Serre de la Madone

t 04 93 57 73 90,
www.serredelamadone.com; open April–Oct
Tues–Sun 10–6;
Dec–Mar Tues–Sun
10–5; closed Mon and
Nov; guided tours in
French daily at 3pm,
ring for details of tours
in other languages;
adm

Just north of here, on the route to Gorbio, is one of Menton's most romantic gardens. The **Jardin de la Serre de la Madone** covers 15 hectares with spectacular terraces. Grottoes and nymphs sprouting from ponds with fronds of trailing ivy lend an air of enchantment and secrecy. The garden was created between 1919 and 1939 by Sir Lawrence Johnstone, another of the fervent English botanists who seemed to overrun this corner of the world in the early part of the 20th century; he was also responsible for the famous English garden at Hidcote Manor.

The Vieille Ville

The tall, narrow 17th-century houses of Menton's Vieille Ville, overlooking the **Vieux Port** east of the Musée Cocteau, are reminiscent of the old quarter of Genoa, knitted together by anti-earthquake arches that span stepped lanes named after old pirate captains and saints. It's hard to believe that the quiet main street, **Rue Longue** (the Roman Via Julia Augusta), was until the 19th century the main route between France and Italy. According to legend, the lady at the Palais Princier (at No.123) received a secret nocturnal visit from Casanova, who crept in through the sewers.

From Rue Longue, the shallow stairs of the Ramps St-Michel lead up to the *parvis* of the ice-cream-coloured church of **St-Michel** (1675), the largest and one of the most ornate Baroque churches of the region, decked out and made fit for the princes of Monaco by two Mentonnais artists, Puppo and Vento. A gloomy late-17th-century painting depicts Sainte Dévote looking suitably martyrish in front of the Rock of Monaco. Honoré III of Monaco tied the knot in the church in 1757 and presented the damask hangings, which are still brought out on special occasions, as a celebratory gift. St-Michel's Baroque neighbour, the pert little **Chapelle des Pénitents Blancs**, was headquarters of one of the old Riviera's many religious confraternities (see 'Nice', p.123), and was feverishly restored in the 19th century with elaborate festooning and stucco. The three Theological Virtues glower uneasily among all the frills. The *parvis* (square in front of the church) has a pebble mosaic of the Grimaldi arms. It is used as the setting for Menton's megastar chamber music festival in August.

The **Montée du Souvenir** leads to the top of the Vieille Ville, where the citadel was replaced in the 19th century by the romantic, panoramic **Cimetière du Vieux Château**, windy and pine-scented. Curiously, it doesn't get an entry in the official tourism pamphlet (it is on map), but is just a quick steep haul up from those sitting out their last years below; as if a foretaste of death, it's the one place in Menton where they can't bring their poodles. Guy de Maupassant called it 'the most aristocratic

Cimetière du Vieux Château

open summer
7am–8pm, winter 7–6

cemetery in Europe' – the venerable names inscribed on the hierarchical array of ornate tombs and little pavilions include William Webb-Ellis, the 'inventor of rugby', and a handful of Russian grand princes. Many immigrants, like Aubrey Beardsley, were consumptives in their teens and twenties and only came to Menton to die.

The Gardens of Garavan

From the cemetery, Boulevard de Garavan leads into the neighbourhood where this dead élite would reside if they were alive today, dotted with elegant villas amid some of the most beautiful gardens on the coast. The **Jardin Exotique du Val Rahmeh** was planted around the ivy-covered Villa Val Rahmeh by enthusiastic English botanists in the 1930s and has since been substantially expanded by the Natural History Museum in Paris. Now more than 700 tropical and subtropical species from around the world bloom contentedly on the garden's sloping terraces. Nearby, the drowsy **Parc du Pian**, an old olive orchard, is dotted with shady wooden benches perfect for afternoon siestas and secret assignations.

Beyond the gardens, a road off the boulevard, Avenue Blasco Ibañez, was named after the author of *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1867–1928), who lived here in the **Villa Fontana Rosa**. He decorated his fantastical **Jardin des Romanciers** with colourful *azulejo* tiles from his native Valencia in the 1920s in homage to the great storytellers. Brightly tiled columns, wide, shallow fountains and flower-covered walkways give way to outdoor 'reading rooms'.

Villa Isola Bella, on the other side of Garavan station, was the home of another victim of tuberculosis, Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923); although ailing, she was happy here, and fictionalized her experiences in a number of short stories.

To the north of Boulevard de Garavan, the romantic red-ochre villa and gardens of the **Domaine des Colombières** was the 40-year project of French artist and writer Ferdinand Bac (1859–1952), the flamboyant and indefatigable illegitimate son of Napoléon III. As well as designing the botanical gardens, with secret leafy passageways dotted with statues, ponds and fountains, he painted all the paintings and frescoes in the house himself and designed the elegant Modernist furniture.

Out almost at the town's eastern limits, on the Promenade Reine Astrid, the **Villa Maria Serena** is enclosed by another lush garden, this one devoted to an extensive collection of rare palm trees, soaking up the sunshine in what is reputedly the most temperate garden in France.

Jardin Exotique du Val Rahmeh

† 04 93 35 86 72; open April–Sept 10–12.30 and 3–6; Oct–Mar 10–12.30 and 2–5; closed Tues; adm; guided tours sometimes available (call Menton's heritage department, † 04 93 35 86 72)

Villa Fontana Rosa

Under restoration, but can be visited by guided tour only Mon and Fri 10am; €5

Domaine des Colombières

open for a very limited period in summer, contact the Maison du Patrimoine, † 04 93 35 86 72, for details

Villa Maria Serena

† 04 92 10 33 66; visits by guided tour only, Tues 10am

★ **Napoléon** >>

Tourist Information and Services in Menton

The **tourist office** has details of 'passports' with reduced entrance fees for local attractions.

Post office: On the corner of Cours George V and Rue Edouard VII, t 04 93 28 64 70.

Internet Access

Café des Arts, 16 Rue de la République, t 04 93 35 78 67.

Market Days in Menton

Tues–Sun am: food market at the Halles.

Sat am: Vieux Port (clothes, accessories).

Every am: Pont du Chemin de Fer du Careï.

Festivals in Menton

Fête du Citron, Feb–Mar: floats, processions, special entrance to the gardens.

Music Festival at Monastère de l'Annonciade, July–Aug at St-Michel. Call t 04 92 41 76 76 for information or t 04 92 41 76 95 for reservations. www.festivalmusiquementon.com.

Where to Stay in Menton

Menton ☒ 06500

All of the old grand hotels have been converted into flats, and no new ones have risen to take up the slack. If all below are full, you could try checking online at www.hotelmenton.com.

*****Hôtel Aiglou,** 7 Av de la Madone, t 04 93 57 55 55, www.hotelaiglou.net (€€€€–€€€). Tucked into a corner of the Parc de la Madone, this independent Belle Epoque hotel is light, stylish and very chic, with spindly antiques and high ceilings. By the pool there is a lovely arbour with wooden beams. *See also* 'Eating Out'.

******Napoléon,** 29 Porte de France, t 04 93 35 89 50, www.napoleon-menton.com (€€€€–€€). This is a delight; rooms are crisply furnished in shades of cream and coral, and those with a sea view have balconies. It has a pool, a restaurant, a private beach, and friendly, obliging staff. *Closed part of Nov.*

*****Royal Westminster,** 28 Av Félix Faure, t 04 93 28 69 69, www.vacancesbleues.com (€€€–€€). This upmarket chain hotel is aimed mostly at retirees; however, it is on the seafront, with quiet rooms furnished in cool sea colours, views over the bay, huddles of elderly ladies on the terrace playing poker, and a *pétanque* court on the gravel drive. It has a restaurant (€€) that is open daily. *Closed Nov.*

****Hôtel de Londres,** 15 Av Carnot, t 04 93 35 74 62, www.hotel-de-londres.com (€€€–€€). Nothing is too much trouble for this hotel's cheerful host, who will even lend you a cushioned mattress for the stony beach. Rooms are simple but attractive, with air-conditioning, and some overlook the shady, flower-filled garden with its little bar and games area. Has a restaurant. *Closed Nov–15 Jan; restaurant closed Mon eve and Wed.*

****Claridge's,** 39 Av de Verdun, t 04 93 35 72 53, www.claridges-menton.com (€€–€). A slightly old-fashioned, quiet hotel on the flowery, clipped Jardin Biovès, a good 10 minutes from the sea, but very near one of Menton's local food markets and the bus station.

***Hôtel Beaugard,** 10 Rue Albert I^{er}, t 04 93 28 63 63, beaugard.menton@wanadoo.fr (€). A sweet place with a quiet garden below the station, this is also a good bargain. Half board available, around €43 per person, rooms with or without bath. *Closed Nov.*

Auberge de Jeunesse, Plateau St-Michel, t 04 93 35 93 14, www.fuaj.org (€) Bus 6 from the station. *Closed Nov–Jan.*

① **Menton** >

Palais de l'Europe, 8 Av Boyer, t 04 92 41 76 76, tourisme@menton.fr, www.menton.fr; open mid-June–mid-Sept and Fête du Citron daily; mid-Sept–mid-June Mon–Sat and Sun am

Eating Out in Menton

Paris-Rome, 79 Porte de France, t 04 93 35 70 35, www.paris-rome.com (€€€€–€€). This is probably Menton's best restaurant, with a Michelin star to prove it. Dine on such elaborate delicacies as truffled scallops or roast venison, prepared by young super-chef, Yannick Fauries. It's located near the new port by the Italian border, a good 25-minute walk from the old town, but there are rooms available if you can't move after dinner. Splash out on the *menu gourmet découverte* if you can, but the lunch *formule* offers great value. *Closed Mon and Tues lunchtime.*

Le Nautic, 27 Quai de Monléon, t 04 93 35 78 74 (€€€). Between the market and the sea, opposite the Musée Cocteau, this bright blue eatery serves up every possible fish dish, including *bouillabaisse*. *Closed Mon.*

Le Riaumont, Hôtel Aiglou (see left). This hotel's restaurant (€€€) serves traditional regional cuisine overlooking its swimming pool in the summer. *Closed mid-Nov–mid-Dec.*

Pierrot-Pierrette, Place de l'Église, Route de Sospel, t 04 93 35 79 76 (€€€–€€). Up at Monti, this restaurant complements its views with delicious fresh blue trout. It also offers simple guest rooms. *Closed Mon, and December–mid-Jan.*

All along Rue St-Michel, in the old town, masses of restaurants vie for your attention, spilling out into the street at lunchtime with tempting displays of hot pastries and baguettes. Try the following:

A Braïjade Méridiounale, 66 Rue Longue, t 04 93 35 65 65, www.abraïjade.com (€€€–€€). Tucked away in the maze of alleyways near St-Michel, serving Provençal favourites. *Closed Wed, and mid-Nov–early Dec.*

Au Pistou, quai Gordon Bennett 9, t 04 93 57 45 89 (€€€–€€). One of the best places in town to try the typical Provençal dish *pistou*. Flavoured with

basil and olive oil, it is served here as soup or with the traditional accompaniment of tagliatelle noodles. They serve a reliable fixed price menu at lunchtimes.

Le Lido, 24 rue St Michel, t 04 93 35 71 07 (€€€–€). This deceptively simple restaurant and bar serves heaped platters of exotic shellfish, along with standard bar grub such as steak and chips. Very friendly and fairly priced.

Rikiki, 7 Square Victoria, t 04 93 28 27 88. (€€). Away from the fray, this atmospheric and popular place serves authentic Italian dishes. *Closed lunch, all day Tues, and Oct.*

Crêperie St-Michel, 5 Rue Piéta, t 04 93 28 44 64 (€). Tucked away off the main street. Cosy decor, including exposed stone walls and bright Provençal prints, make a pretty setting for this buzzy little crêperie. *Closed all day Mon, and Tues lunch, exc in July and Aug.*

Amandine, 24 Rue St-Michel, t 04 93 57 64 85 (€). A tempting array of nougat, sweets and all kinds of locally produced *confiserie* and *fruits confits*.

Entertainment and Nightlife in Menton

Menton isn't exactly a hopping place, but check the Menton page in *Nice-Matin* or the tourist office.

Clubs and Bars

The young head west to Monaco for nightlife; the **Casino** and its disco **Le Brummell** (t 04 92 10 16 16) are disdained as tourist ghettos.

Theatre

Théâtre Francis-Palmero, t 04 92 41 76 95, in the Palais de l'Europe, has a varied programme in French only.

Leisure

Koaland, Av de la Madone, t 04 92 10 00 40, www.azurpark.com. Mini-golf, go-karting, etc. *Open July–Aug daily 10–12 and 4pm–12am; Sept–June Wed–Mon 10–12 and 2–7; closed Tues exc in school holidays.*

North of Menton

Four narrow mountain valleys converge at Menton, with villages hanging over their slopes; they are linked by bus from Menton and to each other by mule tracks. Above the easternmost valley is **Castellar** (7km from Menton), laid out on a grid plan in 1435 to replace the original 1258 village built by the counts of Ventimiglia high on a rocky crag. An hour's hike will take you to the ghostly ruins of old Castellar; or take the less strenuous walk up the Sospel road as far as the waterfall at the **Gourg de l'Oura**. Up the second valley, the **Val du Careï**, sailors have made the little monastery of **L'Annonciade** (5.5km from Menton) the focus of their May pilgrimage since the 11th century. It has gone through countless transformations over the years, and the current building dates from the 17th century. Best of all are its grand views, from a terrace which looks over the whole valley and out to the sea, and its *ex votos*, dating back to the 17th century and including an unusual more recent one – a piece of a zeppelin.

Further up the Val du Careï, amid the viaducts of the old Menton–Sospel railway, you can wander through the scented **Forêt de Menton**, then up to **Castillon**, awaft with the scent of fresh concrete and artisan shops, and well into its third incarnation as 'the most beautiful new village in France' after being flattened by an earthquake in 1887 and bombed in 1944.

From Menton the narrow, winding D22 noodles up to **Ste-Agnès**, at almost 2,625ft the loftiest village on the entire coast, which huddles on the northern side of the peak with its back to the sea. Mornings can be chilly before the sun makes its way around, even in the height of summer. There are three buses a day from Menton, or you can drive up, passing under and over the mighty viaducts of the A8, which look as insubstantial as spider's legs once you reach Ste-Agnès. The village was founded in the 10th century, some say, by a Saracen who fell in love with a local girl and converted to Christianity for her sake. It certainly looks old enough – a patchwork quilt of vaulted passageways and tiny squares that have succumbed to a mild attack of trinketshop-itis.

When you just can't look at another smirking *santon*, head up Rue Longue for a view that stretches to Corsica on a clear day, or scramble up to the ruins of the 12th-century château, which dominate the peak. It was destroyed by Louis XIV and has mouldered away ever since. The villagers have now taken over and are attempting to shore it up, but are not above putting it to practical use – in the miniature medieval garden is a patch of crazy paving and a whirling clothesline.

Ste-Agnes fort

www.sainteagnes.fr;
open July–Sept
Tues–Sun 3–6; Oct–June
Sat and Sun only,
2.30–5.30; call town
hall on t 04 93 35 84 58
for information about
guided tours

Perched at such a dizzying height, Ste-Agnès has always been on the defensive front line; a **fort** was gouged into the rock here in the 1930s as part of the infamous Maginot Line. Despite containing the most powerful concentration of artillery of the entire length of the Line, the fort couldn't hold out against the Germans in the Second World War; its bleak living quarters and grim cannons and mortar are still on view.

Come down the mountain at dusk if you can – it's the only safe way to see if anything's coming round those cliff-face bends, and there's the added bonus of watching Menton light up for the evening, far, far below. On foot – make sure it is a comfortably shod foot – a narrow, stony path descends from Ste-Agnès to Menton in two hours or, better still, take the one-hour shortcut which forms part of the **Balcon de la Côte d'Azur** (the GR51) to **Gorbio** (from Menton it's 8km), passing by the tiny 17th-century **Chapelle St-Lazare**, abandoned and forlorn at the entrance to the village. Gorbio is just as picturesquely medieval as Ste-Agnès, with ivy-covered houses of pale honey-coloured stone and twisting vaulted streets, but has somehow been spared the trinkets. In the Place de la République, more commonly known as the **Place du Village**, there are a couple of terraced restaurants, a plain fountain for the gossips to collect around and an olive tree planted in 1713 (which does double service as the bus stop for Menton). The best time to visit is at *Fête Dieu* (Corpus Christi) in June, for the medieval *Procession dai Limaça*, when the village lanes are lit by thousands of flickering lamps made from snail shells filled with olive oil, set in beds of sand.

Where to Stay and Eat North of Menton

Castellar ☒ 06500

***Hôtel des Alpes**, Place Clemenceau, t 04 93 35 82 83, www.hotelmenton.com/hotel-des-alpes (€). Tidy little rooms, with half- or full-board options, and tasty, local food, with panoramic views from the terrace. Closed end Oct–early Nov, and end Jan.

Castillon ☒ 06500

*****La Bergerie**, t 04 93 04 00 39, www.bergerie-castillon.com (€€). More upmarket, with a pool, rustic but comfortable rooms and

elaborate food. Friendly and family-run. *Restaurant closed Mon.*

Ste-Agnès ☒ 06500

Le Logis Sarrasin, 40 Rue des Sarrasins, t 04 93 35 86 89 (€€). A restaurant offering a warm welcome and more panoramic views, as well as six courses, including delicious *raviolis maison*. *Closed Mon, and mid-Oct–mid-Nov.*

Le Saint-Yves, Rue des Sarrasins, t 04 93 35 91 45 (€). For sweet dreams, dreamy views and courtesy. The restaurant (€€), which looks out over a dramatic view of mountains and sea, serves up regional dishes such as *lapin aux herbes*. *Closed mid-Nov–mid Dec; restaurant closed Fri.*

A Dip into Italy

Just over the border from Menton, in the village of **Grimaldi**, the beachside **Balzi Rossi** (red caves) were the centre of a sophisticated Neanderthal society that flourished c. 100,000 to 40,000 BC and produced some of Europe's earliest art, displayed in the

Museo Preistorico

t (00 39 for Italy, if calling from France) 0184 38113; museum open Tues–Sun 8.30–7.30; closed Mon; adm

Hanbury Gardens

t (00 39) 0184 22 95 07; (www.amicihanbury.com); open last Sun of Sept–Oct daily 10–6; Nov–last Sun Mar Thurs–Tues 10–4; last Sun of March–14 June daily 10–5; 15 June–last Sun Sept daily 9–6

Museo Preistorico.

The town of **Ventimiglia** has a huge market which completely takes over the town every Friday; a number of bus tours go there from Menton or Nice, or just hop on the train. Outside Ventimiglia, at **Mortola Inferiore**, you can visit the extraordinary **Hanbury Gardens**, a botanical paradise of acclimatized plants from all around the world, founded in 1867 by Sir Thomas Hanbury and his brother Daniel. Sir Thomas was a wealthy dealer in silks and spices from China, who fell in love with the spot during a holiday on the Côte d'Azur in 1867. The gardens fell into decay during the Second World War, but are now back in shape and managed by the University of Genoa: highlights include the Australian forest, the Garden of Scents and the Japanese garden.

If you plan to go deeper into Italy, you can save money by filling up with petrol in Menton (that's what all those Italians are doing there). It's only 12km to **Bordighera**.

The Grande Corniche

Roquebrune-Cap-Martin

Nearly every potential building site on the lush mountain shore between Menton and Monaco is occupied by Roquebrune-Cap-Martin – from old Roquebrune just beside the Grande Corniche down to the exclusive garden cape of Cap Martin. Purchased by the Grimaldis in 1355 for 1,000 florins, Roquebrune (like Menton) later revolted against Monaco and became a Free Town until joining France in 1861.

The medieval village is all steep, winding, arcaded streets with a fair number of over-restored houses, galleries and *ateliers*, culminating at the top in the **château**, with the oldest surviving *donjon* in France, erected in the 10th century by the counts of Ventimiglia against the Saracen threat. In the 15th century, Lambert of Monaco built much of what stands today, including the keep; in 1911, Sir William Ingram purchased the castle, planted the mock medieval *tour anglaise* by the gate, and donated it all to the town in 1921. The rooms between the ravaged 11ft-thick walls are surprisingly poky – most people have bathrooms bigger than this lordling's reception hall, which lost its roof to

Roquebrune château

t 04 93 35 07 22; open July and Aug daily 10–12.30 and 3–7.30; Sept and June 10–12.30 and 2–6.30; Feb–May daily 10–12.30 and 2–6; Oct–Jan daily 10–12.30 and 2–5; adm

cannonballs in 1597. An uninspired audiovisual exhibition animates the prison, the archers' room and the kitchens, but the view from the top floor, huge enough for any ego, is by far the best of its attractions.

The castle guards lived below in picturesque **Rue Moncollet**, tunnelled out of the living rock, which leads down into Rue Grimaldi and the **Place des Deux-Frères**, a pretty square with a fat, attractive old olive tree, the little village *lavoir*, a sprinkling of cafés and restaurants, and a vertiginous view across the red-tiled rooftops and over the bay.

Back on Rue du Château is the pink and orange church of **Ste-Marguerite**, originally built in the 12th century but well and truly Baroqued since, which contains a *Resurrection* and *Pietà* by 17th-century Roquebrunois artist Marc-Antoine Otto. A formidable gang of village ladies maintains its current gleaming splendour. Nearby Rue de la Fontaine (turn off Rue du Château just after the post office) leads to a remarkable contemporary of the castle: a 1,000-year-old olive tree measuring 33ft in circumference, with a tangle of roots bursting out of the soil.

In 1467, as plague decimated the coastal population, the Roquebrunois vowed to the Virgin that if they were spared they would, in thanksgiving, annually re-enact tableaux of the Passion. The Virgin apparently thought it was a good deal, and the villagers have faithfully kept their side of the pact every year on 5 August, illuminating the procession with little lamps made from sea shells and snail shells. The best and most coveted of the 500 roles involved in the colourful processions are jealously 'owned' by the oldest families, who pass them down like heirlooms.

Cap Martin

In the 1890s a pair of empresses, Eugénie of France (widow of Napoléon III) and Elisabeth ('Sissi') of Austria, made Roquebrune's little peninsula of Cap Martin an aristocratic enclave, 'whispering of old kings come here to dine or die', as F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote. Churchill did the dining and Yeats, King Nikola of Montenegro and Le Corbusier the dying, the last succumbing to a heart attack in 1965 while swimming off the white rocks beside what is now the **Promenade Le Corbusier** – a lovely walk around the cape, down a succession of little ramps and stairways and past villas immersed in luxuriant pines, olives, cypresses and mimosas. In 1938 Corby stayed in one of the most beautiful and Modernist villas on the Côte d'Azur, called **E-1027**, built in 1929 by furniture designer Eileen Gray; he felt so at home there that at one point he painted a series of murals in it in her absence, much to her fury. The story goes that he loved the house so much that in 1960 he got a wealthy friend to

☆ Promenade Le Corbusier

Le Corbusier Cabanon

guided tours Tues and Fri at 10am from the tourist office; register the previous day at the tourist office; adm

buy it at auction, helping her defeat the higher bids of Aristotle Onassis by dragging the auctioneer off at a crucial moment. In a garden down by the sea, he built himself a tiny **Cabanon**, just 12ft square, which comprised a frescoed corridor and one simple room, and wrote rapturously to a friend of the comforts of his seaside 'château'. It was built as a model of minimal accommodation based on the 'modulor', his patented system of architectural proportions, and encompassed, in his opinion at least, all a man needed to live a comfortable existence. Although its exterior is unprepossessing, each of the carefully crafted interior fittings has several ingenious functions. Le Corbusier is buried in Roquebrune churchyard, along with his wife, in a tomb he designed himself. As for E-1027, after decades of deterioration it was bought by the city of Roquebrune and the French government through a national agency, the Conservatoire du Littoral, but plans for its restoration keep foundering.

The spectacular path leads from Cap Martin to Monte-Carlo beach. If you follow it (about a four-hour walk), look back towards the Cap to see the ruined tower of the long-gone convent of **St-Martin**. When it was built, the men of Roquebrune vowed to protect the nuns from pirates, and one night in the late 14th century the tower's bell sounded the alarm; the Roquebrunois piled out of bed and ran down the hill to defend the good sisters, who laughingly confessed that they were just testing the bell's efficiency. A few nights later, pirates really did appear, and although the nuns rang like mad, their defenders only rolled over in bed. Next morning, in the smouldering ruins, the older nuns were found with their throats slit, while the younger, prettier ones had been carted off to the slave markets of Barbary.

Tourist Information on the Grande Corniche

Roquebrune **tourist office** offers tours of the old town and château as well as Le Corbusier's cabin. Detailed walking maps also available.

Markets on the Grande Corniche

Roquebrune: Provençal market, daily am, Parking du Marché de Carnolès, larger on Wed; mid-Sept, flea market.

Where to Stay and Eat on the Grande Corniche

Along the Corniches ☒ 06190

******Vista Palace Hôtel**, t 04 92 10 40 00, www.vistapalace.com (€€€€€).

If money's no object, this is the ultimate in luxury, hanging on a 1,000ft cliff on the Grande Corniche, with a God's-eye view over Monaco; it also has a heated pool, squash, gym, sauna and famous cliff-hanging restaurant, **Le Vistaero** (€€€€) come in the off season – high season prices are ridiculous.

B&B Le Roquebrune, 100 Corniche Inférieure, Roquebrune Cap Martin, t 04 93 35 00 16. This charming

★ **Au Grand Inquisiteur** >>

i **Roquebrune** >
218 Av Aristide Briand,
t 04 93 35 62 87, www.rokebrune-cap-martin.com; open July and Aug daily; 15–30 June and 1–15 Sept Mon–Sat and Sun am; 16 Sept–14 June Mon–Sat

maison d'hôtes is run by two delightful sisters, who have opened up their home to guests. There are just five rooms (one is suitable for disabled visitors), which enjoy lovely sea views. There is no restaurant, but there are several within an easy bus or car ride (like many in this area, the guesthouse sits on the main road, which means it's not a pleasant stroll).

Roquebrune ✉ 06190

Hôtel des Deux Frères, Place des Deux-Frères, t 04 93 28 99 00, www.lesdeuxfreres.com (€€€–€€). Looking out over Monaco, this hotel has just 10 pretty, recently refurbished rooms, which have all been individually decorated. The prettiest, the 'Nuit de Noce', has spectacular views. Friendly,

knowledgeable staff serve excellent regional dishes in the flower-edged terrace restaurant (lunch menu €28, dinner menu €48). *Closed 10 days in Dec; restaurant closed Sun eve, Mon, Tues lunch, and mid-Nov–mid-Dec.*

Au Grand Inquisiteur, 15 Rue du Château, t 04 93 35 05 37 (€€€–€€). In a former sheepfold cut into the rock, serving well-prepared Provençal dishes such as *fleurs de courgette farcies*, as well as more creative fare. *Closed Mon and Tues lunch, and mid-Nov–mid-Dec.*

La Grotte, Place des Deux-Frères, t 04 93 35 00 04 (€€). A cheaper troglodyte choice, La Grotte also has tables outside at the entrance to the Vieille Ville, and offers pizzas, pasta and a simple *plat du jour*. *Closed Wed, and Nov.*

Monaco

Big-time tax-dodgers agree: it's hard to beat Monaco for comfort and convenience when the time comes to snuggle down with your piggy chips. Unlike most other tax havens, the principality is not an island, so you can purr over to France or Italy in the Lamborghini in just a few minutes. The grub is good, you can safely flaunt your jewels and there's enough culture to keep you from feeling a total Philistine; the homeless and other riffraff who might trouble your conscience are kept at bay. Security, understandably, is the prime concern: closed-circuit cameras spy over every corner; every traffic signal records every passing car. In emergencies, the whole principality can be closed off in a few minutes.

Rainier III, chairman of the board of Monaco Inc. until his death in 2005, will probably go down in history as the principality's greatest benefactor. Through landfill and burrowing he added a fifth to his realm and on it built more (but certainly not better) structures than any of his predecessors, creating a Lilliputian Manhattan. Of the principality's some 32,000 residents, only 4,000–5,000 are actually Monégasque subjects. To obtain one of the precious resident's permits, you have to own or rent a flat in one of these grey towers and watch your ass. Residents who still choose to work, the Luciano Pavarottis and Claudia Schiffers, are hardly ever home. Money is the main topic of conversation no matter where you go in this perfectly sanitized bolthole on the Med, where a calendar of car races, circuses, fireworks, First Division football and operas puts a glittering mask over its ghoulish, acquisitive face.

History Starts with a Stinker

Seven hundred years ago, in 1297, an ambitious member of Genoa's Guelph party, Francesco Grimaldi the Spiteful, dressed up like a friar and knocked at the door of the Ghibelline fortress at Monaco, asking for hospitality. The soldiers sleepily admitted him, whereupon the phoney friar pulled a knife from his robe, killed the soldiers and let in his men. Although Francesco was the first Grimaldi to get into Monaco, the family became lords of their rock only when they purchased it from Genoa in 1308.

Once they were rulers of a mini-empire including Antibes and Menton; today the Grimaldis' sovereign Ruritania has been reduced by the ambitions of others to a sea-hugging 194 hectares (slightly larger than half of Central Park) under the looming mountain, Tête de Chien. Here Rainier III presides as the living representative of the oldest ruling family in Europe, and Europe's last constitutional autocrat.

For centuries the Grimaldis' main income came from a tax levied on Menton's lemons and olives, and when Menton revolted in 1848 they faced bankruptcy; Monaco was the poorest state in all Europe. In desperation, Prince Charles III looked for inspiration to the Duke of Baden-Baden, whose casino lured Europe's big-spending aristocrats every summer. Monaco, Charles decided, would be the winter Baden-Baden, and he founded the **Société des Bains de Mer** (SBM) to operate a casino and tourist industry, with the principality as the chief shareholder. The casino was built on a rock which the prince named Monte-Carlo after himself, and he hired François Blanc, the talented French manager of the Homburg Baden casino, to create a gambling city to order, 10 per cent of all profits going to the crown. Blanc was one of the most successful financiers of the day and he proved his worth. He loaned the French government nearly 5 million francs for the completion of Napoléon III's centrepiece, the Paris Opéra, and in return assured that the French built a new railway from Nice in 1868. With transport to bring in the punters, the money poured in by the bushel; in 1870 the coffers were so full that Charles abolished direct taxation in Monaco, a state of affairs that endures to this day.

But gone are those fond days when the Monégasques could live entirely off the folly of others. France and Italy legalized gaming in 1933, ending the principality's monopoly, and the proportion of its revenue that Monaco gleans from the tables has declined from 95 per cent to a mere 4 per cent. In the dark, bankrupt 1950s, Rainier III gave his little realm a fairytale cachet by wedding a luminous American film actress named Grace Kelly, bringing in a much-needed injection of socialites and their fat bankrolls. Since then, the prince and the omnipresent SBM found new ways to keep

Getting to Monaco

There are no **customs formalities**; you can just **drive** into Monaco along the Basse Corniche, or take the **helicopter** from Nice airport if you're in a hurry (7mins, return €95, **Héli Air Monaco**, t 92 05 00 50, www.helairmonaco.net; **Monacair**, t 97 97 39 00). **Buses** leave hourly from Nice airport (terminal 2, 9am–9pm), or you can get a **taxi** (45mins).

Buses (bus 100, express bus from Nice 100x) every 15mins between Menton and Nice stop at several points along the Corniche.

The Monaco/Monte-Carlo **train station** is in Av Prince Pierre, t 08 92 35 35 35 and t 93 10 60 15.

Getting around Monaco

Small as it is, Monaco is divided into several towns: Monte-Carlo to the east, Fontvieille by the port, Monaco-Ville on the rock and La Condamine below; there's a public **bus** network to save you some legwork. More importantly, free public **lifts** and **escalators** operate between the tiers of streets. These are all marked on the free map from the tourist office.

To drive a **Ferrari** around the Grand Prix circuit, contact **LiveN Up**, opposite the Hôtel Métropole, t 06 11 52 31 51.

Taxis run 24 hours, t 08 20 20 98 98.

For **scooter hire**, try **Auto-Moto Garage**, 7 Rue de Millo, t 93 50 10 80.

Bicycle hire, **Monte Carlo Rent**, Quai des Elats-Unis, t 99 99 97 79.

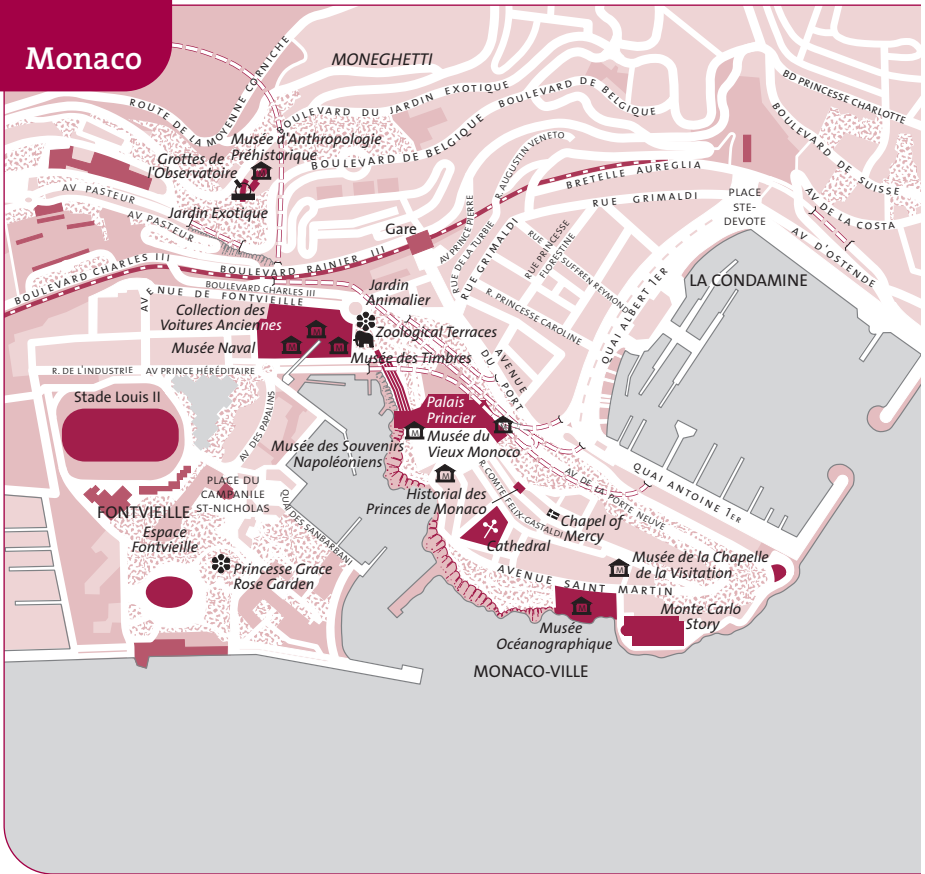
Monaco's residents from paying income tax, especially in 'offshore' banking (some 50 banks do business here), in the media (Télé and Radio Monte-Carlo), in 'business tourism' (there's a new, ultra-modern congress hall) and tourism, with no little interest fuelled by the media's scrutiny of the sadly tarnished fairytale lives of Princesses Caroline and Stéphanie. Rainier was succeeded in 2005 by his son, Albert II, whose current lack of a legitimate heir is cause for constant media speculation.

Monte-Carlo

Casino de Monte-Carlo
t 98 06 21 21,
www.montecarlocasinos.com; *salons privés open from 2pm*

Set back in the sculpture-filled gardens of Place du Casino is the most famous building on the whole Côte d'Azur: the 1863 **Casino de Monte-Carlo**, a fascinating piece of Old World kitsch known in its heyday as the 'cathedral of hell'. Anyone over 21 in civilian clothes (no military uniforms) with a passport can visit the *machines à sous* section just inside the door, with one-armed bandits and other mechanized games. To get past the mastodons at the doorway to the glittering Salon de l'Europe you have to fork out €10; here, American roulette, craps and blackjack tables click and clatter away just as in Las Vegas or Atlantic City. €20 plus some ID gets you into the *salons privés*, quieter and more intense, where oily croupiers, under gilt, over-the-top rococo ceilings, accept limitless bets on roulette and *chemin de fer*. In the Pink Salon Bar, where naked, cigar-chomping nymphs float on the ceiling, Charles Deville Wells celebrated his three-day gambling spree in 1891 that turned \$400 into \$40,000 and inspired the popular tune 'The Man

Monaco



who Broke the Bank at Monte-Carlo'. (Later, he spent eight years in prison after being convicted of fraud in England, but no one ever discovered the secret of his success in Monte-Carlo.) Superstitious gamblers have used a variety of means to ensure the same success: some believed that rubbing the knee of the bronze horse bearing Louis XIV in the lobby of the Hôtel de Paris next door brought luck. The Prince of Nepal, whose religion only let him gamble for five days a year, had private rooms here so that he wouldn't lose a single precious second, and Cornelius Vanderbilt insisted that his entire family was present before betting a franc. Whatever you do, don't miss the thrill of flushing one of the casino's loos.

Salle Garnier
*open for
performances only*

The casino's bijou opera-theatre, the red and gold **Salle Garnier**, with huge new windows on to the sea, was designed by Charles Garnier, his part of the payoff for François Blanc's loan that completed his even more elaborate Paris Opéra. Inaugurated by Sarah Bernhardt in 1879 and backed by pots of SBM money, it



became one of the most exciting theatres in Europe, especially under Raoul Gunsberg, who had been director of the Tsar Nicholas II Theatre. He commissioned operas from composers like Saint-Saëns and Massenet and, in 1911, invited Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, who became the Ballets de Monte-Carlo in 1926. Now it is home to the Opéra de Monte-Carlo, and mostly serves as an excuse for residents to put on the dog. But in the old days its gods – Diaghilev, Nijinsky, Stravinsky, and set designers Picasso, Derain and Cocteau – held court among the dukes and flukes in the café of SBM's frothy **Hôtel de Paris**, next to the casino (see 'Where to Stay'). Or as Katherine Mansfield put it: 'the famous Café de Paris with real devils with tails under their aprons cursing each other as they hand out the drinks. There at those tables sit the damned.'

**Monaco National
Musée Nouveau
(Poupées et
Automates)**

t 377 98 98 91 26, www.nmm.mc; open daily
10–6; adm

If smug displays of wealth give you the misanthropic jitters, you can take comfort in the porcelain, metal, wood and plastic people in the **Monaco National Musée Nouveau (Poupées et Automates)**,

in a luscious campanile villa at 17 Avenue Princesse Grace, designed by Charles Garnier, surrounded by rose gardens. Jolliest among the exhibits is an enormous 18th-century Neapolitan *presepio*, or Christmas crib, with 250 figurines from Virgin to sausage-vendor. A smaller room holds a Josephine Baker automaton in a grass skirt and Princess Caroline's Barbie doll.

The Villa Paloma (at 56 Boulevard du Jardin Exotique) will be the main temporary site of the New National Museum from the end of 2009; a new, purpose-built museum is planned for 2015.

Just west of here, along Avenue Princesse Grace, you can unfray your nerves for free with a dose of Côte d'Azur Shintoism at the **Jardin Japonais**, with waterfalls, ponds and a cedar-wood Tea House. It has been blessed by a Shinto priest and the gardeners have even been taught special Eastern methods of pruning the pine and olive trees, but the calm is ruffled by the posse of boiler-suited men who ensure the rules (no picnicking, no games, no balls) are kept. Further east are beaches of imported sand, resort hotels and the élite **Monte-Carlo Sporting Club**.

La Condamine and Fontvieille

The natural amphitheatre of La Condamine, the port quarter between Monte-Carlo and Monaco-Ville, has suffered the most from the speculators, their big cement brutes dwarfing the 11th-century votive chapel dedicated to Monaco's patron saint, **Ste-Dévote**. After her martyrdom in Corsica in 305, Dévote's body was put in a boat that sailed by itself, guided by a dove that flew out of her mouth, to Monaco (still known then as Portus Herculis Monoeci, after Hercules). In the 11th century some relic-pirates snatched her bones, only to be foiled when the Monégasques set their boat on fire, an event re-enacted every 26 January amidst the armada of yachts, with a big celebratory procession the next day.

From Place Ste-Dévote, Rue Grimaldi leads west to Place du Canton and the **Jardin Animalier**, **Les Terrasses de Fontvieille**, used to acclimatize animals imported from the tropics, including a black panther, a white tiger and some disgruntled rhinos. In 2008, two leopards were rehomed in an African reserve, thanks to the efforts of British actress and conservationist Virginia McKenna. She finally managed to bend Albert's royal ear after 10 years of being stonewalled by Rainier's courtiers. There are plans to rehouse all the animals eventually, and to turn the Jardin into a petting zoo for children. Or there's Prince Rainier III's very own **Collection de Voitures Anciennes**, which displays over 100 vintage cars, including the 1929 Bugatti which won the first Grand Prix. At the **Musée des Timbres et des Monnaies** visitors can admire the fruits of Rainier's other hobby, probably kept for rainy days: coins, bank notes,

Jardin Japonais

*open daily
gam-nightfall*

Le Jardin Animalier

*t 93 25 18 31; open daily
June–Sept 9–12 and
2–7; Mar–May 10–12
and 2–6; Oct–Feb 10–12
and 2–5; adm*

Collection de Voitures

*t 92 05 28 56;
open 10–6; adm*

Musée des Timbres et des Monnaies

*t 98 98 41 50; open
Oct–June 9.30–5;
July–Sept 9.30–6; adm*

Musée Naval

† 93 15 28 48,
www.musee-naval.mc;
open daily 10–6; adm

Jardin Exotique

† 93 15 29 80,
www.jardin-
exotique.mc; bus no.2;
open daily 9–6 or 7 in
summer; closed 19 Nov–
25 Dec; adm

**Musée
d'Anthropologie
Préhistorique**

† 93 15 29 80

Stade Louis II

† 92 05 40 11; guided
tours in English Mon,
Tues, Thurs, Fri at 10.30,
11.30, 2.30 and 4pm,
Wed at 10.30, 11.30,
except during events,
also a 5pm visit
July–mid-Sept; adm

**Princess Grace
Rose Garden**

open daily dawn–dusk

Monte-Carlo Story

† 93 25 32 33; showings
hourly July and Aug
2–6; Jan–June and
Sept–Oct 2–5; closed
Nov and Dec; adm

**Musée des
Souvenirs****Napoléoniens**

† 93 25 18 31; open
Dec–Mar 10.30–5; April
10.30–6; May–Sept
9.30–6.30; Oct 10–5.30;
closed Nov; adm

commemorative medals and a 60-year-old copper stamp press are on display with a gift of 'a free stamp for paying guests' at the end of the tour. Nearby, the **Musée Naval** has more examples of earnest princely passions, this time models of famous ships from the *Titanic* to the battleship *Missouri*. The earliest were constructed by Prince Albert 1^{er} (the 'Scientist Prince') at the end of the 19th century.

More unusual are the prickly contents of a garden near the Moyenne Corniche, the **Jardin Exotique**, where 6,000 succulents planted in the rock face of the Tête de Chien in 1933 range from the absurd to the obscene. Footbridges dangle over 33ft African 'candelabra' cacti, which seem to be holding out their arms to catch the less-than-nimble.

The same ticket admits you to the adjacent **Grottes de l'Observatoire**, one of the few places in Provence inhabited in the Palaeolithic era and, curiously, the only cave in Europe that gets warmer instead of cooler as you descend into its maw. Here, too, is the **Musée d'Anthropologie Préhistorique**, where the collection includes the bones of reindeer, mammoths and hippopotami, along with some from early editions of humankind.

To the south, between the sea and the ultra-modern **Stade Louis II**, where AS Monaco regularly punish the rest of the French football league (although they are a long way from their peak form in 2004, when they were finalists in the UEFA Champions League), stretches **Fontvieille Park**, where the charming **Princess Grace Rose Garden** is a memorial to Monaco's beloved princess, film actress and daughter of an Irish–American brick magnate in Philadelphia – the very same Kelly who supplied Ignatz mouse with ammo in George Herriman's classic comic strip *Krazy Kat*. Near here, a **sculpture path** winds its immaculate way up from the Place du Campanile St-Nicholas. The whirling figures of Arman's *Cavalleria Eroica* and César's massive clenched fist look incongruously emotional against the fastidiously manicured lawns.

Up on the Rock: Monaco-Ville

In 1860 the principality of Monaco consisted of 2,000 people living in this old Italian town, clinging spectacularly to a promontory 300m above the sea; they never dreamed it would turn into a shopping centre for Prince Rainier ashtrays and Princess Grace dolls. As scrubbed and cute as any town in Legoland, it offers devilries that make the casino seem like an honest proposition: the **Monte-Carlo Story: L'Histoire d'une Dynastie** (Terrasses du Parking du Chemin-des-Pêcheurs), which presents 'Monaco le Film' and a mildly interesting collection of old film posters and magic lanterns; and the **Musée des Souvenirs Napoléoniens** in Place du Palais, with

Musée de la Chapelle de la Visitation

† 93 50 07 00;
open Tues–Sun
10–4; closed Mon; adm

Palais Princier

† 93 25 18 31; open April
10.30–6; Oct 10–5.30;
May–Sept 9.30–6.30;
closed Nov–March; adm

Musée Océanographique de Monaco

† 93 15 36 00;
www.oceano.mc;
open July–Aug daily
9.30–7.30; April–June
and Sept daily
9.30–7; Oct–Mar
daily 10–6; adm

over 1,000 items connected to the little Corsican, including ‘garments and toys belonging to the King of Rome!’ – his ill-fated son.

Also along Rue Basse is the pink and yellow **Chapel of Mercy**, built in 1639 and disfigured in the 19th century by a sickly ceramic adoration scene above the door; inside is sculpted woodwork by Napoleon’s official sculptor, François Josef-Bosio. It was the seat of the Brotherhood of the Black Penitents, whose first prior was Monaco’s Prince Honoré II. In the **Musée de la Chapelle de la Visitation**, thanks to a sizeable private donation of sacred art, Rubens’ podgy angels and Ribera’s bleeding martyrs float in the 17th-century Baroque chapel.

From June to October you can yawn your way through the plush **Palais Princier** itself, which, with its 19th-century ‘medieval towers’, is built around the Genoese fortress of 1215 (note the Grimaldi coat of arms, featuring two sword-wielding monks). At other times, when Albert’s at home, you’ll have to be content with the rooty-toot-toot 11.55am **Changing of the Monégasque Guard**. Here, too, is Monaco’s unattractive **cathedral**, built in 1875 using white stone from La Turbie, at the expense of a Romanesque chapel. From the chapel it inherited two lovely retables by Ludovico Brea from the early 16th century: *La Pietà*, over the sacristy door, and the grand *St Nicolas* with 18 panels, in the ambulatory. The more recent princes of Monaco are buried here, including Princess Grace, whose simple tomb inscribed ‘*Gratia Patricia Principis Rainerii III Uxor*’ is often bedecked with nosegays from admirers, all waiting for the miracle that will sway the Vatican to beatify her.

Monaco’s most compelling attraction is nearby in Avenue St-Martin: the **Musée Océanographique de Monaco**, founded in 1910 by Prince Albert I^{er}, who sank all of his casino profits into a passion for deep-sea exploration. To house the treasures he accumulated in his 24 voyages, he built this museum in a cliff, filling it with instruments, shells, whale skeletons and, on the ground floor, a fascinating aquarium where 90 tanks hold some of the most surreal fish ever netted from the briny deep, including a mesmerizing cylindrical tank where thousands of identical fish swim in an endless circling shoal. The rest of the building is taken up with research laboratories, which used to be headed by Jacques Cousteau, specializing in the study of ocean pollution and radioactivity. You can park directly underneath and get a lift straight up into the museum, but don’t neglect to go out and look back at this remarkable Belle Epoque building clinging to its cliff, with an 250ft sheer stone façade.

Besides the path east to Cap Martin (see p.89), there’s another trail that begins on the D53 in **Beausoleil**, Monaco’s French suburb, and ascends to the top of **Mont des Mules**. A third path, beginning

at Fontvieille's Plage Marquet, heads west along the crashing sea to the train station at **Cap d'Ail** (Cape Garlic). It continues around the cape past more snooty Belle Epoque residences, including Greta Garbo's bolthole, and then drops down a wooded slope to the little cove of **Mala Plage**.

Mediterranean Centre for French Studies

t 04 93 78 21 59,
www.centremed.
monte-carlo.mc

Also out here on Cap d'Ail is another jolly Cocteau creation: the **Mediterranean Centre for French Studies**. A grassy path decorated with stones etched with cavorting fauns and surreal flowers leads to the open-air theatre; based on a classical Greek amphitheatre, it has bold black and white mosaic profiles in the centre of the circular stage, and a wonderful handrail formed by a sinuous gold and turquoise snake to guide the audience to their seats.

Notes on Monaco

Telephone Numbers

If the telephone number has only eight digits, you must dial t 00 377 before calling from anywhere outside Monaco, even from France. If the number has 10 digits, it operates like a French number.

Money

Monaco's unit of currency is the euro; Monégasque coins are in circulation.

Markets in Monaco

Daily until 2pm: Marché de la Condamine, Place d'Armes.

Near Eglise St-Charles: Mon–Sat 7–1, Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri also 4–7.30, food market.

Sat afternoons: Port de Fontvieille, flea market.

Sports and Activities in Monaco

Thanks to the SBM, there's always something to do in Monaco: a mountain-top 18-hole **golf course** high above the town at La Turbie; **tennis** and every imaginable **water sport**; one free **beach** (**Plage du Larvotto**, near the Japanese garden) among the exclusive paying ones such as the beach at the eastern tip of town belonging to the Monte-Carlo Sporting Club; **deep-sea tuna fishing and cruises**; and **helicopter tours**

the coast (**Héli Air Monaco** or **Monacair**, see 'Getting Around').

In January there's the **Monte-Carlo Rally** – the first one in 1902 occasioned the world's first tarmac road, designed to keep the spectators from being sprayed with dust.

In April you can watch the **tennis championship**; the second week of May sees the famous **Monte-Carlo Grand Prix** (when even the pavements charge a hefty admission price).

For **football** tickets at the Louis II stadium, call t 92 05 37 54, or online at www.asm-fc.com.

Where to Stay in Monaco

Monaco ☑ 98030

Monaco's hotels have nearly as many stars as the Milky Way, so if you'd like one of the few more reasonably priced rooms in the summer, you can't reserve early enough.

Luxury (€€€€€)

*******Hôtel de Paris**, Place du Casino, t 98 06 30 00, www.montecarloresort.com. A palatial residence where the tycoons check in. Opened in 1864 by the SBM for gambling tsars and duchesses, it now has direct access to the modern-day Riviera prerequisite, a thalassotherapy centre. The famous **Café de Paris**, t 92 16 20 20 (€€€) is here as well as the lavish Louis XV (see p.100).

i Monaco >

2a Bd des Moulins,
Monaco, t 92 16 61 16,
www.monaco-tourisme.com; open
Mon–Sat and Sun am

★ Monte Carlo Bay Hotel and Resort

****Hermitage, Square Beaumarchais, t 98 06 40 00, www.montecarloresort.com. Also owned by the SBM, this Belle Epoque hotel perched high on its rock, overlooking the Port d'Hercule, has an Italian loggia and a sumptuous 'Winter Garden' designed by Gustave Eiffel.

****Hôtel Métropole, 4 Av de la Madone, t 93 15 15 15, www.metropole.com. Another luxurious palace, built in 1886 and refurbished with gold and marble and vast rooms. It's home to the most fabulous spa in town. Contains the superb Joël Robuchon restaurant; try the six-course tasting menu.

Hôtel Columbus Monaco, 23 Av des Papalins, t 92 05 90 00, www.columbushotels.com. Stylish boutique hotel with all the amenities, a favourite with glittering young celebs. Bar open to non-guests.

****Monte Carlo Bay Hotel and Resort, 40 Ave Princesse Grace, Monte Carlo, t 98 06 02 00, www.montecarlobay.com. The SBM's first new hotel for 75 years, this is an extravagant resort set in four hectares of gardens right on the water's edge. Palatial rooms, a choice of award-winning restaurants, a fancy spa and the best nightclub in town make this the hottest choice.

Very Expensive (€€€€)

***Tulip Inn Terminus, 9 Av Prince Pierre, t 92 05 63 00, www.terminus.monte-carlo.mc. This may be yet another concrete high-rise block, but it has been refurbished by the Tulip chain recently and to spend a night here still doesn't quite require a king's ransom. Restaurant (€€€).

Expensive (€€€)

***Hôtel Alexandra, 35 Bd Princesse Charlotte, t 93 50 63 13, www.monaco_hotel.com/montecarlo/alexandra. More turn-of-the-last-century opulence is to be had at this gilded hotel, although rooms are disappointingly bland.

**Le Versailles, 4 Av Prince Pierre, t 93 50 79 34, www.montecarlo.mc/versailles. Near the station, old-fashioned and modest with a reasonable French-Italian restaurant. Restaurant closed Mon.

Moderate (€€)

**Hôtel de France, 6 Rue de la Turbie, t 93 30 24 64, hotel-france@montecarlo.mc (€90). A peachy building in a street of art galleries.

***Hôtel Miramar, 1 Avenue Président J.F. Kennedy, Monaco, t 93 30 86 48, <http://miramar.monaco-hotel.com>.

There are no bargains to be had in Monaco, but this modest hotel is one of the cheapest in town. It has a good location by the port, and most (smallish) rooms offer sea views. There's a wonderful rooftop bar for romantic cocktails, and a decent restaurant serving Provençal cuisine.

****Novotel Monte Carlo, 16 Boulevard Princesse Charlotte, t 99 99 83 00, www.novotel.com. This big, bland chain hotel offers the best value in town, with spacious, clean rooms at a reasonable price, and plenty of extras including an outdoor pool, gym and restaurant. Family rooms are available, and the website offers excellent deals (particularly if you book well in advance).

Eating Out in Monaco

Very Expensive

Louis XV, Hôtel de Paris (see p.99), t 92 16 30 01. In Monte-Carlo, those who make it big at the tables, or have simply made it big at life in general, dine in the incredible golden setting of the Louis XV. This was a favourite of Edward VII when he was Prince of Wales; once, while dining here with his mistress, he was served a crêpe smothered in kirsch, curaçao and maraschino that its 14-year-old maker, Henri Charpentier (who went on to fame as a chef in America), accidentally set alight, only to discover that the flambéeing improved it a hundredfold. The prince himself suggested that they name the new dessert after his companion, hence *crêpes Suzette*. Under Alain Ducasse, France's most celebrated and hard-working chef (he now has 15 Michelin stars), the cuisine is once again kingly – and is as sumptuous and spectacular as the setting. *Closed Tues and Wed (open Wed eve in July and Aug), also Dec and last 2 wks Feb.*

Very Expensive–Expensive

Le Vistamar, in the Hermitage hotel (see left), t 92 16 27 72. A riotous pink and silver period piece, and a historical monument to boot, the famous Belle Epoque restaurant is now reserved for groups; in its stead, the Vistamar, offers fresh fish dishes like *pesca d'u matin*, which brings the fish from the sea to your plate in under an hour at lunchtime.

Expensive

L'Hirondelle, Les Thermes Marins, 2 Av Monte-Carlo, t 98 06 69 30. Gourmets on a diet can take solace here, with lovely, light dishes accompanied by views over the sea. *Daily lunch and dinner, brunch on Sunday.*

Moderate

Le St Benoît, 10 ter Av de la Costa (enter the car park and take the lift up), t 93 25 02 34. Just below the Hermitage, the St Benoît offers superb seafood to go with the views from the terrace, high above the port. Some dishes €€€. *Closed Sun eve and Mon, and Dec.*

Loga Café, 25 Bd des Moulins, t 93 30 87 72. Sit out on the terrace and dine sumptuously on *barbagian* (a kind of fried cheese- and leek-filled pie) or *stocafi* (stockfish stewed with tomatoes, herbs, wine and olives), and other Monégasque specialities. *Closed Tues eve, Sun, and Aug.*

Le Texan, 4 Rue Suffren Reymond, La Condamine, t 93 30 34 54. Come to this rowdy Tex-Mex joint just up from the port for the possibility of brushing shoulders with famous residents over a steak, pizza or tacos. One of the best value places for beer. *Kitchen open all day until midnight.*

Entertainment and Nightlife in Monaco

Nightlife in Monaco is a glitzy, bejewelled fashion paraded catered for by the omnipresent SBM at the **Monte-Carlo Sporting Club**, Av Princesse Grace, with its summer discotheque, Las Vegas-style floor shows, dancing, restaurants and

casino. There are similar offerings at **Monte-Carlo Grand Hôtel**, 12 Av des Spélugues, and at the **American Bar** at the Hôtel de Paris.

Jimmy'z, 26 Av Princesse Grace, t 92 16 22 77, www.montecarloresort.com. Entrance is free, but the drinks require a small bank loan at Monte-Carlo's number one dance club, favourite of U2, Sting and other rich old men. Now has a Cuban cigar bar. Upstairs is **Le Bar Bœuf & Co**, t 98 06 71 71, www.alain-ducasse.com, the Philippe Starck-designed Alain Ducasse restaurant. *Open till the small hours. Closed Mon in May, June and Sept.*

Le Stars n' Bars, 6 Quai Antoine 1^{er}, t 97 97 95 95, www.starsnbars.com. Young people from all along the coast drive to this sports bar and club. *Closed Mon in winter.*

Flashman's, 7 Av Princesse Alice, t 93 30 09 03. Disco bar and cocktail club, with DJ sessions.

Ship and Castle, 42 Quai Jean-Charles Rey, t 92 05 76 72. A Brit pub with quiz nights and food.

Opera, Circus and Fireworks

In January the opera, theatre and ballet season begins (t 92 16 22 99 or t 99 99 30 30 for info, www.opera.mc).

In January or February there is an excellent **Circus Festival** (t 92 05 23 45); in March, join or at least gawp at the queues of the high and mighty for the annual **Rose Ball**. Sign up for well-attended **Concerts at the Palace** in July, August, October and December.

The **Monégasque National Holiday** is 18–19 Nov.

The **International Pyromelodic festival**, with fireworks set to music, is held for four days in July.

Cinema

Cinéma d'été, 26 Terrasses du Parking des Pêcheurs, t 08 92 68 20 22/t 93 25 86 80, www.cinemasporting.com. Open-air and showing a different film in its original language every evening at 9.30 during July–Sept.

Cinéma Le Sporting, Place du Casino, t 08 92 68 20 22, www.cinema-sporting.com. Three screens.

North of Monaco

From Monaco, the D53 ascends to the Grande Corniche, a road the Romans called Via Julia Augusta, built to link up the Urbs to its conquests in Gaul and Spain. Several hard campaigns had to be fought (25–14 BC) before the fierce Ligurians finally let the road-builders through, and in 6 BC the Roman senate voted to erect a mighty commemorative monument known as the Trophy of the Alps (the Romans called it *Tropea Augusti*, or 'Augustus' Trophy') at the base of Mont Agel. The views are precipitous, and you can escape the crowds by venturing even further inland to Peille and Peillon, two of the most beautiful villages on the Côte d'Azur, or by following the ancient salt route up the Paillon valley to l'Escarène.

La Turbie and its Trophy

Though hemmed in by upstart mini-villas and second homes, La Turbie (a corruption of Tropea) still retains its old typical core of narrow vaulted alleys, built back in the days when it merited a mention by Dante in *The Divine Comedy*: see the relevant immortal lines proudly engraved on the tower. La Turbie also has an elliptical 18th-century church, **St-Michel-Archange**, with a sumptuous Baroque interior; the altar alone uses 17 different kinds of marble, the communion table glitters with onyx and agate, and the paintings are attributed to, or by the schools of, Raphael (*St Mark writing the Gospel*), Veronese, Rembrandt, Ludovico Brea, Murillo and Ribera (a stark *Ste Dévote*) – not bad for a village of 3,000 or so souls!

The old Via Julia Augusta (Rue Comte-de-Cessole) passes through town on its way to the **Trophy of the Alps**. This monument originally stood 147ft high, supporting a series of Doric columns interspersed with statues of eminent generals, the whole surmounted by a colossal 20ft statue of Augustus flanked by two captives; on its wall were listed the 44 conquered Ligurian tribes, and stairs throughout allowed passers-by to enjoy the view. When St Honorat saw the local people worshipping this marvel in the 4th century, he vandalized it; in the Dark Ages it was converted into a fort; Louis XIV ordered it to be blown up in 1705, and the stone was quarried to build St-Michel-Archange. The still formidable pile of rubble that remained in the 1930s was resurrected to 114ft and its inscription replaced thanks to the patronage of a rich American, Edward Tuck. The only other such trophy to survive *in situ* is in Romania, although the base of an even older one has recently been found at Le Perthus on the Spanish border. A small **museum** on the site has models and drawings which trace the Trophy's history,

La Trophie museum

t 04 93 41 20 84; open mid-May–mid-Sept Tues–Sun 9.30–1 and 2.30–6.30; mid-Sept–mid-May Tues–Sun 10–1.30 and 2.30–5; closed Mon; adm

Getting around North of Monaco

Buses go daily from Nice (*gare routière*) to La Turbie, continuing up to Peille (not on Sundays), plus there are several daily from Monaco. Buses leave less regularly from Nice to Peillon.

Both Peillon and Peille have **train stations**, but these lie several steep kilometres below their villages.

while the **park** behind offers magnificent views of Monaco and the coast below.

Peillon and Peille

These two villages are tiny and lovely; balanced atop adjacent hills, both require a wearying climb to reach them. But Peille and Peillon aren't quite the Tweedledee and Tweedledum of the Côte.

Peillon, most easily reached on the D53 from Nice, is a bit posher, complete with a *foyer* – a cobbled square with fountain at the village entrance. Inside are peaceful medieval stairs and arches, which snake up through vaulted passageways to the summit and a theatrically restored Baroque parish church, the **Church of the Transfiguration**, built on the highest point of the village.

But Peillon's big attraction is right at the entrance: the **Chapelle des Pénitents Blancs**, adorned with a cycle of Renaissance frescoes on the Passion of Christ by the charming and vigorous Giovanni Canavesio (c. 1485), who would certainly be better known had he painted anything outside the valleys of the Maritime Alps. Look out for Judas, tormented by a malignant black devil who is ripping out his soul. From Peillon, there are trails that lead to country rambles.

One of those walks, signposted near the parish church, follows the Roman road in two hours to **Peille**, further up the D53. More isolated, Peille has more character, and its very own dialect, called *Pelhasc*. There's an ensemble of medieval streets like Peillon's and a church begun in the 12th century, with an interesting medieval portrait of Peille and its now ruined castle. Once, during a drought, Peille asked for help from a shepherd (in Provence, shepherds often moonlight as sorcerers), and he made it rain on condition that the lord of this castle give him his daughter to wed – an event remembered in a *fête* on the first Sunday in September. The Church may frown at such goings-on, but Peille often had its own ideas on religion, twice in the Middle Ages preferring to be excommunicated rather than pay the bishop's tithes.

The Paillon river flows up the valley to **L'Escarène**, a strategic pit stop in the days of the salt route, when salt from the marshes of Hyères and Toulon was loaded on to mules in Nice and taken across the mountains to Turin. From the bridge, you can see the houses overhanging the river. The lovely 17th-century neoclassical

Chapelle des Pénitents Blancs

*ring the tourist office
to arrange a visit,
groups only*

★ **Auberge de la Madone** >>

📍 **La Turbie** >

Place Detras, t 04 93 41 21 15, www.ville-laturbie.fr; open July and Aug daily; Sept–June and Sept Mon, Tues, Thurs and Fri, plus Wed pm and Sat am

📍 **Peille** >>

Mairie, t 04 93 91 71 71; open Mon–Fri 9–12

Markets North of Monaco

La Turbie: Thurs am, general market.

Where to Stay and Eat North of Monaco

📍 **La Turbie** ☒ 06320

Hostellerie Jérôme, 20 Rue Comte de Cessole, t 04 92 41 51 51, www.hostelleriejerome.com (€€€€). Superb traditional cuisine prepared with the finest regional produce. There is also a less expensive café (€€). Also has rooms (€€€). *Hotel closed early Dec; restaurant closed lunch and Mon, Tues.*

📍 **Peillon** ☒ 06440

*****Auberge de la Madone**, t 04 93 79 91 17, www.auberge-madone-peillon.com (€€€€–€€). Just outside the walled village, this family-run inn has astonishing views over the valley. Dine out on its terrace. *Closed Nov–Xmas and 10–30 Jan; restaurant closed Wed.*

*****Auberge Lou Pourtail**, t 04 93 79 94 58, (€€–€). A cheaper but equally charming annexe to the Auberge de la Madone. *Closed Nov–Xmas.*

📍 **Peille** ☒ 06440

Les Lavandes, 247 Rte de la Turbie, t 04 92 10 86 23 (€). *Chambre d'hôte.*

church of **St-Pierre-aux-Liens** was designed by Jean-André Guibert, architect of the Cathedral Ste-Réparate in Vieux Nice. It was restored in the 19th century with admirable (and unusual) restraint, and now hosts a festival of ancient and Baroque music in the summer. Under its wings, tucked in on either side, are the twin chapels of the **Pénitents Blancs**, with spectacular rococo decoration, and the **Pénitents Noirs**.

The Moyenne Corniche

Between Monaco and Nice, the main reason for taking the middle road has long been the extraordinary village of Eze, the most perched, perhaps, of any *village perché* in France, squeezed on to a cone of a hill 1,400ft over the sea.

Eze

★ **Eze**

Eze, they say, is named after a temple to Isis that the Phoenicians built on this hill. The village then passed to the Romans, to the Saracens, and so on, although rarely did Eze change hands by force; even if an enemy penetrated its 14th-century gate and walls, the tight little maze of stairs and alleys would confuse the attackers, the better to ambush them or spill boiling oil on their heads.

These days, if intruders got far enough to assault what remains of the castle – 1,400ft above sea level – they would run into the needles of the South American cacti in the **Jardin d'Eze**, a spiky paradise created on municipal initiative in 1949 by *ingénieur agronome* Jean Gastauld.

Le Jardin d'Eze

t 04 93 41 10 30; open daily July and Aug 9–8; June and Sept 9–7; May 9–6.30; April and Oct 9–6; Mar 9–5.30; Nov–Feb 9–5; adm

Getting to and around the Moyenne Corniche

Eze-Village is the destination you really want, for sightseeing.

TER trains stop at Eze's coastal outpost (Eze-Bord-de-Mer); in high summer a minibus (*navette*) will shuttle you up from the Basse Corniche to Eze-Village and Eze-Grande Corniche. Beware, it's a very arduous walk up otherwise, taking over an hour even for the extremely fit.

There are several **buses** a day (no.112) from Nice directly for Eze-Village. Be careful, as all the buses on the Nice–Menton line stop at Eze-Bord-de-Mer down below (see note under 'By Train', above). Some buses from Nice to Peille stop at Eze-Grande Corniche.

Eze's other non-commercial attraction, the cream and yellow **Chapelle des Pénitents Blancs**, built in 1766, has gathered an eccentric collection of scraps: an old model of a sailing ship is suspended from the ceiling in place of a missing chandelier, and a disembodied arm brandishes a 13th-century Catalan crucifix, the *Christ of the Black Death* (as is typical in medieval Catalan art, the sculptor emphasized Christ's divine nature, and he smiles, even on the Cross). Here, too, is a 14th-century *Madone des Forêts*, where baby Jesus, rather unusually, holds a pine cone.

A scenic path descending to Eze-Bord-de-Mer is called the **Sentier Frédéric Nietzsche** after the philosopher. It starts at the entrance to the old village, down a narrow, almost hidden path on the left, which also leads to a small observation spot. Nietzsche, however, walked up instead of down, an arduous trek that made his head spin and inspired the third part of his *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

He might have cleared his head up in the **park** which curls around the Grande Corniche, a speleologists' delight with caves and chasms. Nature trails, bike trails and horse trails splinter off in all directions and an orientation table surmounts a Genoese-style tower, looking across the Plateau de la Justice, where the gibbet of the Lords of Eze once stood, and out to Corsica and St-Tropez.

i Eze >

Place du Général de Gaulle, t 04 93 41 26 00, www.eze-riviera.com; open Jan–Oct daily; Nov and Dec Mon–Sat; walkers can pick up an excellent little guide to walks in the area here; there's also a small office on the Basse Corniche, near the station; open May–Sept Mon–Sat

Shopping in Eze

Every other doorway in Eze spills over with art or souvenirs.

La Salamandre, near the Jardin Exotique, t 04 93 41 19 06. A friendly shop offering soft cotton and linen clothes, mostly made in France and often dyed in sunny Provençal colours. Closed Nov–Mar.

L'Échoppe Provençale, 55 Av de Verdun, t 04 93 41 00 23. A selection of the best Provençal wines, regional delicacies and beautiful tableware and crystal.

Where to Stay and Eat in Eze

Eze ☒ 06360

A road links the three *corniches* at Eze, and there are hotels on each level.

Eze-Grande Corniche

******Les Terrasses d'Eze**, Rte de La Turbie, t 04 92 41 55 55, www.hotel-terrasses-eze.com (€€€€€–€€€€). The rooms are not quite as big as you might hope for the price, but the restaurant (€€€) offers the best

views along the coast to go with the Mediterranean but rich cuisine.

B&B La Vieille Bergerie, 585 Route de la Revère, t 04 93 41 10 22, www.bastideauxcamelias.com (€€€).

A 200-year-old farmhouse of soft grey stone, this overlooks the pine forests on the edge of Eze. There's just one spacious bedroom-cum-sitting room, a spacious, white-painted vaulted chamber which looks out onto a flower-filled garden.

B&B La Bastide aux Camélias, 3C Route de l'Adret, t 04 93 41 13 68, www.bastideauxcamelias.com (€€€).

A pretty Provençal-style villa set in verdant gardens outside Eze-village, this B&B offers elegant rooms, an outdoor pool, a hammam, outdoor Jacuzzi and even its own petanque court. The hosts are so friendly you may never want to leave. They also have a romantic, self-catering cottage with private roof terrace in the heart of Eze village itself.

*****L'Hermitage**, Grande Corniche, 2km from Eze village, t 04 93 41 00 68, www.ezehermitage.com (€€€–€€). Two kilometres from Eze, L'Hermitage offers priceless views, traditional decor and monstrous portions of startlingly good Provençal food. From the hotel a footpath leads along the ancient Voie Aurélienne on to Mont Leuze, with breathtaking views. *Restaurant closed Tues.*

Eze-Village (Moyenne Corniche)

In Eze-Village there are two luxurious inns with only a handful of rooms each to let, but superb kitchens.

******Château Eza**, Rue de la Pise, t 04 93 41 12 24, www.chateaueza.com (€€€€€). This former prince's residence is actually a collection of medieval houses linked together to form an eagle's nest, all sharing an extraordinary perched terrace restaurant (€€€€–€€€). *Closed Nov;*

restaurant closed Tues and Wed in winter, and Nov–Christmas.

******Château de la Chèvre d'Or**, Rue du Barri, t 04 92 10 66 66, www.chevredor.com (€€€€€). In a medieval castle rebuilt in the 1920s, this romantic Relais & Châteaux hotel has a small park rippling down the mountain-side, a pool and more ravishing views. Chef Philippe Labbé cooks refined *cuisine créative* (€€€€). *Reserve well in advance. Closed Nov–early Mar; restaurant closed Wed in Mar–mid-April.*

Le Troubadour, 4 Rue du Breç, t 04 93 41 19 03 (€€€). Turbot or *filet de bœuf aux cèpes* go down nicely here, but choose carefully or the bill can come as a shock. *Closed Sun and Mon (open Mon eve July–Sept), and mid-Nov–mid-Dec.*

Mas Provençal, Av de Verdun, t 04 93 41 19 53 (€€€€). Just outside the tangle of medieval streets, this friendly *mas* is completely covered in flowers and ivy, and comfortably ensconced in the 19th century. Sink into plush red velvet chairs (with antimacassars) or out in the romantic gardens and dine on milk-fed pig roasted on a spit, or *risotto aux cèpes*, before ordering the carriage home. *Closed Sun in winter and Oct–Mar.*

Le Nid d'Aigle, Rue du Château, t 04 93 41 19 08 (€€). Head to this place on the summit of the rock, next door to Le Jardin d'Eze, for lofty fish (*daurade au pistou*, salmon) and all kinds of Provençal staples, including *lapin à la provençale*. *Closed Wed in Sept–June. Closed three weeks in Nov–Dec, and three weeks in Jan–Feb.*

Eze-Bord-de-Mer

******Cap Estel**, t 04 93 76 29 29, www.capestel.com (€€€€€). Set in a park, this luxurious, sparkling Riviera dream, which was originally built for a Russian princess, has two heated pools and a flight of movie-star steps down to the manicured gardens. *Closed Jan and Feb.*

★ Le Nid d'Aigle >>

★ Château Eza >

The Basse Corniche

To the west of Eze-Bord-de-Mer, another wooded promontory, Cap Ferrat, protrudes into the sea to form today's most fashionable address on the Côte d'Azur. The fascinating, wildly eclectic Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild and gardens crown the summit of Cap Ferrat, while the awful King Léopold II of the Belgians, Otto Preminger and Somerset Maugham had sanctuaries by the sea. To the east, the peninsula and steep mountain backdrop keep Beaulieu so sheltered that it shares with Menton the distinction of being the hottest town in France, while to the west the Corniche skirts the top of the fine old village of Villefranche-sur-Mer, with a port deep enough for battleships – grey tokens from the grey world beyond the Riviera.

Beaulieu

'*O qual bel luogo!*' exclaimed Napoleon in his Corsican mother tongue, and the bland name stuck to this lush, banana-growing town overlooking the **Baie des Fourmis** (Bay of Ants), so called for the black boulders in the sea. It was eccentric American millionaire and press baron James Gordon Bennett who put Beaulieu on the European tourist map; after his enforced exile from New York, he idled along the Riviera coast in his extravagant yacht and was smitten by the bay. The local fishermen refused to let him buy it and build a fabulously expensive new port, and he had to be content with establishing a coach service between Nice and Beaulieu, drawn by four horses and sometimes accompanied by a brass band, to bring in the sun-seekers.

Beaulieu admits to a mere four days of frost a year and calls its steamy easternmost suburb **La Petite Afrique**; most of its affluent population are trying to imitate Gustave Eiffel, who retired here and lived to be 90. Beaulieu's vintage **casino** has been renovated after years of dilapidation and is back to its former sparkling grandeur, with all the usual means of squandering fortunes, along with restaurants and a *salon* for *dîners-spectacles*. The *thés dansants* held in **La Rotonde** are a further retro attraction, but the *real* magnet is a place so retro that even Socrates would feel at home there: the **Villa Kérylos**, a striking reproduction of a wealthy 5th-century BC Athenian's abode, furnishings and garden, built in 1908 by archaeologist Théodore Reinach. The marble bathroom is fantastically

Beaulieu casino

t 04 93 76 48 00;
open daily 11am–4am,
5am at weekends; Fri
night – dinner and
show for €50

Villa Kérylos

t 04 93 01 01 44,
www.villa-kerlyos.com;
bus stop (bus no. 81
from Nice, or Beaulieu-
sur-Mer) Hôtel
Métropole then a 5min
walk; open Nov–mid-
Feb Mon–Fri 2–6,
Sat–Sun and holidays
10–6; mid-Feb–Oct
10–6; adm

Getting around the Basse Corniche

The most amusing way to visit is by way of the Côte d'Azur's equivalent of Hollywood's 'See the Homes of the Stars' bus tours: a 'little train' starts on the quay at Villefranche and chugs around the promontory with a guide calling out, in French and abominable English, the names of the famous who live(d) in the villas. Runs mid-April to Oct.

opulent, with a submerged throne and a playful mosaic of bizarre sea creatures. The library beats most poky studies; built over two storeys, the lofty ceilings and high windows let in long shafts of natural light, along with the gentle rushing sound of the sea. Outside, the sea breeze ruffles the aromatic herbs and plants, which draw droves of giant dragonflies, buzzing like mini-helicopters. Reinach spared no expense on the marble, ivory, bronze, mosaic and fresco reproductions to help his genuine antiquities feel at home; glass windows, plumbing and a hidden piano which unfolds like a Chinese puzzle box are the only modern anachronisms. And here, on a shore that reminded him of the Aegean, this ultimate philhellene lived himself like an Athenian, holding symposia, exercising and bathing with his male buddies, and keeping the womenfolk well out of the way.

Market Days in Beaulieu

Mon–Sat: Fruit and vegetable market on Place du Marché. Expands to include clothes and household goods on Sat.

3rd Sun of month: Interesting antiques (and *brocante* – 'junk') market by the port.

Where to Stay and Eat in Beaulieu

Beaulieu-sur-Mer ☒ 06310

******La Réserve**, 5 Bd Général Leclerc, t 04 93 01 00 01, www.reservebeaulieu.com (€€€€€). In the 1870s, when the wealthy James Gordon Bennett, owner of the *New York Herald* and the man who sent Stanley to find Livingstone, was booted out of New York society for his scandalous behaviour, he came to the Riviera and ran the Paris edition of his

newspaper from here. It is now one of the most exclusive hotels on the Riviera and offers grand sea views, a beach and marina, heated pool and more delights, including an elegant neo-Renaissance restaurant (€€€€). *Closed Nov–mid Dec.*

*****Artemis**, 3 Bd Maréchal Joffre, t 04 93 01 12 15, www.hotel-artemis.com (€€€) €125–140. Near the station, this basic hotel has rooms with balconies and access to a pool at the back. *Closed Jan.*

****Le Havre Bleu**, 29 Bd Maréchal Joffre, t 04 93 01 01 40, www.hotel-lehavrebleu.fr (€€). An attractive hotel with pleasant rooms, many with terraces for sunnier days. One of the best bargains in the area. *Closed Dec.*

****Sélect**, 1 Rue André Cane, t 04 93 01 05 42, www.hotelselect-beaulieu.com (€€). This small, simple Logis de France place near the station is impersonal but convenient.

📍 Beaulieu >

Place Clemenceau,
t 04 93 01 02 21,
www.ot-beaulieu-sur-mer.fr; open July–Aug
Mon–Sat and Sun am;
Sept–June Mon–Sat

★ **Le Riviera**, 6 Rue Paul Doumer, t 04 93 01 04 92, www.hotel-riviera.fr (€€–€). With pretty wrought-iron balconies, just up from the Basse Corniche. Non-smoking. *Closed Nov–after Xmas.*

Le Catalan, Bd Maréchal Leclerc, t 04 93 01 02 78 (€€–€). Wood-fired pizzas and delicious pasta abound, along with Mediterranean fish and meat dishes, just around the

corner from the Riviera hotel. *Closed Sun.*

Le Petit Darkoum, 18 Bd Général Leclerc, Beaulieu-sur-Mer, t 04 93 01 48 59 (€€€). This welcoming North African restaurant, formerly to be found in Menton, has moved to Beaulieu but the menu hasn't changed. You'll still find the delicious *tajines* as well as *cous cous* with vegetables, or *t'faïa*, with chicken, almonds and cinammon.

★ Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild

t 04 93 01 33 09, www.villa-ephrussi.com; for opening hours see *Villa Kerylos* on p.107; state rooms and gardens only; guided visit of upper floor 11.30, 2.30, 3.30, 4.30 (and 5.30 in July and Aug); adm

Cap Ferrat

Another retro-repro fantasy, the **Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild** (a 10min walk from the Basse Corniche, or catch the St-Jean bus which passes its entrance) crowns the narrow isthmus of bucolic Cap Ferrat, enjoying spectacular views over both the Baie des Fourmis and the rosy harbour of Villefranche below. The flamboyant Béatrice de Rothschild, who never went anywhere without her trunk of 50 wigs and who greeted guests to her parties dressed as Marie-Antoinette, was a compulsive art collector and lover of the 18th century and, after marrying the banker Baron Ephrussi, had this Italianate villa specially built to house her treasures – a Venetian rococo room was designed for Béatrice's Tiepolo ceiling, while other rooms set off her Renaissance furniture, Florentine bridal chests, paintings by Boucher, rare Chinese screens and furniture, Flemish and Beauvais tapestries, Sèvres and Meissen porcelain, Louis-Quinze and Louis-Seize furniture. There is also a covered Andalucian patio (a favourite location shot for films), a hidden bathroom and a large collection of porcelain chamber pots.

To create the equally eclectic gardens, the isthmus was given a crew cut and terraced into different levels, all linked together by little pathways and stone steps. There's a French garden with a copy of the *Amour* fountain from the Petit Trianon; a Florentine garden with a white marble ephebe; a Spanish garden, with papyrus, dates and pomegranates; exotic, Japanese, English and Provençal gardens; musical fountains; and a lapidary garden decorated with Romanesque capitals and gargoyles.

For all the trouble she took to build this glorious pile, Béatrice actually spent very little time here, preferring her villa in Monte-Carlo as it was closer to the gambling tables. You can take luncheon, tea or cakes in the elegant former *salon d'hiver*, and there is a good bookshop.

Zoo

t 04 93 76 07 60,
www.zoocapferrat.com;
open daily 9.30–7 in
summer; 9.30–5.30 in
winter; adm

Cap Ferrat itself, with its lush greenery, secret villas and little azure coves, is ripe territory for strolls or swims – there are a dozen small beaches, albeit of fine gravel. **Plage de Passable** along **Chemin du Roy**, west of Villa Ephrussi, is popular with families and scuba-divers. The ‘Roy’ in question was bad old King Léopold II of the Belgians, whose ruthless exploitation of the Congo (see Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*) helped to pay for his luxurious life here, where he took a swim every day with his beard neatly folded into a rubber whisker-protector while his valet ironed his newspapers. His villa (**Les Cèdres**) is now more democratically used for a **zoo** (although such prime real estate is under constant threat).

The former-fishing-now-yacht-port of **St-Jean-Cap-Ferrat** has the distinction of a Salle des Mariages painted by Jean Cocteau (without the same vigour as in Menton, see p.79). A walking path circles around the dewclaw of land south of the port called **Pointe St-Hospice** where, in the 6th century, the Niçois saint Hospice had a hermitage (now marked by a 19th-century chapel). With one arm chained to the wall, Hospice lived off algae brought to him by pious souls, and uttered dire prophecies about barbarian invasions that came true, recorded by Merovingian historian Gregory of Tours.

Modern-day invasions take place at nearby **Plage de Paloma**, favourite of Italian day-trippers and millionaire pensioners, and Plage des Fosses. Another path, the **Promenade Maurice Rouvier**, leads from St-Jean’s beach to Beaulieu, passing **Villa Scoglietto** and its sea-defying garden, where Charlie Chaplin spent his summer holidays and actor David Niven lived out the last years of his life.

Where to Stay in Cap Ferrat

Cap Ferrat ☒ 06230

The villas here are the most exclusive on the Riviera, and Cap Ferrat’s hotels are in price ranges to match, beginning with one of the most beautiful small hotels on the Côte.

******La Voile d’Or**, Av Jean Mermoz, t 04 93 01 13 13, www.lavoiledor.fr (€€€€€). Charming Italian villa, overlooking the marina and once owned by film director Michael Powell, who inherited it from his father (and sold it because no one

ever paid their bar bills). The Voile d’Or is an ideal honeymoon hotel, with a garden hanging over the port, a heated pool and rooms with every luxury a hotel could provide. Its equally exceptional restaurant (€€€€) is favoured by the tanned and languid yachting set. *Closed Nov–Mar.*

******Grand Hôtel du Cap Ferrat**, 71 Boulevard Général de Gaulle, t 04 93 76 50 50, www.grand-hotel-cap-ferrat.com (€€€€€). At the very fashionable Belle Époque Grand Hôtel the already luxurious rooms have been restored (2009) in a more airy, comfortable Riviera style, all set in acres of gardens, lawns and

📍 St-Jean-Cap-Ferrat >

59 Av Denis Séméria,
t 04 93 76 08 90,
www.saintjeancaferrat.fr; open July and Aug daily; Sept–June Mon–Fri

palms. A funicular railway lowers guests down to an Olympic-size seawater swimming pool just over the Mediterranean. Its restaurant, **Le Cap** (€€€€), on a palatial terrace shaded by parasol pines, serves delicious meals decidedly unhealthy for your wallet.

******Royal Riviera**, 3 Av Jean Monnet, t 04 93 76 31 00, www.royal-riviera.com (€€€€€). A sumptuous hotel in a pale pink Belle Époque villa set, again, in acres of elegantly landscaped gardens, with the usual Riviera paraphernalia: a sandy private beach offering a wide variety of water sports; an airy, terraced restaurant – **Le Panorama** – serving classic French and Provençal cuisine (€€€€); and a nearby helipad to park the runaround. *Closed Dec–last week Jan.*

More down-to-earth choices in Cap Ferrat include:

*****Brise-Marine**, Av Jean Mermoz, t 04 93 76 04 36, www.hotel-brisemarine.com (€€€€–€€€). With a garden, terrace and large rooms, half of which have sea views. *Closed Nov–Jan.*

*****Hôtel Panoramic**, 3 Ave. Albert-1er, t 04 93 76 00 37, www.hotel-lepanoramic.com (€€€€–€€€).

A simple, old-fashioned hotel on the hill above the harbour, which offers spotless rooms with sea views, and breakfast on a panoramic terrace. There's no pool or restaurant, but you'll find plenty of dining options around the harbour. Prices are good value for the glitzy Cap.

Eating Out in Cap Ferrat

Le Cap, Grand Hôtel du Cap Ferrat (€€€€, see above). Fabulous cuisine from Michelin-star-winning chef, Didier Anies.

Capitaine Cook, 11 av. Jean Mermoz, t 04 93 76 02 66 (€€). Provençal cuisine, with the emphasis on seafood, is the speciality at this cosy and traditional restaurant, with a panoramic terrace overlooking the village. *Closed Nov–Christmas, Thurs lunchtime and Wed.*

Around the Port de Plaisance (marina) you'll find several nautically named beaneries.

Le Pirate, t 04 93 76 12 97, www.restaurant-le-pirate.com (€€). Fresh seafood, *bouillabaisse* and paella on a terrace overlooking the port.

Villefranche-sur-Mer



In the 14th century the deep, wooded bay between Cap Ferrat and Nice was a duty-free port, hence Villefranche's name. It became an important military port for the Savoy in the 18th century, a period that saw Villefranche take on the appearance it has today: tall, brightly coloured, piled-up houses; and narrow lanes and stairs, some so overhung with houses that they're actually tunnels. An example is **Rue Obscure**, 'a good place for a knifing', as William Sansom described it, which Cocteau used as an underworldly setting for his film *Orphée*. It also came in handy as a bomb shelter in the Second World War. In 1971, the Villa Nellcôte (the former Gestapo HQ, complete with swastika decoration and dungeons) became the unlikely refuge of the Rolling Stones, who were broke and had to leave England to avoid paying income tax. They holed up in the Villa Nellcôte, set in pine woods just back from the sea, illegally wired up some electricity from the nearby

railway line, and made their greatest album, the classic *Exile on Main Street*. In the heart of the old town is the church of St-Michel, Baroque with unusual restraint and containing a recumbent Christ which was carved from a fig tree by a 17th-century slave.

The streets open up to the wide quay, given over to bars and restaurants, and a fine **beach** with a shallow slope and calm bay that is ideal for children. The charm of the place, and the presence of so many brawny sailors from around the world on shore-leave, made Villefranche a popular intellogay resort in the 1920s, with Jean Cocteau weaving his personal mythologies with opium, 'fluids' and his friends in the little **Hôtel Welcome**: 'Poets of all kinds, speaking every language, lived there and by a simple contact of fluids transformed the extraordinary little town, whose steep chaos ends at the water's edge, into a veritable Lourdes, a centre of legends and inventions.'

Villefranche's fishermen once stored their nets in the portside Romanesque **Chapelle St-Pierre** on Quai Courbet, and in 1957, after a protracted battle with the local municipal authorities, Cocteau, who had become fascinated by the little church three decades earlier, won permission to restore and renovate it. The fishermen resisted at first, disgruntled at the loss of a convenient storage place, and even stole his ladders when the project finally got under way. They only came round when Cocteau offered to give the proceeds of visits to the chapel to the Fishermen's Benevolent Fund. Finally let loose on the 500-year-old chapel, he began to fresco it in 'ghosts of colours' with scenes from the life of St Peter (walking on the water with an angel's help, which astounds the fish but makes Christ smile), plus images of the fish-eyed fisher-girls of Villefranche, the Gypsies at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, and angels from Cocteau's private heaven.

The Duke of Savoy's 16th-century **Citadelle St-Elme** has been put back to work as the Hôtel de Ville, with a few more paintings by Jean Cocteau (upstairs) and three free museums. The first, the **Fondation Musée Volti**, has voluptuous bronze, copper and terracotta female figures sculpted by Antoniucci Volti, set in an idiosyncratic series of small chambers, patios and niches. During the Second World War, Marcel Carné used them to film *Les Visiteurs du soir* and *Les Enfants du Paradis*. The **Musée Goetz Boumeester** has paintings and engravings by the American artists and collectors Henri Goetz and his wife, Christine Boumeester, along with gifts to the couple from their celebrity friends. Finally, there is the little **Collection Roux**, with ceramic figurines inspired by medieval and Renaissance manuscripts and the Salle-Souvenir (Memorial Room) dedicated to the 24th Battalion of the Alpine Hunters (24eme Bataillon de Chasseurs Alpins).

Chapelle St-Pierre

t 04 93 76 90 70; open July and Aug 10–12 and 4–8; Mar–June and Sept 10–12 and 3–7; Oct–Feb 10–12 and 2–6; closed for three weeks annually in Nov–Dec; adm

Les Musées de la Citadelle

t 04 93 76 33 27; open Oct–May 10–12 and 2–5.30; June–Sept 10–12 and 3–6.30; closed Sun am and Nov

Market Days in Villefranche-sur-Mer

Sun: flea market in the Jardin François Binon and Av Amélie Pollonnais.

Sat am: Provençal market, Jardin F. Binon and Promenade de l'Octroi.

Where to Stay in Villefranche-sur-Mer

i Villefranche-sur-Mer >

Jardin François Binon,
t 04 93 01 73 68,
www.villefranche-
sur-mer.org; open
July–Aug daily;
Sept–June Mon–Sat

Villefranche-sur-Mer ☒ 06230

*****Welcome**, Quai Amiral Courbet, t 04 93 76 27 62, www.welcomehotel.fr (€€€€–€€€). Just beside the port, this legendary hotel is ideally situated, although its wild days are over. The rooms are air-conditioned; those on the 5th floor boast ravishing views.

La Fiancée du Pirate, 8 Bd de la Corne d'Or, t 04 93 76 67 40, www.fianceedupirate.com (€€€–€€). Up on the Moyenne Corniche above Villefranche, with fabulous views down to the sea, a friendly, family-run modern hotel with its own pool. *Closed 2 weeks Jan.*

Hôtel La Darse, 12 Ave General de Gaulle, t 04 93 01 72 54, www.hoteldeladarse.com (€€). A long-standing favourite, the functional little Darse is still one of the best bargains on the Côte d'Azur. Most rooms have been recently renovated, and the best look out over the sea or the port. It's an attractive ten-minute stroll to the old town. Family rooms are available.

Eating Out in Villefranche-sur-Mer

La Mère Germaine, 9 Quai Amiral Courbet, t 04 93 01 71 39, www.meregermaine.com (€€€€–€€€). One of the oldest (established in 1938) and most prestigious restaurants in Villefranche, this has an expansive terrace right on the waterfront – and a price tag to match. Try their famous bouillabaisse, or the fresh

fish of the day. *Closed mid-Nov to Christmas.*

Le Carpaccio, Promenade des Marinieres, t 04 93 01 72 97, www.restaurant-carpaccio.com (€€€). This has long been a favourite of the Rolls-Royce crowd, who travel from Monaco, yet remains affordable for the rest of us, either for a splurge or for a modest pizza.

L'Oursin Bleu, 11 Quai Courbet, t 04 93 01 90 12 (€€€). Another good restaurant on the port, with its own lovely terrace, this offers modern versions of classic Provençal dishes prepared by up-and-coming young chef Jérôme Deloncle. Try the fish soup, or the baked sea bass with lime and finish up with a scrumptious dessert.

Les Garçons, 18 Rue Poilu, t 04 93 76 62 40 (€€€–€€). Two beautifully carved, Indonesian wooden doors lead into this fashionable and romantic restaurant and bar, which serves elegant, modern Provençal and Italian dishes, including risottos, fresh fish and home-made pasta. The desserts are out of this world – try the *duo de crème brûlées* with vanilla and coffee, or the *fondant du chocolat* with pecans. There's a tiny little terrace on a stone square in the heart of the old town.

La Grignotière, 3 Rue du Poilu, t 04 93 76 79 83 (€€€–€€). Local Niçois specialities in the old town. *Open evenings only, plus all day Sun; closed Wed in winter.*

L'Aparté, 1 Rue Obscure, Villefranche-sur-Mer, t 04 93 01 84 88 (€€). Tucked away under the shadowy arches of the Rue Obscure, this friendly and stylish little restaurant offers original Mediterranean cuisine including delicious ravioli filled with foie gras and lip-smacking desserts. There's an excellent, affordable wine list and delightful young staff. *Open daily, eves only.*

Le Cosmo, 11 Place Amélie Polonnais, t 04 93 01 84 05, www.lecosmo.fr (€€). A popular choice, conveniently opposite the Chapelle Cocteau, Le Cosmo is good for salads, snacks and uncomplicated dishes like *moules et*

frites, or even just a romantic drink as the sun begins to set.

Conveniently (and unusually), the kitchen is open all day, with just a brief break in the late afternoon.

Café des Delices, 15 Rue du Poilu, t 04 93 76 60 91 (€€). Reader-recommended, friendly local restaurant with good house wine, great *tagliatelle au pistou* and a good *plat du jour*.