

TRAVEL

OMF Monday, January 20, 1992

Changing of the Guard



Photos courtesy of Monaco Government Tourism and Convention Bureau

In front of Monaco's Royal Palace at 11:55 a.m. every day the Changing of the Guard is performed in a full-dress uniform that has not changed for a century.

Golden age of glamour French Riviera's sophisticated aura endures

By Tony Rocca
New York Times Syndicate

The French Riviera has inspired artists, writers and hedonists for more than a century.

Remarkably, its aura of glamour and sophistication endures at a time when high rises and fast foods have destroyed the atmosphere in other Edens — though the visitor may disagree when crowds clog roads and beaches in summer. The region now attracts about 8 million visitors annually.

It was in winter that the aristocratic rich first fell for the charms of this narrow coastal strip between the Alps and the Mediterranean, extending roughly from the Italian border to Hyeres.

Nearly all of Europe's crowned heads were once drawn by the mild climate (48 degrees is the January average; 68 is not unusual).

So uninterested was the upper crust in the Mediterranean's beaches and the notion of swimming that when the famed Negresco Hotel first opened its doors in Nice in 1913 they faced north, away from the sea. Passing through Monaco, Victoria ordered her train's curtains drawn.

Where ermine ladies paraded, togetherness is now the order of the summer day. The Promenade des Anglais in Nice is an eight-lane race track, three miles long.

A ferocious construction boom threatens to engulf the whole coast in concrete. Yet visitors still benefit from blue skies in winter — the only time that the Côte d'Azur lives up to its name, for in summer's heat the skies turn white.

Carmine sunsets and a tableau of mimosa, bougainvillea, parasol pines and saw-toothed palms complete the picture, from snow-crowned mountains to deep blue sea.

The Riviera's golden age of tourism is echoed in its Belle Époque villas, the wedding cake facades on its Edwardian promenades and in the coast's cafes.

WINTER EVENTS:
The Nice Opera on Rue Saint-François de Paule, is performing Verdi's "Stellian Vespers" on Feb. 6, 8, 11, 13, 16 and 18. Tickets start at \$18. The Ballet "Coppella" will be performed on Jan. 24 and 26. Tickets start at \$7.50. For more information call on any of these performances call 93-65-67-31.
The Nice Philharmonic is playing both Beethoven's and Mahler's first symphonies at the Acropolis Convention Center, on Esplanade Kennedy, on Jan. 25 and 28; works by Liszt, Brahms

and Milhaud on Feb. 14 and 15. Tickets start at \$7.50. All prices are calculated at the rate of 5.45 francs to \$1. For more information call 93-92-83-19.

The Monte Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra plays in Monaco's Congress Center on Feb. 15 and Feb. 23. Tickets start at \$18. For more information call 93-30-76-34.

The Monte Carlo Opera, at home in the princely's Suite Garnier in the Casino complex since 1897, offers two new productions: Bizet's "Hobbejo Deveraux," Jan. 24, 25 and 26 and Wagner's "Flying Dutchman," Feb. 13, 16 and 19. Tickets range from \$28 to \$110. For more information call 93-50-78-54.

Public traditions surrounding St. Devote, patron of Monaco and the ruling Grimaldi family, unfold on Jan. 26. A torchlight procession, from Avenue J.F. Kennedy at 6 p.m. leads to a symbolic boat-burning ceremony at 7:30 p.m. on Route du Stade Nautique and fireworks over the port at 7:45 p.m.

SIGHTSEEING:
The labyrinth of narrow lanes called Old Nice, with its treasure box of street art in earthy trompe l'oeil from ochre to apricot, is in great contrast to the sophistication of modern Nice, fifth largest city in France.

The flower market, which is open from 6 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and the morning fruit and vegetable market on Cours Saleya is joined by antiques on Mondays and local art and crafts on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Artists' workshops, galleries and specialty shops are everywhere you go in this clamorous warren.

The Palais Lascaris, at 15 Rue Droite, is a fine example of a 17th-century nobleman's home, complete with pharmacy. It is open from 9:30 a.m. to noon; 2:30-6 p.m.; closed Monday. Admission is free.



High on a scenic cliff, the Monaco Cathedral, built of white stone in 1675, contains the tombs of former princes of Monaco.

For more information call 93-62-65-34.

Lustretemples can be traced in the Roman ruins in the city's Cimiez neighborhood (Les Arcades) near Queen Victoria's winter palace (Boulevard du Cimiez), which is now an apartment complex.

For a grandiose neo-classical edifice of the 18th or 19th century, the Boulevard du Lascaris, while a crystal concoction of 16,309 stones made by Illegiacat for Czar Nicholas II illuminates the Hotel Negresco, at 37 Promenade des Anglais, itself an official historic monument. For more information on the Hotel Negresco call 93-88-39-21.

With 18 museums and galleries Nice has a cultural richness second only to Paris. If one had to pick just one exhibit perhaps it should be the Musée Chagall, at Avenue Menard, built especially to house 17 canvases constituting the artist's Biblical Message. It is open from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.; 2:30-6 p.m.; closed Tuesday. Admission is \$3. For more information call 93-81-75-75.

Regionally, there is the Picasso Museum in the Chateau Grimaldi in Antibes. It is open from 10 a.m. to noon; 2-6 p.m.; closed Tuesday. Admission is \$3.60. For more information call 93-34-91-91.

There is also Bonnard's, Braques and Miró at the Magasin Foundation, at St.-Paul-de-Vence. It is open from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.; 2:30-6 p.m., daily. Admission is \$6.40. For more information call 93-32-81-63.

Nothing has been allowed to sully the Edwardian elegance of Cannes' seafront promenade, La Croisette. The opulent yachts in the old port next to the Palais des Festivals can also be ogled without charge.

Even Monaco springs an "old town" surprise. Upon the famous Rock, Monaco Ville's ancient streets still give an impression of village life, sanely sanitized to view of their proximity to Prince Rainier's Palace.

The royal apartments there are closed in winter, but the gardens and the Napoleonic Museum are open from 10:30 a.m. to noon; 2-6 p.m.; closed Monday. Admission is \$2.50.

The oceanographic Museum has a worldwide reputation for fish and fossils. It is open from 9:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Admission is \$9.

Less known are the views from its roof over Monte Carlo and the Casino, which opens from noon daily. Admission is \$9 and visitors must show passports. For more information call 93-30-69-31.

WHERE TO STAY:
Nothing captures the ambience of the bygone Riviera better than the 250-room Hotel Hermitage, on the Square Beaumontel, Monte Carlo, near the casino and the designer boutiques of the Avenue des Beaux Arts. A room for two costs from \$256 in winter. Winter rates are generally good through February, rates tend to start rising in March. For more information call 93-30-67-31.

In Nice, a livelier and more central base for coastal explorations, a good choice is the Beau Rivage, located at 24 Rue St.-François de Paule. Although it faces the city not the sea, the hotel has been modernized since Matisse, Nietzsche and Chekhov were guests. Doubles start at \$152. For more information call 93-60-80-70.

Ville-Vieille-sur-Mer, next to Nice, is an old town tumbling down to the sea where the Welcome Hotel, at Quai Courbet, offers rooms with balconies right on the water. They are only gradually being redecorated — Nos. 42 and 44 are best. The atmosphere is rather tired, but the patina is wonderful. Doubles start at \$125. For more information call 93-76-76-93.

On the Croisette in Cannes the newly redecorated Hotel Palma has seawall doubles with balcony for \$108. For more information call 93-94-22-16.

One block inland the Hotel Cristal, at 13 Boulevard Dubuys d'Angers, is comfortable and new, with double rooms from \$91. For more information call 93-39-45-45.

Budget choice, Les Cigognes, at 16 Rue Maccarani, Nice. This is a family-run, central hotel with tariffs pegged 20 percent below its rivals. Doubles start at \$67. For more information call 93-88-65-62. (Tony Rocca is a journalist who lives in Cannes, France.)

For warm weather getaway you'd better shop around

We went to Nassau, Bahamas, for the weekend recently and came home to a foot of snow. Micky shovels snow in a woolen cap that reads "It's Better In the Bahamas," which doesn't help.

A warm weather getaway at a great price sounds irresistible, but I learn and relearn that old lesson: do your homework. The fine print says that those \$299 prices are midweek, limited in number and priced for the least expensive hotel.

I read the local papers as well as the New York Times, and checked packages available through travel agents. The most popular and inexpensive packages from Detroit are to Nassau, Bahamas and Cancun, Mexico.

I chose Nassau. Pan Am flew a lot of the package flights to the Bahamas, and Pan Am is out of business, so some tour packages weren't available despite the ads.

We booked too late to get 21-day advance discounts, so our package was \$500 a person including Delta Airline flights, land transfers and four nights at the Best Western British Colonial Resort Thursday through Monday.

The least expensive package to Nassau usually lacks the British Colonial in downtown Nassau. Prices are higher for Paradise Island, across the bridge from eastern downtown or Cable Beach, up Bay Street a few miles to the west.

I had never stayed at the British Colonial, the only hotel I would consider in town, but I've passed the grand old lady of Nassau often enough. From a cruise ship it's a \$5.00 U.S.-dollar spread of pink slacks wrapped around a small private beach and a courtyard full of palm trees.

The British Colonial has survived, but like many old aristocrats, she



crossroads
Iris Jones

had to go to work. I knew that Best Western had spent \$5 million on renovations since 1988, so I booked it and hoped for the best. I was lucky.

The lowest-priced standard rooms face the parking lot or the street, but they are just as spacious, clean and attractive as the higher-priced garden and ocean views. (The only small rooms seem to be those with one double bed.)

I had made a good choice, but there is always something I miss. Nassau hotels add a 10-percent tax to the published room rate, plus \$2.50 per person per night for maid service. That cost was not included in our package price, so it added \$22 a day to our budget.

For more information about the Bahamas, contact your travel agent.

**Cruise Alaska
PRINCESS CRUISES**

"The Love Boat"

Save up to \$400 per couple
if booked by Feb. 14, 1992.

Call now
and save!
Only By Sea, Inc.
645-9900

Maumee Valley Historical Society

ANTIQUES SHOW AND SALE

January 25-26

Toledo, Ohio

82 dealers offering a display of high quality antiques at realistic prices for the negotiable and the avid collector. Lots of furniture.

Saturday 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sunday 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Lucas County Historical Center, 2901 Res. Street, Maumee, Ohio — one mile east of Ohio Turnpike Exit 4 on the center east rd. 43-475 East 6.

Manager: Jim Reynolds 434-437-2028 ADMISSTON: \$4.00

**We've
Turned Over
a New Wing!**

**THE NEW
TOLEDO
MUSEUM
OF ART**

**Come see us again...
for the first time!**

Celebrating the reopening of the west wing galleries

2445 Monroe at Scottwood
Daily 10-4, Sunday 1-5, Closed Mondays
Admission is Free / Call 419-255-8000