

TRAVEL

French Riviera is heaven-on-earth for visitors

BY GRETCHEN HITCH KIRKPATRICK
SPECIAL WRITER

Cote d'Azur on the Riviera in southern France... the name brings visions of Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, and fellow author Somerset Maugham, entertaining royalty and glamorous notables.

You can almost see them luxuriating at their villas on the azure blue Mediterranean coast before World War II.

A June trip to stay at a small European hotel in Villefranche-sur-Mer for almost two weeks made a home base for motoring to Monaco, Cap d'Antibes, Cannes, Cap Ferrat, St. Paul-de-Vence, Beaulieu and Eze perched on the Moyenne Corniche.

To drive the spectacular Grande Corniche as in *To Catch a Thief* is chilling. Sadly this stretch of road - called by many the most beautiful road on earth - is where its star Grace Kelly (then Princess Grace of Monaco) died in a tragic car accident.

Staying in the enchanting little fishing village of Villefranche-sur-Mer, we headquartered at a hotel overlooking the Mediterranean's deep natural harbor between the peninsula of Cap Ferrat and Nice.

By foot

On a walking tour, we learned the settlement began in 1295 on the coast of Savoy with people encamped atop the high cliffs. The Count of Savoy inveigled the folks to come down from the towering cliffs and live on the harbor by promising no taxes. By 1388 the settlement took place on the coast of Provence and by the 16th century became a free port called Villefranche-sur-Mer.

Climbing through the ramports of the ancient Citadel St.

Elme, we crossed the drawbridge and passed the sloping stone fortress walls, and we walked in the moat while viewing the fort's present use as city offices and sculpture galleries. Continuing on the walking tour of Villefranche, up countless stone steps we came upon the Rue Obscure, a covered narrow street lined with ancient doorways that protected the people from bombardment through the centuries until as late as World War II.

Beaulieu-sur-Mer is a nearby town where Cap Ferrat joins the mainland, and Gustave Eiffel, who designed the Paris tower, built a house, now a quietly glamorous hotel. Adjoining we find lavish Pompeii-inspired Villa Kerylos of the Belle Epoque period.

An admirer of Greek architecture and furniture, archaeologist Theodore Reinach in 1902 to 1908 built this extraordinary villa on the rugged coastline. In the dining room chaises for guests to recline as they dined surrounded the three-legged Grecian tables.

Cap Ferrat

Cap Ferrat is on the way to Monaco on a not-to-be-missed peninsula of sumptuous villas, and it offers a fascinating five-mile hike, according to ophthalmologist Bob Stephenson, who enjoys the Riviera with his wife Mary Jo. But the stroll has been made more than rigorous by storms that crashed into the walk at the tip of the peninsula breaking up some of the concrete slabs strewn among rocks.

On Cap Ferrat since 1934 the Fondation Ephrussi de Rothschild opens her mansion with its original collection of lavish furnishings, some of which belonged to Marie Antoinette. At night we could see the lighted

Rothschild mansion atop Cap Ferrat across the bay from Villefranche-sur-Mer with Nice harbor lights on the right, the harbor dotted with yachts.

Up the towering cliffs of Alpes Maritimes on the Moyenne Corniche perches the little village of Eze. Mort and Mary Lou Zieve told us during dinner one night in Villefranche we must walk up to the pinnacle of medieval Eze's castle-fortress with its 14th-century portals. Now the old structures on Eze serve as three small hotels with expensive dining and countless shops. No cars are allowed. Visitors have a spectacular view down to the coastline.

St. Paul-de-Vence, a hill town with medieval streets and buildings, boasts the famous hotel Colombe d'Or, whose 1920s patrons included artists Picasso, Signac, Medalliani, Matisse and Calder, who paid their bills with paintings, which hung casually in the dining and bar rooms now. Sophisticated people dine languidly on the terrace where Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald once got into a fight.

By chance we drove up to the top of Haut de Monte Carlo, past La Turbie settled by the Romans in 6 BC on the Grande Corniche, and found the most magnificent view of all looking down on Monte Carlo, its palace and the yacht harbor. The palace is a former fortress, which during the Grimaldi - the oldest reigning dynasty in the world - turned into a palace. Today, when the Prince is away, the palace is open to visitors.

After 12 days of heaven-on-earth, we took a last stroll along the harbor in Villefrancheavoring the row of glowing cafe lights on the waterfront, mixing with the smiling, happy people arms entwined soaking up the magical sights in paradise.



PHOTO BY CHUCK KIRKPATRICK

On the Waterfront: A hundred pleasure boats (and a few fishing boats) line the waterfront in the Cote d'Azur fishing village Villefranche-sur-Mer. On the hill beyond, the first residents subsisted by growing olives.

Evgeny Kissin piano

WED 10/24 8 pm

Hill Auditorium • Ann Arbor

"Evgeny Kissin is the kind of pianist who comes along once in a couple of generations if we are very lucky indeed..." (The Guardian, London) Kissin returns for his second UMS recital, featuring Mussorgsky's rarely-performed masterpiece, Pictures at an Exhibition.

PROGRAM
Bach/Busoni
Schumann
Mussorgsky
Toccata in C Major, BWV 564
Sonata No. 1 in F-sharp minor, Op. 11
Pictures at an Exhibition

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CRUISE SHOWCASE

Tour Showcase, Oct. 23.

The showcase will bring together representatives from Funjet Vacations, Globus & Cosmos, Carnival Cruise Line, Celebrity Cruise Line, Holland America Line, Norwegian Cruise

Line and Royal Caribbean Cruise Line.

The Cruise & Tour Showcase runs from 6-9 p.m. Oct. 23 at the Embassy Suites in Livonia (Seven Mile and I-275).

Meet Jane Seymour



artist and actress



October 18 & 19, 2001
Thursday 6 to 9 p.m.
Friday 4 to 8 p.m.

Ave Maria Fine Art Gallery

Domino's Farms - Ann Arbor, Michigan

Entrance off Lobby B.

Emmy and Golden Globe Award-winning actress, Jane Seymour, star of the hit CBS series, "Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman," will be on hand October 18 and 19, 2001 at the Ave Maria Fine Art Gallery to exhibit a wide collection of her artwork and will personally inscribe purchases made during the event. Her work as a colorist ranges from delicate watercolors to vibrant oil paintings. It's an exhibit you won't want to miss!

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please call 734.930.7514
Space is limited.

Come dressed as you dare!
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