

# ORIENTARSI

## A Nice Visit along the Mediterranean

Let Nice introduce you to the scenic attractions of the French Riviera. Enjoy two days in one of the world's most glamorous and scenic coasts.

Nice conjures up images of casinos, beaches and beautiful people. This image is pretty much right. While Monaco may be better known for its more outlandish casinos, there are still quite a few in France's fifth largest city. It attracts sun worshippers like honey attracts bees. But Nice isn't as glamorous as Cannes so as a backpacker you won't feel to out of your depth here.



### Day 1 - Get your bearings

Unlike some other French cities, Nice isn't exactly swarming with budget travellers. It is more commonly frequented by many of France's elite, or 'beautiful people'. To get your bearings and get used to seeing flash cars and people, take a leisurely stroll around the area in which you are staying and begin to explore this cosmopolitan city.

Once you have moseyed around for a while there's nothing left to do apart from head straight for the beach! Nice doesn't exactly have golden sandy beaches, more like rounded stone beaches. This can prove to be quite uncomfortable when you first lie down, but like anything else you get used to it. The beach commands amazing views over the Baie des Anges and planes constantly fly over the bay going in and out of the city. This will provide you with more than enough to look at while lying on your back.

From the beach you won't have far to go to enjoy a few sociable beers with the Promenade des Anglais overlooking the beach. Dotted all along this promenade, that was built by a group of English tourists, are a string of bars, cafés and restaurants. Particularly in the summer months when you can sit outside, it is perfect for people spotting as well as enjoying a nice relaxing evening.

## Day 2 - Monaco

While it isn't actually part of France, and an independent principality in its own right, Monaco is only 30-40 minutes away from Nice on the train. While it is home to the rich (as are many places around the French Riviera), the train only costs approximately €7.

Walking around Monaco and Monte Carlo will keep any person occupied for a number of hours. Walking around the streets, it is fascinating to actually witness the starting grid for the annual Grand Prix along with the array of yachts which protrude just how much wealth there is in the miniscule state.

If you want to see exactly how the local royal family, the Grimaldis, live then you must visit Prince's Palace. Situated on the top of a hill, getting to the palace can be tough but the view from the top makes it more than worthwhile. Naturally, walking around the palace makes up for a lot of the walk also.

One of Hollywood's most famous icons, Grace Kelly (later to live under the title of Princess Grace of Monaco) who was killed in a car crash in 1982 is buried in Monaco. Killed with her husband Prince Rainier III in 1982, her grave today lays in the Cathédrale de Monaco. The cathedral itself isn't the most spectacular one in the world, but it is still worth a visit, if only to visit Grace's grave.

Other points of interest in Monaco include the Le Casino, the opera house and Jardin Exotique.



## Day 3 - Vieux Nice

Beginning the next day of your break along Promenade des Anglais is perfect for clearing your head if you had too many beers the night before. Otherwise, the pleasant walk is the perfect way to begin any day in Nice. You may even feel like spending a couple of hours on the beach again!). But keep travelling east on the promenade (with the sea on your right) you will eventually reach Quai des États-Unis. Upon reaching this street you will begin to notice a difference in architecture. You are now entering Vieux Nice.

Better known to English speaking tourists as Old Nice, this area is a maze of winding streets, cafés, restaurants and ice-cream stalls – lots and lots of ice-cream stalls. If you are fond of the sweet dairy product then you will have no problems finding it in the old town.

You could spend half day in this quarter of the city. Its old streets are fascinating, as is the architecture of the buildings. One trademark of the buildings in Vieux Nice is that it resembles an old Italian town rather than France.

Conveniently, Vieux Nice is also one of the liveliest parts of Nice. Most of the restaurants stay open until midnight, the bars serve until 1.30am-2am, and for the real night owls the clubs stay open until after 5am! The best known bar in the area is Wayne's which is jam-packed basically every night which is due to the many bands playing there nightly. And once they shut up shop, the busiest and most popular is Blue Whales.



### **Morning: The Old Town**

The capital of the French Riviera struggles to wake itself each morning. Rise early and you'll have the wide **Promenade des Anglais**, the seafront esplanade named after the rich turn-of-the-century Brits who vacationed here, all to yourself. The healthier among us can pop into **Roller Station** and pick up a pair of blades or a mountain bike for an hour. Cheaper still are bikes from **Vélo Bleu**, the bike sharing scheme that has electronic rent-a-bike stands all over Nice.

Wander through the arches on the Quai des Etats Unis at the end of the prom' into the resplendent Cours Saleya, a pedestrianised 18th-century street lined with pavement cafes. At one end is the fabulous golden house that painter Matisse once lived in. At the other is Le Pain Quotidien, the best breakfast spot in town. Light floods through the tall windows. The bare wooden tables overflow with home-made jams, hearty loaves and *café au lait*. Pricier than most, but way cooler.

Nice's daily flower market (pictured) is right outside. The 30 stalls give off varying tangs of jasmine, rose and lily. Heading back down the Cours Saleya, Monday's antique stalls should be setting up shop; otherwise, the fruit and vegetable market (a riot of colour) will be in full swing. You can plunge into Nice Old Town right here; a warren of vibrant lanes built 500 to 250 years ago when this city was part of Italy.



### **Afternoon: Cimiez**

A busy morning should, by rights, be followed by a good dose of carbs and sugars. Our French friends make do with a platter of ocean-fresh oysters and langoustine accompanied by a *souppçon* of chilled white wine instead. The **Café de Turin** at the Place Garibaldi edge of the Old Town is the locals' place of choice. They got around to extending their terrace in late 2008 after 100 years of business, so there's plenty of room for you, too.

Of the many artists who made the Riviera their home, Matisse and Chagall were Nice's adoptive sons. Wander underneath the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (or MAMAC, as it's known locally) on Place Garibaldi and jump on the number 15 bus up to their two respective museums in the ritzy suburb of Cimiez. The former is a festival of vibrant forms and colours. Matisse didn't do watercolours, he did fun. Chagall is more ethereal, deeper and religiously poignant.



### **Evening: Nice Port**

Fancy joining the locals for a €5 feast? **Chez Pipo** dishes up socca (local chickpea pancakes), a Niçois onion pizza and Provence-style dips on long communal tables. For a harbourside blowout hit the rarified terrace of **Les Pecheurs** in the harbour itself. The €28 set menu is a volley of playfully presented local produce, seafood and cheeses. The Old Town's bars beckon 10 minutes away on foot. Ask around for the current nightspot of choice: at last check **Bliss**, **Ghost** and jazz bar **Shapko** were the coolest of the cool.

### **Not full-fledged itineraries yet, but here are some itinerary ideas.**

Nice is on the mainline railway, allowing rail easy travel long distances (Paris, Lyon, Avignon, Marseille, Monaco and Italy). The train is also the easiest way to travel along the coast in the summer, for day trips to Frejus, Cannes, Antibes, Villefranche, Beaulieu, Eze, Monaco, Roquebrune-Cap Martin and Menton.

Bus travel is available for some of the inland towns, like Grasse and Vence, but a car is necessary for the beautiful little perched villages: Peillon, Gorbio, Sainte-Agnes. Other

day trips could include a tour of St Paul, Vence, Tourrettes-sur-Loup, Bar-sur-Loup and the impressively perched Gourdon.

A day-trip on the narrow-gauge Train des Pignes goes along magnificent river valleys and gorges, past lovely little villages offering lunch stops, picnic hikes and Medieval fortresses (Entrevaux).

A single day's car trip will take you to perched medieval villages in the Tinée Valley (La Tour, Clans, Marie, Ilonse, Rimplas and Saint-Sauveur), but you'll really need several day-trips to spend at least a couple of hours in each of the villages. Past Saint-Sauveur, you could loop around to the west past Roure, Roubion and Beuil, and then back down the Gorges de Dalius.



### **Itinerary and Tips for Nice**

Walking on the Promenade des Anglais is a must for looking at the sea, the beach and the hotels.

The Old Town and the Cours Saléya: Start from Place Masséna and walk towards the Promenade on Rue de l'Opéra. Make a left on Rue St-Francois-de-Paule, check the boutiques but don't buy there (touristy prices way too high). Walk straight ahead to the Marché aux Fleurs (Cours Saléya). There is a market every day except Mondays. Walk to the end of the market and you get to the Chapelle du St-Suaire. Make a left on J' Gilly street . It ends on Rue de la Préfecture. Make a left there and walk until you reach Rue Ste-Réparate. Make a right and you will see the Cathedral Ste-Réparate and get on Place Rossetti. Very typical (look at the warmth of colours if you are there 1hr or 2 before sunset). A left on Rue Rossetti until you reach Rue Droite. Make a left on Rue Droite and walk to its end. Stop by Palais Lascaris (free visit) and some nice artist shops (check Christian Dury's gallerie: he puts typical Nice things in Plexiglas frames). Rue Droite falls into Rue St-François the in Rue Pairolière. Both typical Old Nice streets with locals shops, food store, fish and meat stores, etc. Open your eyes and your ears and take a deep breath. Now you see the real thing. You get to the Place Garibaldi. Time for lunch. Help yourself, there are plenty nice spots at cheap prices. If you are keen on sea food the Café de Turin is the place for you. (No reservations)

From Place Garibaldi keep your right and stay on Rue Catherine Ségurane from where you will get a road that brings you up the Castle Hill (Colline du Château). Walk up to its top and have a look at the whole area (the Port, the beaches, the town). Stop by the Cemetery on your way down and walk to the Port. Look at the small fishermen boats on Quai des Deux Emmanuel. And walk back to town circling the Castle Hill by walking on the sea side to reach back Promenade des Anglais. If you're not up to all that walking, take the little white train that starts from the Promenade des Anglais opposite the Place Albert 1 (next to the Méridien Hotel & McDonald's !). This runs through the old town & up to the Castle & you can get off to do some sightseeing & catch a later train back. That one should take not far from a day long, especially if you stop often at boutiques or for an ice cream cone...



**Another nice day is going** to Villa Éphrussi Rotschild by Bus 81 (starts from Gare Routière). It accepts regular bus tickets (4 euro for a day, around 15 euro for a week pass with unlimited travel). Ask the driver for the name of the bus stop right at the doorsteps of the Villa. It's a superb mansion with seven fantastic gardens. One can spend two hours of pure delight there. When you leave the Villa, walk to your left. The road goes up a bit, walk on the road to your left. It goes down towards St-Jean-Cap Ferrat where you can stop for lunch and get back to Nice with Bus 81 once again. Or you could walk on the seaside towards Beaulieu-sur-Mer using the trail called Sentier des Douaniers. It is about an hour walk and you could then visit Beaulieu, Villa Kerylos and get back to Nice by train.

If you are there on a Friday, take the train to Vintimille (Ventimiglia in Italian), a small Italian town where they have a well-known market. When you leave the train station, walk straight ahead. 200 ft and it's crowded; you just found the market! Before getting in it, look on your right for the food market. Back at the real market, you can get good deals on leather, cashmere wool, etc. The morning is enough time spent in the market. There are some nicer Italian restaurants at cheap prices if you don't mind walking a block or 2 on your right (eastbound), getting away from the market. Back on the train to Nice, get off at Monaco (not the Ste-Dévote Chapel exit at the back of the train but the one at the head of the train). Have fun for the afternoon in Monte-Carlo.

Like art? Get a car or take the bus to Vence and St-Paul-de-Vence. It's about ¾ hour from Nice and take the day for both villages. Catch the 400 bus from the Gare Routière in Ave Jean Jaurès - journey time 50/55mins - fare €1.30 each way. (A taxi would cost €45/50 & take 25 mins). If you rented a car and feel like shopping with the local crowd, stop by St-Laurent-du-Var Cap 3000 shopping centre just past the airport. A huge one.



**Museums? Like Modern Art?** Don't miss the Fondation Maeght just outside the walls of St Paul. Back in Nice the Mamac Museum of Modern Art is a must. Then you have both Chagall and Matisse Museum on bus route 15 from the City centre.

Want to shop? Rue Jean Médecin, rue de l'Hotel des Postes. Rue Gioffredi are all street you should not miss and you have the Centre de l'Étoile shopping Centre on Rue Jean Médecin along with the Galeries Lafayette, the Monoprix for food and clothes and the FNAC for records and books (along with Virgin Megastore across the street). There are walking only streets close to that area and they are full of shops and restaurants.

You could take the bus to Eze-Village, a medieval village that must be seen. Menton along the coast is also quite nice to see and has its own Old Town.

Westbound towards Cannes, you have Antibes and Juan les Pins that can be reached easily by bus.

If you rent a car, Mougins and Biot and Valbonne are quite nice to see.

