

Sailing the French Riviera

Villefranche-sur-Mer

INDULGE YOURSELF WITH SEAFOOD FEASTS OR SUN-KISSED BEACHES
AMONG THE FRENCH RIVIERA'S SECRET SAILING SPOTS



Port Vauban, Antibes

Words by Tristan Rutherford

WHEN IT COMES TO SAILING ON THE FRENCH RIVIERA, SIZE DOESN'T MATTER. It's what you do with it that counts. By sailboat, speedboat, ferry, or superyacht, a watery world of secret islands and barefoot beach bars awaits.

British rocker Keith Richards kept an unlicensed 7m *Riva* speedboat at his home in the 11th century medieval town of **Villefranche**, just outside **Nice**. When the mood struck him, the Rolling Stone would jet across the waves for lunch in Italy without insurance, pilot's licence or, for that matter, a passport. Boating on the French Riviera is as carefree as it comes.

Indeed, some of most sublime spots in the south of France are only reachable by sea. A case in point is **Sainte-Marguerite Island**, just off the **Cap d'Antibes**. The hour-long €34 (US\$43) ferry ride from Nice (*trans-cote-azur.com*) takes in million-dollar views of this glamorous peninsular where Paris Hilton holidays and which boat-loving billionaire Roman

Abramovich calls home. Sainte-Marguerite Island itself is a century-old national park. There are no cars, and no noise; just the scents of eucalyptus, lavender, and Aleppo pine. Under the waves, colonies of grouper and octopus lie in wait.

Other visitors would rather putter through paradise under their own steam. Aboard a rented wooden speedboat, the past playgrounds of Riviera royalty are readily on display. David Niven's pink castle sits on **Cap Ferrat** – Europe's richest stretch of land. Aristotle Onassis's former boat, the *Christina O*, regularly docks in Monaco – Europe's richest per-capita state.

Speedboat hire outfits reside in the sheltered resorts of Villefranche (*darkpelican.com*) and Antibes

(*antibes-bateaux.com*). First-time sailors are let loose on 6hp four-person motorboats from US\$180 per day. In terms of power, they're hardly James Bond. But with a picnic of olives, baguettes and French cheese, anyone can be a pretend movie star in the southern French sun.

Those visitors with a motorboat licence may rent something meatier. The pleasure ports of **Juan-les-Pins** (*yacht-riviera.com*) and **Golfe-Juan** (*boat-synergy.com*) hire 200hp monsters, the maritime equivalent of a Mercedes SLK, for around US\$500 per day. Both ports offer a two-day speedboat licence qualification course, that allow prospective captains to play Schumacher-on-sea on their next visit.



CONNECT

NICE, FRANCE

Distance from Doha: **4,488 km**
 Flight time: **8 hrs, 45 mins**
 Frequency: **3 flights a week**
 (via Milan)

نيس، فرنسا

المسافة: ٤.٤٨٨ كم
 مدة الرحلة: ٨ ساعات و٤٥ دقيقة
 معدل الرحلات: ٣ رحلات أسبوعياً
 (عبر ميلانو)

→ 'Riviera' is an Italian term originally from the Middle Ages for Liguria, the north west coastal region of Italy.

SPECIAL STOPS

The medieval town of **Grasse** is the centre of the world's perfume industry. Visitors can see it – and smell it – from the rose-trimmed road that weaves uphill from the coastal resort of Cannes.

In the 2006 movie **Perfume**, a young Ben Whishaw (who plays the role of Q in the forthcoming Bond film **Skyfall**) traverses the town in search of the perfect scent.



Modern-day visitors can tour the grand perfume houses of **Fragonard** (fragonard.com) and **Molinard** (molinard.com).

Here, jasmine, rose, and violet are pressed into gels, creams, and scent. For €30, guests can even make their own bespoke aroma to wow the world at large. But Grasse's distinguished 'noses' – or *les nez* – aren't worried about the competition. The average nose can distinguish between 2,000 different kinds of scent, and blend several dozen into an award-winning cologne.

Floral riches made Grasse a wealthy town. Queen Victoria holidayed in its fabulous hotels a century ago. Angelina Jolie pops in from time to time. Even the local village church boasts a trio of paintings by Dutch master Rubens on the right-hand wall.

Roads don't exist on the waves, so drivers may cut, swerve, and burn across an endless expanse of blue. A dozen secret anchorages lie in wait. Each one has a barefoot beach bar where you may tie up and indulge in a lazy seafood feast.

Paloma Plage (beach) on Cap Ferrat overlooks the **Principality of Monaco**. The beach club's private jetty is a favoured dining spot for Brad Pitt. **La Tonnelle** (tonnelle-abbayedelerins.com) on **Saint-Honorat Island** is only accessible by motor launch. After house specials of *foie gras* cheeseburger and *panisse* chips, diners can explore an uninhabited paradise island ringed by vineyards, rock pools, and tiny stretches of sand.

Some would argue that the best way to cruise the Riviera is not by steam, but by sail. They'd be in good company. Legendary Italian industrialist Gianni Agnelli sailed the south of France on the 25m *Agneta*. The Fiat chairman would regularly jet between **Rome** and **Turin** at lunchtime, then return to the Riviera

at dusk to entertain the likes of Rita Hayworth and Anita Ekberg for cocktails off Cap Ferrat.

The gloriously pretty port of Villefranche between Nice and Monaco is a fine place to moor such a vessel. Jean Cocteau loved to sail his own little boat around the secluded bay with fellow painter Pablo Picasso. Better still, dropping anchor in these temperate waters is completely free. An 11m five-berth rental yacht starts from US\$2,300 per week (giotto.it).

There are only a few hundred superyachts on the globe, but 90% of them will tour the French Riviera at least once during their lifetime. Chartering one of them is the ultimate summertime statement, and Saint Tropez is the undisputed star of the superyacht circuit. Days start in the resort's **Vieux Port** (Old Port of Marseille), where Mick Jagger and David Beckham take their morning strolls. After breakfast, guests join a million-dollar migration of the world's finest boats to **Plage de Pampelonne**,

Paloma Plage, Cap Ferrat



© Christopher Anesi/stockphoto

the preferred summer party spot of Jack Nicholson and Sean 'P. Diddy' Combs.

Chartering your own piece of paradise lets you join an elite club – and it doesn't come cheap. Superyacht specialist Y.CO (ycoyacht.com), which has offices in both Monaco and Doha, charter yachts such as the 55m *Elena*, a recreation of the 1928 transatlantic sailing race record-holder, from US\$90,000 per week. She comes with five mahogany en-suite cabins and a whole host of 'toys', from wakeboards and water skis to kayaks and kitesurfers.

Need something higher spec? From a cool US\$250,000 per week Y.CO recommends the 67m luxury sailing yacht *Vertigo*, whose strapline reads 'Urban at Sea'. It boasts a breathless modern interior plus an 8m hi-tech yacht tender that looks tailor-made for a James Bond baddie. ✈