

THE  TIMES**30 budget places on the Riviera**

Cathedrale apartment in Nice, press handout image from Nice Pebbles, French Riviera on the cheap for tmes weekend travel

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Michelin-star meals for £15 and rooms for £100. You don't have to be rich to enjoy the South of France

Hold the Krug! The original billionaires' playground has been stirred, if not shaken, by the financial crisis. Thankfully, the Côte d'Azur has been in the holiday business since Queen Victoria first frequented the Riviera so its hoteliers know when to be flexible on price. A new breed of hip hotel and designer campsite now offers family lodgings for less than £100 and £50 respectively. The apartment rental market has been torn open by the likes of Holiday Rentals.co.uk and the local specialist Nice Pebbles. And there is no need to hire a car — or to pay a standard €20 (£18) for overnight parking. A €1 bus system now spans the Riviera, linking every coastal resort and hilltop hideaway from Antibes to Menton to

St-Paul de Vence.

Finally, the Michelin-star-spangled Riviera has long been a training ground for restaurateurs. Several twentysomething chefs opened their own cut-price culinary outposts offering set lunches last year — with wine — for less than €17. Two of them picked up their first Michelin stars in 2011, with others on our list gunning to join the club next year. Here is what's chic on the Côte d'Azur this summer.

Chic sleeps up to £100

Nice Pebbles, Nice

Nice's largest apartment rental agency manages more than 50 properties in locations that the big hotel brands simply can't reach, including the old town and port. All have wi-fi, washing machines, chic interiors and Egyptian cotton linen. You can book online for the Providence apartment, two minutes from the beachfront (£90 a night in August), or stay in the two-bedroom Cathédrale apartment for £100 a night in October for a minimum of four nights (quote *The Times* for this special offer and 5 per cent off any booking this year).

Details From £100 per apartment (0033 4 97 20 27 30, nicepebbles.com)

Hotel Miramar, Cap d'Ail

The Miramar's panorama from its roof terraces pans from Monaco to Cap Ferrat: yours for only €88 this August. This tidy guesthouse also has bargain basement rooms for €43. Breakfast in bed — or on your own private terrace — costs an extra €7.50.

Details Room-only doubles from €48 (0033 4 93 78 06 60, monte-carlo.mc/hotel-miramar-capdail)

Le Refuge, Plage Gigaro, St-Tropez peninsula

Le Refuge is a real find. This line of rustically Provençal cabins lies two minutes on foot from Plage Gigaro, the St-Tropez peninsula's quietest, most family-friendly beach. Granted, it's a simple set-up, with hefty wooden beds and simple outdoor furniture, but guests have been known to stay for a month — or longer. It is set in a gloriously unkempt Mediterranean garden sprinkled with magnificent giant yucca, cacti and swaying palms.

Details B&B doubles from €88 (0033 4 94 79 67 38)

Hôtel Les Deux Frères, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin

The pretty village of Roquebrune tumbles down the hill towards Monaco and a stunning public beach. Its principal hostelry — once the old village school — has its own fine dining restaurant.

Details Room only doubles from €110 (0033 4 93 28 99 00, lesdeuxfreres.com)

Le Relais du Postillon, Antibes

A seaside town decked with street markets, colourful shutters and a château-turned-Picasso Museum, Antibes is justifiably popular. Rooms may be small but with the odd balcony on Antibes' main square, who's counting?

Details Room-only doubles from €70 (0033 4 93 34 20 77, relaisdupostillon.com)

Nice Garden Hotel, Nice

Simple, sweet and five minutes from the beach, the Nice Garden is in a shady orange grove in the centre of town. Rooms are a touch granny-ish but all are blissfully quiet and comfy.

Details Room-only doubles from €90 (0033 4 93 87 35 62, nicedgardenhotel.com)

Camping Les Embruns, Antibes

This leafy campsite, with a smoothie bar and a retro games room, is a favourite with French families. It is a short walk from Aquasplash (the Riviera's largest water park), Marineland, and, best of all, a long public beach.

Details Two adults, pitch and vehicle costs €20-€24 a night (0033 4 93 33 33 35)

Douce Quiétude, St-Raphaël

Set in pine woodlands at the edge of the Massif de l'Estérel's crimson mountains, Douce Quiétude is a campsite that is perfect for active families.

Details Two adults, pitch and vehicle costs €28-€54 a night (0033 4 94 44 30 00, douce-quietude.co.uk)

Les Medes, Île de Porquerolles

Unlike daytrippers to the Île de Porquerolles, guests at Les Medes get the island's white-sand beaches, translucent waters and car-free lanes all to themselves at sunset.

Details Apartments from €66 per person (0033 4 94 12 41 24, hotel-les-medes.fr)

Hôtel Alnea, Cannes

With a decor that's Pop Art fantastic, this central Cannes charmer has 14 brightly painted rooms. Its sister hotel, Hotel 7 Art, has rooms for the same price.

Details Room-only doubles from €90 (0033 4 93 68 77 77, hotel-alnea.com)

Fine dining for under £15

Mon Rêve De Gosse, Cannes

Thirty-year-old chef Ludovic Ordas last year left Michelin two-star La Palme d'Or to open his own restaurant. To scale prices down to a €15 lunchtime menu, recipes are inspired by the adjacent Forville market, including flash-fried scallops with aioli and pigeon breast.

Details 11 rue Louis Blanc (0033 4 93 39 68 08, monrevedegosse.com) Closed Tues

Eden Plage Mala, Cap d'Ail

A day at a beach club is de rigueur. Many are pricey and posey, including St-Tropez's decadent Voile Rouge, where champagne is routinely sprayed over diners. Not so at Eden Plage, which attracts a shabby-chic crowd for €15 salads of fresh artichokes, Parmesan and Parma ham.

Details Allée Mala (0033 4 93 78 17 06, edenplagelamala.com)

Le Cosmo, Villefranche-sur-Mer

Villefranche has a quayside lined with ritzy restaurants serving lobster and local mullet. Locals head instead to Cosmo for €14 salads, including the house special of grapefruit and hearts of palm.

Details 11 place Amélie Pollonais (0033 4 93 01 84 05)

G.Square, Nice

The menu revolves around a showpiece rotisserie oven where a dozen of France's finest Périgord chickens slowly roast each afternoon. The €14 lunch menu includes a generous slug of wine and a quarter of the best chicken that a Briton may ever eat.

Details 9 place Garibaldi (0033 4 89 03 69 28)

Le Rustic, Antibes

Euro for euro, this is the best restaurant in Antibes. It is a true family-run joint too, with grandson manning the alfresco terrace and grandmother pulling dishes such as duck breast roasted on a metal spade out of the wood-fired oven.

Details 33 place Nationale (0033 4 93 34 10 81)

Adagio, Monaco

The €15 two-course set menu (try spezzatino beef stew or herby flanks of salmon) accompanied by a hefty glass of Valpolicella at this modern Italian restaurant must be the Principality's biggest bargain.

Details 1 rue Bioves, Monte-Carlo (00377 97 98 15 56) Closed Sun

Flaveur, Nice

Flaveur's three young partners learnt their trade in some of the Riviera's finest kitchens. Their edgy cuisine — including seabass in a coconut ceviche — scooped up a Michelin star this year. Book ahead for the €16 set lunch, including wine.

Details 25 rue Gubernatis (0033 4 93 62 53 95, flaveur.net) Closed Sat lunch and Sun

Pétrus, St-Tropez

Since 2010 Pétrus has been dishing up cut-price haute cuisine with a Franco-oriental menu, including Asian-spiced chicken brochettes (€16).

Details 13 Quai de l' E pi (0033 4 94 43 12 94, restaurant-petrus.com)

Saison, Nice

This Japanese-Mediterranean noodle bar has a focus on seasonality. Each morning its chefs scour Nice's markets to create a fresh €16 set lunch menu.

Details 17 rue Gubernatis (0033 4 93 85 69 04, saison-nice.com) Closed Sun and Mon

Café de la Place, Saint-Paul de Vence

Café de la Place is as inexpensive as it is timeless, right down to its original zinc-topped bar. Hearty €10.50 *plat du jour* lunches include Niçoise daube oxtail stew.

Details Place de Gaulle (0033 4 93 32 80 03)

Days out for under £1

€1 bus transport, Cannes to the Italian border Bus No 100 is our favourite, skirting the panoramic Basse Corniche en route to Villefranche, Cap d'Ail and Monaco. Bus No 200 heads in the opposite direction, stopping at every beachside resort, including Antibes and Juan-les-Pins.

Details www.lignesdazur.com

Changing the Guard, Monaco

Seek out the newlywed Prince Albert's home, the panoramic Palais Princier, while taking in the changing of the palace guards. The five-minute ceremony is pompous fun.

Details Palais Princier, 11.55am daily

Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain (MAMAC), Nice

Outside Paris, Nice is home to more museums than any other French city and almost all of them are free. Visit the MAMAC to take in *L'Art Contemporain et la Côte d'Azur (1951-2011)*, the museum's summer exhibition showcasing locally inspired art from Raoul Dufy, Marc Chagall and Max Ernst.

Details Promenade des Arts, Tues-Sun 10am-6pm (www.mamac-nice.org)

Vélo Bleu bicycles, Nice

Nice's compact Old Town and 5km-long Promenade des Anglais are perfect for exploring by bike. Get pedalling with Vélo Bleu, Nice's neat bike-sharing scheme. Register for a pass online or use your mobile at any of the city's 90 cycle stations.

Details €1 one-day pass allows free use of a bike for up to 30 min a ride (velobleu.org)

Second-hand markets

Whatever your treasure, find it at one of the Riviera's many weekly *brocantes* (bric-a-brac or second-hand markets).

Details Cours Saleya, Nice, Monday 8am-6pm; Place Audiberti, Antibes, Thursday and Saturday 8am-6pm; Marché Forville, Cannes, Monday 8am-1pm; Place des Lices, St-Tropez, Tuesday and Saturday 8am-1pm

Sentier du Littoral, St-Tropez peninsula

Turquoise waters lap the St-Tropez peninsula's coastline. Yet few visitors know that a *sentier du littoral*, or public walking path, rings the whole of this exquisite promontory.

Details We love the hearty hikes eastwards from Plage de Gigaro (golfe-saint-tropez-information.com)

Renoir's gardens, Cagnes-sur-Mer

Swap the beach for citrus groves and sun-dappled gardens at petite Domaine des Collettes, former home and studio of the Impressionist great.

Details Gardens free; Chemin des Collettes, Wed-Mon 10am-noon and 2-6pm

Grand Prix Circuit, Monaco

The Monaco Grand Prix circuit weaves through city streets, which means that speed fiends can drive, cycle or walk the 3.34km loop. Looking for a shortcut? Hop aboard Monaco's new solar-powered Bateau Bus.

Details (€1) monte-carlo.mc

Follow Picasso's footsteps, Vallauris

Pablo Picasso used the Galerie Madoura as a workshop in the 1950s — it's now a gallery selling his limited-edition ceramics. Just up the road, the artist gave bronze sculpture *Homme au mouton* (Man with sheep, Place Paul Isnard) to the town in 1950. Art

aficionados can then take a peek at his anti-war *La Guerre et la Paix*.

Details madoura.com

Outdoor adventure, Auron

Come summertime, Auron transforms into an outdoor adventure destination, with 16 mountain biking trails. Daily buses (No 740) pick up passengers from Nice's railway station and airport.

Details (€1) auron.com; cgo6.fr

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