

MONACO

By Mandy Hegarty

Few places have such connotations of luxury, opulence and glitz. The name alone conjures up images of the glamorous Grimaldis, fast-living Formula 1 drivers, high-flying tycoons and uber-successful sports and film stars. The crème de la crème of the jet-set crowd leave hints of their presence at every turn: the marinas are crammed with their glimmering yachts, the streets with high-end sports cars and the footpaths with shoes that are almost invariably designer. In this tiny tax-free principality, champagne flows and lavishness reigns. One thing is for sure, it's no place for austerity.



Though it clocks in at just 500 acres, Monaco manages to outperform its size as far as upscale activities are concerned. For out-of-towners, few things can exemplify Monegasque decadence better than the extraordinarily lavish casino. The elegant and exuberant façade demands attention, not least from those who may recognise it from a spate of James Bond films, including 'GoldenEye'. Inside, the sumptuous chandelier-strewn interior exudes old-world glamour. On the tables, you'll quickly discover that the stakes are high. Unsurprisingly, money is flung around pretty freely here, though not by Monaco's well-known locals. Residents of the principality are

forbidden from gambling. For the wealthy exiles who call Monaco home – among them familiar faces like Boris Becker, Ringo Starr, Shirley Bassey and retail magnate Philip Green – it is the glistening Mediterranean waters and not the casino that is their playground. You are more likely to glimpse the elite locals sipping flutes of Dom Perignon on the deck of their enormous yachts. Of course, you'll require a yacht of your own to do so. Companies like Bespoke Yacht Charter can offer both day charters as well as longer charters from Monaco and all ports on the French Riviera.

Among the glut of options are yachts

to suit all tastes and predilections, but in this town, it's all about style and speed. The 35.37-meter (116.04-foot) Mistral 55 (prices beginning at 11,666 euros per day plus fuel, tax et al.) fulfils both criteria. This sleek yacht was designed by the esteemed Fulvio de Simoni and speed-wise, it also performs. Capable of reaching in excess of 50 miles per hour, the Mistral 55 is ideal for day trips and can carry those on board to Corsica in under three hours and to St. Tropez in less than 40 minutes. For smaller parties marina-hopping around the French Riviera, the 13-metre (44-foot) Riva Rivarama is a stylish choice with prices beginning at around 3,000 for a day charter.



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for the world's most moneyed.*

Back on dry land, dinner is all about haute cuisine. The restaurant to see and be seen at is Alain Ducasse's Le Louis XV at Hôtel de Paris. Ducasse is a something of a Michelin-star magnet, and was the first chef to earn three Michelin stars for three different restaurants in his empire – his Monaco outpost among this lauded trifecta. The dining room has recently undergone a refit under the tasteful direction of Paris-based architects Patrick Jouin and Sanjit Manku. Gone is the old profusion of fusty busts, with new additions, such as a metal and wood central service station and a showpiece hand-assembled Murano glass chandelier complete with 700 pieces of glass, lending the dining room a more contemporary air. However, the classic Belle Epoque grandeur remains. The shell is still as gloriously gilt-and-marble-encrusted as it has always been and the original ceiling fresco, painted at the construction of the Hôtel de Paris, is still in place.

The menu has been recently updated too, with Ducasse and head chef Dominique Lory adding new and fresh Riviera-inspired dishes, like blue lobster with myrtle berries and ginger, and Mediterranean sea bass with local citrus. As its stars indicate, the food at Ducasse's flagship restaurant is truly

top-rate and the diners are often A-list. It's not unlikely you'll share the dining room with some recognisable gazillionaires. In Monaco, it's de rigueur to get dressed up for dinner and the Pavilions Monte-Carlo – a striking collection of five pebble-shaped aluminium structures – is the perfect place to pick up some suitably swanky attire. These pavilions, which can be found in the Boulingrins Gardens, house luxury stores including Alexander McQueen, Balenciaga and Piaget, and will remain here until 2018 when the renovation of the nearby Place du Casino is complete.

After a few nights spent indulging in Monaco's fine-dining hotspots and indulgent party scene, the only thing for it is a spa visit. Unsurprisingly, in a place where Botox sessions and costly wellness treatments are as common as dental appointments, there are plenty of spas to choose from. The Thermes Marins, adjacent to the historic Hermitage Hotel, is among the finest places to recoup and regenerate. Though the spa was founded in 1895, many of its treatments are thoroughly modern, relying on high-tech equipment and cutting-edge techniques to aid relaxation, as well as for anti-aging, slimming and beauty therapies.

Be sure to try Cryotherapy. Thermes Marins was the first spa facility on the continent to offer this innovative wellness treatment. Frequently used on recovering athletes, Cryotherapy takes place in two special chambers where cool temperatures of between minus 60 and minus 110 degrees Celsius are employed. The sub-zero temperatures benefit muscle and inflammatory diseases, and can help relieve jet lag and fight stress. After your treatment, bliss out in the immaculate spa facilities, where you'll find everything from an ice fountain and a hammam to a Russian banya and ocean-facing outdoor Jacuzzi, as well as a heated seawater pool complete with underwater jets for massage purposes.

Monaco is frequently described as a playground for the world's most moneyed. And that is exactly what it is: a little fantasy land, where moderation is cast aside and hedonism rules. While here, you'll probably be handed a bill that makes you balk and you'll definitely drink at least one champagne too many, but while you're in this unique little bubble, it's best to embrace the excess.



ADHP - Loup, betteraves, agrumes (c) Pierre Monetta

Alain Ducasse à l'Hôtel de Paris - vue d'ensemble (c) Pierre Monetta

