

by Maryalicia Post



Of a prince and princess – and Camelot by the sea

In Camelot, the legendary realm of King Arthur, "all was well and wonderful." Monaco seems a lot like that.

Here the weather is never too hot or too cold; the sun shines 10 months a year. There's a princely palace on the hill, and an ornate casino by the sea. The splendid yachts lining the harbour are stirred, though seldom shaken, by the blue Mediterranean. There are manicured parks, litter-free streets, no visible poverty, and no direct taxation. In short, as the song puts it: "There's simply not a more congenial spot" – especially for settling down with one's investments. No wonder foreign residents outnumber the Monegasques by four to one.

The principality, a half-mile wide and three miles long, is wedged between France and Italy, with the Alpes Maritimes at its back and the sea at its feet. It's built on the side of hill so steep it is practically a cliff. Except for the Vatican, Monaco is the smallest independent country in the world. Nonetheless, it's divided into four quarters: Monaco-Ville surrounding the

Grimaldi palace on top of "the Rock"; La Condamine, the mini Manhattan below it; Fontvieille – on seven acres of recently-reclaimed land; and Monte Carlo.

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Charles Garnier – the architect of the Paris Opera house – it's worth the 10 admission charge simply to look around. From the Atrium, lined with onyx pillars, to the sumptuous red and gold gaming rooms, this is unabashed, "maximalist"

décor: stained glass, bronze lamps, allegorical paintings, and sinuous marble sculptures. Only the black and white formal attire of the impassive croupiers is restrained.

The surroundings are no less baroque in the slot machine rooms where, though you may never become "the man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo," you can pass a fairly exciting hour or two. In the casino, there is also an informal bistro, a bar, a restaurant, and the possibility of attending a cabaret performance while you dine. Slot machine rooms open at 2 pm; the gaming rooms open at 4 pm. For information on the Cabaret, telephone +377 98 06 36 36

Garnier contributed two more buildings to the glory of Monte Carlo. One of them is the Salle Garnier, Monaco's Opera House, which is currently closed for renovation. The other building, once a private villa, now houses the National Museum. This is not the place to come for the history of Monaco. For that, visit the Palace Archives or attend one of the

frequent screenings of the Monte-Carlo Story at Rue Emile de Loth in Monaco-Ville.

Telephone +377 93 25 32 33.

Getting there:

Nice is the closest international airport to Monaco. By helicopter, you can cover the 22 kilometres from the airport to the landing pad in Fontvieille in six minutes.

Heli Air Monaco, Regular flights Monaco/Nice/Monaco.

For reservations, telephone +377 92 05 00 50

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Walk into history with short walk from Monte Carlo

Cross over the border to France to visit the village of Cap d'Ail, between the mountains and the sea. It's only two kilometres from Monte Carlo, yet has scarcely changed in 100 years. Surely the coast's best-kept secret, it's worth visiting for its beautifully preserved Belle Époque villas, flowery parks and squares and access to Plage Mala, "the prettiest beach on the Riviera."

Cap d'Ail meticulously maintains four un-demanding but stunningly panoramic walks: two following the shoreline and two up in the hills. Each walk is signposted to help you identify the flora

growing along the way. For a 5 charge, a knowledgeable guide will accompany you. Information and bookings at the Cap d'Ail Tourist Office. *87 bis, Av du 3 Septembre. Open Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to noon and from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. Open on Saturday from 9 a.m. to noon. Closed Sunday. Tel: +33 (0) 4 93 78 02 33*

There are two exceptional restaurants in Cap d'Ail, both on Plage Mala. La Pinede, once a fisherman's hut on the shore, is now an atmospheric setting in

which to sample Mediterranean fish specialities. La Reserve, with its flower-banked wooden deck overlooking the sea, is beautiful in the daytime but memorable on a warm night when the water reaches almost to the deck and torches light the high tide mark. *Reservations advised. La Pinede: Telephone: + 33 (0) 493 78 37 10; La Reserve: Telephone: +33 (0) 493 78 21 56.*

A "bijou" villa often visited by the late Prince Ranier as a child is now the exquisite 12-bedoomed Hotel de Monaco, from which there is a pleasant walk down to Plage Mala. Rates,

including breakfast, range from 140 to 165. There's a morning shuttle for people attending conferences in Monaco. *Hotel de Monaco, Avenue Pierre Weck, 06320 Cap d'Ail, France. Tel: +33 (0) 4 92 41 31 00 Email: david@hoteldemonaco.com Website: www.hoteldemonaco.com*

Small suggestions for a short trip

Dolls in the National Museum

Perhaps fittingly for a country described by Hans Christian Anderson as a "toy republic," Monaco's National Museum houses a remarkable collection of china dolls and rooms full of clock-work automatons. As you enter the museum, look to your right. Under a glass dome stand dolls of Prince Ranier and Princess Grace, dressed in exact replicas of the late couple's wedding costumes. *National Museum of Monaco, 17, Av. Princess Grace. Telephone: +377 93 30 91 26. Open daily 10 am to 12:15 pm and from 2:30 p.m. to 6:30 pm.*

Cathedral in death and Palace in life

Rainier's personal fairy tale ended with the death of his beloved Princess in 1982. Prince Ranier died earlier this year and is buried next to her in the family crypt in Monaco's Cathedral. It's a short walk from the Cathedral, through the medieval streets of Monaco-Ville, to the Grimaldi Palace. Most of the present royal residence dates from the 16th and 17th centuries; only the towers of the original 13th century fortress remain. Francesco, the first Grimaldi to capture the Rock, wrested the stronghold from a rival Genoese faction in 1297. He gained admittance disguised as a monk, and knifed the sleepy guards. His soldiers overran the garrison. A bronze statue of him in monk's robes stands on Palace Square. *State Apartments, Palace Square. Tel: +377 93 25 18 31. Open daily from 10 am to 5 pm. Changing of the Guard on Palace Square occurs daily at 11:55 am.*

Oceans and gardens

The not-to-be-missed attraction in Monaco-Ville is the oceanography museum. Founded in 1910 by Prince Albert, who had a passion for deep-sea exploration, it is part-museum, part-aquarium and totally engrossing. Prince Albert also established his famous Exotic

Gardens adjacent to it; in 1913, the gardens were transferred to a rocky hillside above what is now Fontvieille, alongside the entrance to the underground cave observatory. *Oceanographic Museum and Aquarium, Av. Saint-Martin. Open daily except Monday; hours of opening can vary. Tel: +377 93 15 36 00*

Holy art

Before leaving Monaco-Ville, stop in at the tiny Chapelle de la Visitation. This 17th century Baroque building currently houses some dozen examples of religious art, including a Rubens and a Ribeira. You may well have them all to yourself. *Chapel of the Visitation Museum, Place de la Visitation, Monaco-Ville. Tel: 93 50 07 00. Open Tuesday to Sunday from 10 am-4 pm. Closed Monday.*

Olds cars

Over 100 elegant old automobiles – the personal property of Ranier who opened his collection to the public – comprise the "Exhibition of the Prince of Monaco's Private Collection of Classic Cars" at Fontvieille Terraces. *Exhibition of the Prince of Monaco's Private Collection of Classic Cars, Fontvieille Terraces. Open every day from 10 am to 6 pm. Tel: +377 92 05 28 56.*

New cars

To admire elegant new automobiles, stroll down Avenue Princess Grace towards the Grimaldi Forum. Lamborghinis, Mercedes, and Bentleys glint in the show room windows, each car with its modestly displayed five- or six-figure price tag. Earlier this year the first million-euro Bugatti was sold in Monaco.