

# Travel & Outdoors



A Bentley outside the belle époque Monte-Carlo casino

## Pleasure principal

Monaco is like a super-clean theme park, perfect for people-watching, and even better for super-car spotting

BY CHRISTIAN SYLT

**Y**OU KNOW YOU'RE OFF to somewhere special when weary travellers' faces are transfixed by the sweeping vistas visible through the aircraft windows as it comes in to land. It is a feeling anyone who has flown into Nice airport will know well.

On a clear day, sunlight glances off the decks of the super-yachts bobbing on the azure Mediterranean and the coastline can be seen curving from France round to Italy. Between the two countries lies the tiny principality of





Monaco, famed for its high octane Grand Prix.

With no airport in Monaco itself, the quickest way there is by helicopter from Nice, and the ten-minute flight offers a sweeping spectacle which far beats any seen from a cabin window. Swooping through the haze and over the cypress trees lining the hilltops is an exhilarating experience, but pricey at €99 (£79) one-way. The cheaper alternative is the train, which offers picture opportunities aplenty as it tracks the craggy coastline, but for a once-in-a-lifetime journey, the helicopter is the way to travel. It suits the destination.

Only two kilometres square, Monaco is small enough to fit inside Hyde Park but has the air of a palatial theme park. It even has its own castle, a palace belonging to the ruling Grimaldi family, perched on a mountain. Just a few hours in Monaco are enough to discover that legends about the state really are true.

It has a radiant glow; everything seems to sparkle. Balustrades and cascading fountains abound; even the streets shimmer. The cleanliness of its public areas is unmatched by almost any other country in the world. In a week, I spotted only one piece of litter on the streets. It wasn't there for long, as littering is a strict no-no in Monaco, along with walking around bare-chested, barefoot or letting your dogs out without a lead. Prominent signs remind visitors of these and other state rules, and more than 300 CCTV cameras ensure they are followed.

Public places are kept in a similar condition to palaces in other countries. Classical music is piped to the streets from carefully concealed speakers and automatic sprinklers water the roadside palm trees, which are wrapped in garlands of dazzling fairy lights.

Even the public gardens are themed. They range from a Japanese-style enclave, complete with pagodas, to a topiary dinosaur spouting water from its mouth. There is a public sculpture trail and a peaceful rose garden with a statue of the late American star Princess Grace, mother of Monaco's current ruler Prince Albert, at its centre.

Excess is the norm in Monaco. Its centrepiece shopping mall has chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, and the state's underground walkways have marble floors and mirror-lined walls. But it's the public spectacles that give Monaco its most majestic allure.

The annual Grand Prix through its streets is the most famous of these, and motor-racing monuments are littered across the state. There are iron models of ancient race cars, shops packed with team merchandise and, of course, the streets themselves. The place for race fans to have their picture taken is the famous hairpin bend, replete with rubber on its red-and-white kerb, amassed from years of tyre contact.

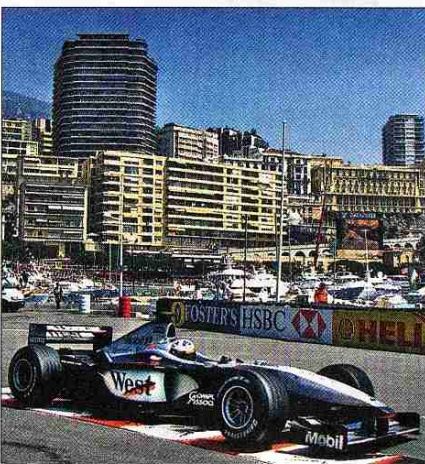
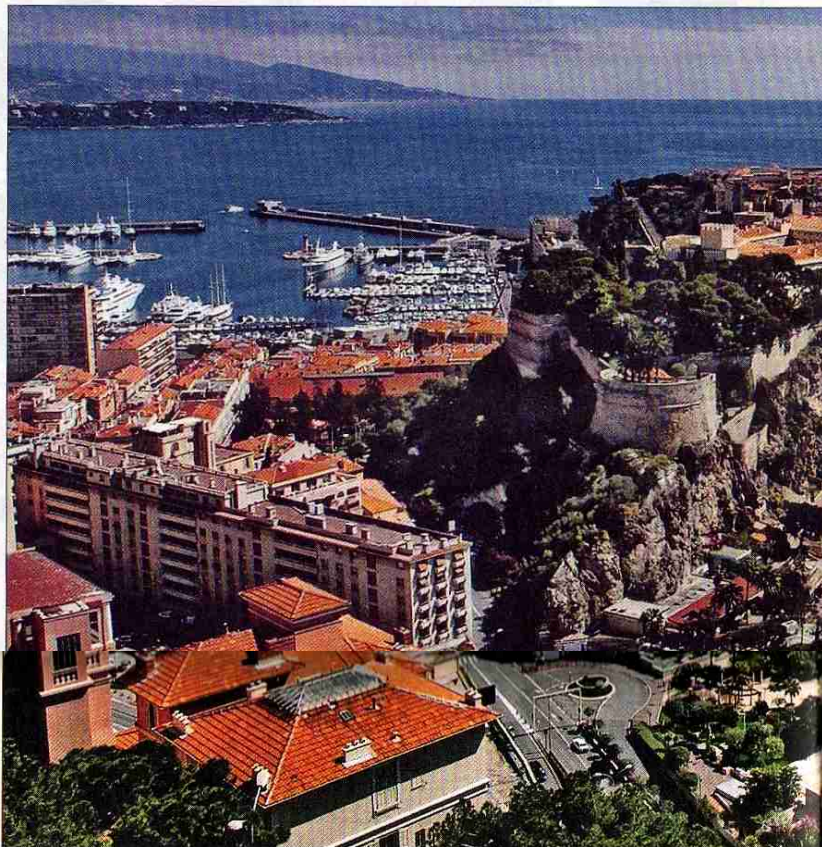
Summer sees a free fireworks competition hosted in the main harbour and, being Monaco, not only is it timed to music, but this is piped to speakers around the surrounding blocks, with the street lights handily dimmed for ease of viewing.

Walking through the streets, you really get the feeling of being a guest of the royal family in its giant playpen. The lush, grass verges by the roads are lined with avant garde sculptures bearing blue plaques. They were gifts to Monaco's late Prince Rainier from various royals around the world. His collection of classic cars is open to the public for the small fee of €4.57 (£3.65).

In fact, you're never far from the Grimaldis' gaze, with Albert's face displayed, proudly, in every shop window. And for film fans, there's a walking tour guided by numbered roadside panels, with faded pictures showing the historic public duties Princess Grace Kelly performed at that spot.

Stop for a drink at the Café de Paris, on historic Casino Square, and convince yourself you're an extra on the set of an Agatha Christie thriller. The wedding cake-style Hotel de Paris and the belle époque casino have hardly changed in 100 years, with the main giveaway of the era being the convoys of super-cars touring round the square.

People-watching is a popular pastime on Casino Square but then, so is auto-gogling. A wall of tourists outside the casino surrounds an £800,000 Bugatti



**Clockwise from main: the royal palace on a promontory above Monaco harbour; a McLaren Mercedes in training for the Grand Prix; the Japanese garden**

Veyron pulling in to park. An indication of just how common mind-bogglingly expensive motors are in Monaco came when I saw what amounted to a super-car sandwich – a £250,000 Rolls-Royce Phantom nearly hit a £300,000 McLaren SLR reversing out of a tight space as a Ferrari Maranello waited to park there.

If the excesses get too overbearing there are plenty of soothing distractions in Monaco, such as the Oceanographic Museum which includes a giant aquarium with a reconstruction of a coral reef. It gives visitors a unique, fish-eye

view with an elevated walkway. Sharks circle the water's surface while, below, all manner of exotic fish swim by.

It's easy to spend hours sitting in the blazing sun and gazing out to sea, on the grass terrace behind the casino. For an even better view, head up to the palace, as it must be one of the few places in Europe where you can clearly see three countries in one sweep.

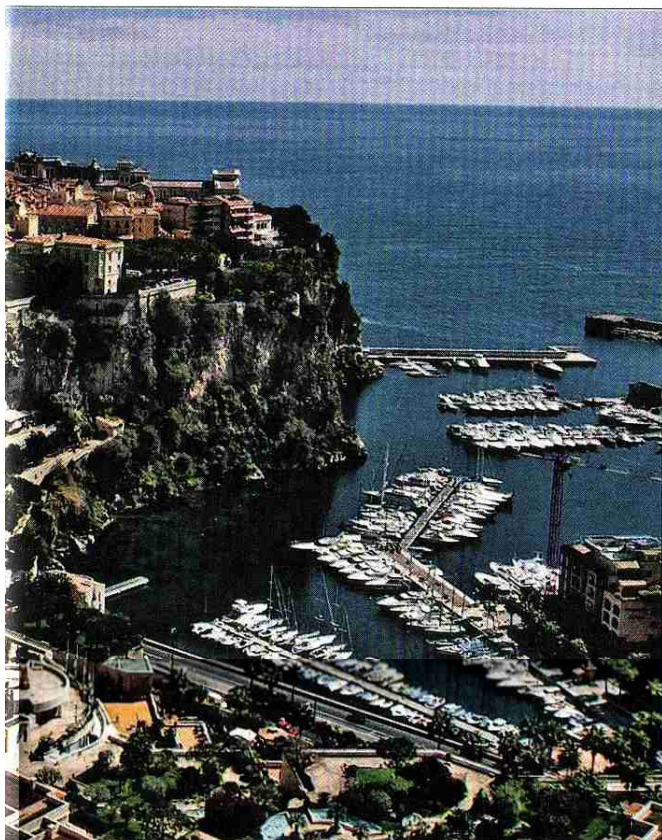
It's compact, but be prepared to do a lot of walking in Monaco. As it's built into a hill, paths can be extremely steep and before heading to any attractions it's worth picking up a map to locate the public elevators or escalators (yes, there are even public escalators in Monaco).

After you've worked up an appetite, you'll be thankful that Monaco's eateries are as much of an event as the rest of the state's attractions. And they don't break the bank.

Monaco boasts some excellent Italian restaurants. The best is Pulcinella, where you can pick up a sumptuous spaghetti for €13 (£10.40) and dine among the stars. The walls are covered with photos of celebrities who have eaten there, from George Lucas to Rogers Moore and Federer. My own visit saw me sitting next to this year's Le Mans winner, Dumfries's very own Allan McNish.

If you want to immerse yourself further in Monaco's sporting heritage, visit Stars and Bars ([www.starsnbars.com](http://www.starsnbars.com)) by the harbour. Signed memorabilia hangs from the rafters, Planet Hollywood-





style, and the food is all-American.

Nights out local-style might require remortgaging the house, though. Jimmyz is the nightclub of choice for Russian billionaires and 1980s rock stars, with its open-air dance floor and fluorescent lighting. But beware, a glass of water alone costs over £25.

Monaco's hotels are equally racy, with the historic Hermitage and Hotel de Paris looking more like palaces than Prince Albert's place does. A more personal touch is found at the Port Palace – the smallest hotel in Monaco and the only one on the harbour.

From its lobby, lined with white marble and vivid orchids, to the wall-length mirrors and leather-bound furniture, the hotel has the look of a designer's home. Its vast rooms each have a Jacuzzi and all overlook the harbour.

However, they have a price tag to match. The Columbus hotel costs less and although it's a little further from the action, its sleek cream and mahogany style is almost as eye-catching.

The most relaxing (and free) way to end a regal day in Monaco is sitting on the beach listening to the waves crashing in and watching the twinkling lights of the cruise ships in the distance. With an average annual temperature of 16 degrees, it's one of the few places in the world where you can feel comfortable doing this and not have to wear a coat.

Strolling back to the hotel at night can be the best way to get a close-up view of the super-cars as crime is so low, the showrooms leave their convertible motors outside for all to see. It gives you a taste of the high life and that is what Monaco is all about. **SM**

## FACTFILE MONACO

### PACKAGE

■ Luxury tour operator Kirker (020 7593 2288, [www.kirkerholidays.com](http://www.kirkerholidays.com)) has packages, including return flights from Edinburgh, airport transfer and two nights' accommodation. Prices from £476 per person, including taxes, staying at the Columbus. The same package at the Port Palace costs from £603.

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## SHOOTING & FISHING

# We're Tweed off

What to do when the fish won't bite?

BY ALASTAIR ROBERTSON

WE HAVE HAD A LATE SUMMER SPORTING visitation in pursuit of salmon and duck. The shooting son appeared with a friend called Ed who spoke knowledgeably about bits of Tweed, as you must call it (the "the" is dropped). He smiled nicely and made sensible conversation and appeared to be trying to build a wind farm for a client in Wales, confirming my suspicions that wind farming is good money if you can get it – £10,000 a year rent per turbine in some cases, but don't expect the neighbours to talk to you ever again.

The pair drove through the night from the south in the middle of the week and by 11am the following morning were on the river, having fried the ~~best part of half a pig and straggled it into bacon butties.~~

I do admire such dedication. When the river is free and available ten minutes down the road, it is very easy not to bother when you live here all the time. There had been rain, but not too much and the barometer sort of hovered around the "Rain" mark but never quite made it, and it was warmish.

It was that sort of weather they call "fishy". There is no need for heavy wet-weather gear; you can stand in the river in a shirt and maybe a fleece in a light breeze and put up with the odd shower. And there are quite clearly fish in the river; not because someone says they have seen some but because you have seen them yourself.

They go splish or silently "top and tail", their humped backs breaking the surface like dolphins, and then gone. The first fish was what I think we call a stonker, a cock of 13lbs, clean and silvery and terrifically deep, almost tuna-like.

And it was caught by Ed on a Cascade, which is the fly that seems to catch the majority of fish these days, mainly because if

everyone uses the same fly then that is the one that is likely to be responsible for catching the most fish.

At the end of the day a red 4lb grilse came out and was put back. The following day was partially ruined by the opposite bank where they were spinning, stirring up the one good pool for hours on end, probably in

## Rats under the floorboards live off the remains of old barbecues

desperation as they had been fishing for a month and caught one fish.

We are inclined to be rather snobbish about the other bank as they have what might easily pass for a small Swiss chalet, rather than our rustic and run-down shelter with rats under the floorboards living off the remains of old barbecues.

The difference is that the other side is a commercial operation and our side is a bit of fishing that occasionally gets let but is offered by one of my many cousins to friends and family.

The third day, the water hovered not too high and not too low, and the other side had gone. The boys flung out long and lazy lines so perfectly pitched and placed it made you want to be a hungry fish. But nothing. The fish were there, the weather was there, the water was there, the skill was there.

And they had put in six hours a day for three days. So we went duck flying instead, which I'll tell you all about another time.

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