
July 23, 2006

GOING TO

Monaco

By **SETH SHERWOOD****Correction Appended**

WHY GO NOW Monaco — the platinum-plated name evokes scenes of a sun-drenched pleasure dome where European royalty drive Ferraris, poodles sport emerald collars and Lords Such-and-Such extol the virtues of Cuban cigars in the voice of Thurston Howell III. Glimpsing the fabled Casino de Monte Carlo only hammers the image home. Under the Côte d'Azur's stars, equally glittery couples stride into the opulent 19th-century gaming halls, and lay down small fortunes at felt-covered tables once frequented by Mata Hari, the Rothschilds, King Farouk of [Egypt](#) and other aristocratic figures.

But the home of the Grand Prix is shifting gears. Between the yacht brokerages and Bentley dealerships, avatars of a more youthful and populist Monaco are materializing. Boutique hotels, nonexistent five years ago, are insinuating themselves among the grande dame palaces. Along the boulevards, Chanel and Dior are losing their stranglehold on fashion to upstart boutiques, while an invigorated club scene caters as much to young hipsters as to diamond-encrusted divorcées. Most noticeably, an easterly wind is blowing across Monaco's culinary landscape, suffusing chic new canteens with Asian flavors.

Even the royal portraits hanging on shopkeepers' walls look fresh: With the passing of Prince Rainier III last year and the assumption of power by Prince Albert II, the 48-year-old bachelor, the face of Monaco is literally younger.

WHERE TO STAY "A Whole New Monte Carlo" beams the Web site of this microscopic country's newest digs, the Monte Carlo Bay Hotel and Resort (40, avenue Princesse Grace; 377-98-06-25-25; www.montecarlobay.com). It's not all hype. Within the towering 334-room seaside hotel are some of the principality's coolest hangouts. Eschewing the traditional cherubs of Monte Carlo, the hotel's red casino is a chic haven of smooth curves and art photos. The cocktail lounge employs a modern nautical theme that would leave old seafarers adrift. Completing the fashionable spread are a Cinq Mondes spa and a stylish restaurant presided over by the Martinican chef Marcel Ravin. Low-season doubles from 300 euros (\$390, at \$1.30 to the euro).

Stroll into the cool white lobby of the three-year-old Port Palace Hotel (7, avenue Président [John F. Kennedy](#); 377-97-97-90-00; www.portpalace.com) and you'll see Clint Eastwood, [Bruce Springsteen](#)

and the [Rolling Stones](#) hanging on the photograph-lined walls — a yearlong exhibit. Decorated by Leïla Menchari, design director for Hermès, the décor combines pop-culture touches, Poltrona Frau furniture and regal Rubelli fabrics to create a boho-chic vibe. The new Mandarin restaurant is one of Monaco's hot tables of the moment. Low-season doubles from 265 euros.

For the Grand Prix driver David Coulthard, the pit stop of choice is the Columbus Monaco (23, avenue des Papalins; 377-92-05-92-22; www.columbushotels.com), since he is an owner. On the opposite side of Port Fontvieille from the rarefied heights of Monte Carlo — geographically and spiritually — the down-to-earth and design-savvy hotel gets its autumn-cool touch from Amanda Rosa, the former designer for the Malmaison chain. The 181 rooms soothe with coffee and cream colors; the lounge finishes the job with Cuban cigars and premium Scotches. Doubles from 255 euros.

WHERE TO EAT For years, the towering presence of the superstar chef [Alain Ducasse](#) has cast an intimidating shadow over the kitchens of Monaco. Blazing with three Michelin stars, his Louis XV restaurant (Place du Casino, 377-98-06-88-64; www.alain-ducasse.com) draws throngs of deep-pocketed diners to gape at the vaulted Versailles-like salons and pay about \$100 an entree from a changing menu that has included spit-roasted Pyrenean baby lamb with sauté of offal. Fortunately, Monaco's new dining options are much more democratic.

Culinary nirvana awaits within the Zen-like dining rooms of Maya Bay (24, avenue Princesse Grace, 377-97-70-74-67), an Asian-infused restaurant that's currently one of Monaco's most coveted reservations. Under the half-closed eyes of stone Buddhas, waiters in brown serve dishes from a frequently changing menu that might include miso-glazed black cod, stir-fried lobster with Chinese noodles and other Orient-inspired dishes. To finish, try the robust clafouti, a warm pudding with mango and saffron. Dinner for two without wine, 100 euros.

The year-old Beefbar (42, quai Jean-Charles Rey, 377-97-77-09-29) draws a buzzing polyglot crowd of dealmakers, socialites and preclub beauties to its airy silver and black dining room overlooking the Mediterranean. Carnivore-friendly favorites include grilled Dutch veal, Argentine steaks, and raw fish specials. The mainly Bordeaux wall of wines has everything from a modest Château Arnaud to Pétrus. A two-course lunch, with a glass of house wine, runs 27 euros a person. Dinner for two, 110 euros.

For your fix of coriander, head to La Mandarin at the Port Palace (7, avenue Président John F. Kennedy, 377-97-97-90-00), where the chef Grégory Goulot sprinkles it into an impressive array of dishes, from sautéed fois gras in a chutney-mango-coriander reduction to green curry with lacquered duck. Perched atop the Port Palace, it overlooks the megayachts of the cliff-lined Port de Hercules. The prix-fixe menu is 60 euros a person.

WHAT TO DO DURING THE DAY Soak up the rays. Hard-core tanners congregate in the Larvotto district, a seaside crescent lined with private and public beaches. For a few euros, you can upgrade from the pebbly public beaches to La Spiaggia (377-93-50-50-80), an unpretentious beach club where you can rent lounge chairs piled with mattresses (12 euros) and wide umbrellas (5 euros). The

yellow sand isn't exactly talcum powder-soft, but the Champagne service (8 euros a glass) helps lower your standards.

Or soak up some culture at the Grimaldi Forum (10, avenue Princesse Grace; 377-99-99-20-00; www.grimaldiforum.com), an arts center. From July 14 to Sept. 10, the mean streets of [Manhattan](#) invade the elegant avenue with the exhibition "New York, New York: 50 Years of Art, Architecture, Photography, Film and Video." It shows over 500 works by John Cage, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Robert Mapplethorpe, Martin Scorsese and others. Admission 10 euros.

WHAT TO DO AT NIGHT Jimmy'z (48, avenue Princesse Grace, (377) 98-06-70-61; www.montecarloresort.com) has long dominated Monaco's night life. This multilevel seaside club is a place where everybody knows one another — especially if you are a sultan or a prince. A few rounds of cocktails can cost as much as an international flight.

Luckily for those without a famous face, a clutch of chic new hangouts have opened. The latest is Moda (11, rue du Portier, 377-97-77-03-04), a three-month-old club with lots of hard-edged black surfaces, futuristic lighting, plasma TV's playing Japanime and stripper poles graced by scantily clad go-go girls. The vibe is "Blade Runner" meets "Showgirls." Order a piscine (Champagne and ice in a bulbous glass, 17 euros) and dance to the D.J.'s mix of electro-soul.

The action picks up at Grimaldi Forum (10, avenue Princesse Grace), where two nightclubs cater to the young masses. Zebra Square (377-99-99-25-50), a convivial lounge that plays deep-house music, is popular with a well-tanned, well-heeled crowd ranging from 20 to 45. There's no cover.

You can then head down one level to Karé(ment) (377-99-99-20-20), a huge nightclub, as white and smooth as an iPod, that plays host to top international D.J.'s like David Guetta and Joachim Garraud. Don't be intimidated by [Bono](#) or Julian Lennon in the V.I.P. room: the crowd is a democratic mix of young professionals, foreign vacationers and dolled-up Niçoise on girls' nights out. The 20-euro cover includes a drink.

WHERE TO SHOP For those with Swiss bank accounts, the Avenue des Beaux-Arts is a buffet of Cartier, Louis Vuitton and Yves Saint Laurent labels, with enough bling and dazzle to blind the average shopper. For those who can afford only counterfeits, an artsy and bohemian strip is sprouting across town on the Rue de Millo.

Fashion misfits should check out Lull (29, rue de Millo, 377-97-77-54-54), which carries Vivienne Westwood, Raf Simons, Le Flesh and other cult labels. The jewel-box-sized Insula (16, rue de Millo, 377-97-77-80-95) also caters to indie spirits. Browse for elegant ceramics from [Provence](#)-based Jacqueline Morabito, feather-and-silk purses from the Serbian designer Dragana Ognjenovic and funky coppola caps from [Sicily](#).

YOUR FIRST TIME OR YOUR 10TH Put on your best outfit, pay the 10-euro entrance fee and glide into the Casino de Monte Carlo (Place du Casino, 377-98-06-21-21). The ornate Italianate gambling

hall is a time capsule of plush carpets, gauzy Romantic murals, vast chandeliers and enough gilt to humble King Tut. But you can sit at the low-rollers' roulette wheel (5 euros a bet) and try to forget the laws of probability.

YES, FREE Just down the hill from the casino, tucked among the fancy high-rises and luxury-car showrooms, is the verdant Japanese Garden. With its ambling network of trails and footbridges and a gurgling waterfall, it's the perfect place to meditate on life's fleeting fortunes, like last night's pile of casino chips.

HOW TO STAY WIRED Most hotels are wired. High-speed Internet can also be found every day but Sunday at the cybercafe Achille Informatique, which charges 1.50 euros every 15 minutes (15, place d'Armes, 377-97-70-88-90; www.achille.biz).

GETTING AROUND Though Monaco covers less than one square mile, the steep hills and cliffs make it difficult to walk. If your Bentley is in the shop, the principality luckily has an efficient bus system. The routes operate from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., for 1.50 euros a ride.

Taxis are not abundant and tend to congregate at the train station and the Place du Casino. They also are not metered, so rates tend to be subject to the driver's whim.

GETTING THERE

Air France has direct flights to nearby Nice from Kennedy Airport in New York and Delta goes nonstop from [Atlanta](#). August fares from Kennedy started around \$925, through Delta's Web site. From the Nice airport, the No. 110 bus leaves Terminal One for Monaco every hour, on the hour, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. The trip takes 50 minutes and cost 14.70 euros.

Correction: Aug. 13, 2006

The Going To column on July 23 about Monaco referred incorrectly to Air France flights from Kennedy Airport to Nice, France. The flights require a change of planes in Paris; they are not direct. The column also referred incompletely to Delta flights from the United States to Nice. In addition to flying nonstop from Atlanta, Delta also offers a nonstop flight once a week from Kennedy Airport.

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