

Travel

The Riviera is a Nice place to go



This hilltop monastery is not far from the Riviera's beaches

By JIM WITHERS

NICE, France — If you were to paint a picture of the southern French region known as Provence, you undoubtedly would need lots of blues and greens in your palette.

Certain reddish hues would also be required, to depict the tile roofs, which dot the rolling countryside.

Along the region's semi-tropical southern boundary, the color blue is dominant, as the horizon vaguely divides Provençal skies from the aquamarine Mediterranean. Appropriately enough, this curving stretch of land bears the name Cote d'Azur.

Not far inland the color green takes over. Vineyards line the Rhone River, which is Provence's western boundary, while forests clothe the mountainous terrain to the east.

Away from the hullabaloo of the Riviera, the interior of Provence is comprised of woodlands, sleepy French villages and steep, winding mountain roads.

The proud residents of this tranquil territory denounce the fast pace of life in the north, especially in Paris, a city which they feel exercises too much political control over their lives.

The name Provence is an old one, dating back to 52 BC, when the region became the first Roman province outside of what is known as Italy.

Ruins of the Roman Empire and of the Greek occupation that preceded it, can be found throughout Provence.

The oldest Roman city in France, Nimes, can boast of an assortment of Roman remnants, including baths, a three-tiered aqueduct, a memorial to Augustus Caesar and a 20,000-seat amphitheatre.

Excavations at Nice and St. Remy de Provence have exposed ruins of Greek architecture, which are more than 2,000 years old.

The Greeks also left their mark on Marseille, the capital of Provence, which

they founded in about 600 BC.

Today this city of one million, the second largest in France, is a captivating blend of old and new. Sailboats of all sizes and descriptions glide to and from the well fortified entrance of the city's ancient port.

Guarding the entrance way are Fort Saint Nicholas, which was built by Louis XIV, and Pharo Palace, which was commissioned by Napoleon III.

Adjacent to the old port are the oil refineries and shipyards of Marseille harbor, where oil tankers and ocean-going vessels bring their cargo.

To the east of Marseille, lie the celebrated beaches of Cannes, Antibes, St. Raphael, Nice and St. Tropez, which was made famous by Brigitte Bardot. Along this curving coastline, splendid villas nestle among palm trees, and expensive yachts anchor in shady lagoons.

One hour's drive north of Marseille, along the 800-kilometre road to Paris, stands the walled Provençal city of Avignon.

Today the majestic Palais des Papes plays host to an annual theatre festival, which attracts stage-devotees from all over France.

In contrast to this well-fortified former papal capital, the coastal city of Nice opened its doors long ago.

As does the region of Provence, Nice too has its quieter side, which is frequently ignored by the bronzed beachcombers. Many visitors miss seeing the alluring Russian Orthodox church, for example, which is just a short walk from the train station.

Visitors flock to the tourist-oriented Principality of Monaco nearby and miss the rustic, alpine charm of Upper Provence, just a few kilometres away.

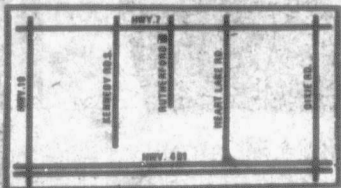
Both Air Canada and Air France have flights to Paris, with connections to Marseille or Nice. The basic round-trip fare is roughly \$510, while in peak season the price jumps by well over \$100, depending on the length of stay.

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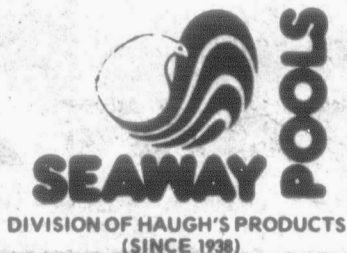
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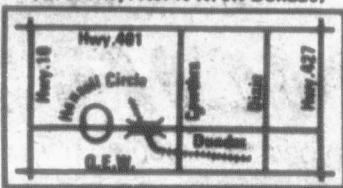
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