

TRAVEL / FRANCE

HAVE A NICE DAY



“Set on the cliffs on the corniche and overlooking the Baie des Anges, it features stunning views of the city and the famous French Riviera coastline.”

There's a surprise around every corner in this city where you'll make a connection with the French Riviera that will stay with you long after you've left, writes **SUE WALLACE**.

“FOLLOW your nose,” says a debonair French gentleman sipping coffee and munching on a croissant as we inquire about Nice's famous flower market. He's the epitome of all things French, complete with a beret and a fresh baguette tucked in his basket.

True to his word, as we turn the corner the sweet-smelling perfume of fresh flowers wafts through the air.

Located near Nice's historic old town, there are stalls with buckets of brightly coloured roses, pansies, jasmine and lillies lined up at one end of the famous square known as Cours Saleya.

At the other end there's a fabulous food market with an array of fresh produce that makes you want to create a feast in your hotel room or head to the beach for a picnic.

Rows of ruby red tomatoes, bright green courgettes, spiky artichokes, plump pumpkins, snake beans and mushrooms are on display.

Then there are the more unusual producers selling different salts from all over the world — including Australia's famous Murray River Salt.

Salts come in all shades and coarseness according to the salt seller, who says the French are very particular about their salt.

Nearby is a stall devoted to dried herbs from Provence and another specialises in selling bags of lavender and sweet-smelling products.

The popular market is a photographer's dream and stallholders don't seem to mind you snapping away, as long as you make a purchase here and there.

The daily market opens at 6am and by 9am it is very busy with locals and tourists jostling side by side.

It is a complete treat for the senses and the good news is there's hardly a plastic bag in sight. Most locals carry baskets and calico bags.

Further on, the seafood stalls are doing a roaring trade with fishmongers selling mussels, a variety of fresh fish, scallops and sardines.

When you are done looking, pull up a chair at one of the nearby cafes that line the market square serving coffee and pastries seafood and French classics.

The square is a great place for people and dog watching with water bowls for canines appearing as quickly as menus.

Nice, located on the south-east coast of France on the



Mediterranean, is the second-largest French city on the coast, after Marseille.

It's the type of resort that hides a surprise around every corner.

But don't expect long stretches of sand like Aussie beaches — it's full of uncomfortable pebbles.

Nice has long been a favourite with the English.

The main thoroughfare, the Promenade des Anglais (the Walkway of the English), was named after those who came to enjoy the Mediterranean climate hundreds of years ago.

The promenade sweeps around along the Baie des Anges (Bay of the Angels) and is enjoyed by walkers, joggers, cyclists and those who just want to enjoy the sea air.

Nice is also well known for its special light, which has attracted many famous artists over the years such as Henri Matisse and Marc Chagall.

Today their work is displayed in the city's museums, including Musee Marc Chagall, Musee Matisse and Musee des Beaux-Arts Jules Cheret.

The Matisse Museum's permanent collection is featured in the rooms of Villa des Arenes, a Genoese mansion dating from the 17th century.

Art lovers can enjoy 68 paintings, 236 drawings, 218 prints, 57 sculptures and 14 illustrated books, as well as 95 photographs and 187 objects belonging to the painter.

The Botanical Gardens, the Italian-style Monastery Gardens and the Mediterranean-style Chagall Museum gardens are close by and are lovely places to stroll.

It is no wonder Nice attracts more than 4 million visitors each year, making it the second most popular city in France, after Paris.

Like many old European cities, its buildings have a unique architecture bearing Russian, English, Italian and French influences.

A great base is Hotel La Perouse, a member of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World, which offers unique accommodation and arguably the best seaside views.

Set on the cliffs on the corniche and overlooking the Baie des Anges, it features stunning views of the city and the famous French Riviera coastline.

Through a discreet entrance guests take several elevators to the heart of this iconic building, which seems to cling to the cliffs.

Warm tones on the outside facade blend with contemporary furniture and eclectic decor epitomises “French chic”.

A former owner and lover of the sea named the hotel La Perouse as a tribute to the great French naviga-

tor, Jean-François Galaup, Count of La Pérouse (1741 - 1788).

Louis XVI ordered La Perouse to lead a scientific mission that set sail from Brest in 1785 on two ships: the Astrolabe and the Boussole, which were filled with treasures. There were 213 men on board, including some of the era's great researchers.

Their goal was to sail around the world and discover new lands and unknown civilisations.

The hotel restaurant, Le Patio, features excellent Mediterranean-style cuisine featuring fresh produce that I suspect came from the nearby market.

For lunch, sit under the shade of the hotel's lemon trees and select from its Provencal menu. At night, enjoy the gardens aglow with soft candlelight.

Some of the 56 suites feature terraces with bay views and there's an outdoor pool heated from April through to October, a sauna, solarium and a jacuzzi.

Nice is one of those places that, even if your stay is brief, intrigues and entertains.

No wonder it has attracted so many over the years.

Travel notes

GETTING THERE:

The TGV operates from Paris to Nice — Rail passes are available from Rail Europe, visit raileurope.com.au

STAY:

Hotel La Perouse — a member of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World, 11 Quai Rauba Capeu, Nice.

The hotel is part of the Les Hotels De Roy unique stable and features 56 suites with great views and some with terraces perfect for soaking up the famous French Riviera sun.

It is well-located close to the famous Flower Markets and Old Town.

For details visit slh.com and leshotelsduroy.com



SHORT STAYS

CRUISE



Set sail aboard MSC Sinfonia, which is one of the cruise ships passengers will travel on during their journey.

Life's a cruise

MSC Cruises is combining two fascinating cruises in one European holiday with its 22-night Cossacks and Classics fly, stay and cruise package.

Priced from \$4678 per person twin-share from Australia it leaves on May 7 next year.

The package combines an 11-night round cruise from Genoa in Italy on board MSC Lirica with seven nights aboard sister ship MSC Sinfonia as well as a night's hotel stay in Genoa and return Emirates airfares from Australia to Milan.

The MSC Lirica cruise will call on Civitavecchia (Rome), Istanbul, Piraeus (Athens) and Sorrento and span as far north as the Ukraine's Odessa and Yalta.

The following return seven-night cruise, also from Genoa, will be aboard MSC Sinfonia and call on St Tropez, Mallorca, Mahon (Spain), Olbia and Salerno (both in Italy).

Return economy airfare and flight taxes from Australia are included in the price along with listed transfers, one night's stay in Genoa and port and service charges.

As with all MSC Cruises, children under 18 years cruise free (pay only port charges) when sharing a cabin with their parents. MSC Cruises, phone 1300 028 502, msccruises.com.au

TASMANIA



Celebrate ... Maui Motorhomes and Mercure have joined forces to provide a day stay for travellers in Tasmania.

Pampering day

AUSTRALIA and New Zealand's Maui Motorhomes has partnered with Mercure Hobart and Mercure Launceston hotels to offer self-drive travellers to Tasmania the chance to day stay and refresh while on the road.

Campervan cruisers can now book the Mercure and Maui Pamper Pack, which includes a hotel day stay at either Mercure Hobart or Mercure Launceston and full use of hotel facilities during the hours of 9am to 5pm, priced at a special day rate of \$65.

The pamper pack includes a well-appointed accommodation room, complimentary in-room internet, full-day parking, laundry service and access to online supermarket shopping.

Tassie road-trippers can place a supermarket order for essential supplies and snacks on arrival at the hotel, which is then delivered and stocked in the van before they hit the highway again.

The pack can be purchased directly at the Maui Hobart branch. For more information, visit maui.com.au or mercure.com