Celebrities of Nice & the French Riviera

Celebs Yesterday & Today

Few places on earth have attracted the famous, the brilliant, and the powerful as consistently as Nice and the Côte d'Azur. From Roman-era rulers to 21st-century rock stars, the light, the warmth, and the landscape have drawn the world's most celebrated figures for centuries. This page traces their stories by era, noting where they lived, what they created here, and where — with a little luck — you might still glimpse their successors today.

> *See also: individual pages linked within each entry for deeper reading.*

I. The Belle Époque (1860–1914)

The annexation of Nice to France in 1860 and the arrival of the railway in 1864 opened the city to the European aristocracy. What followed was arguably the most glamorous chapter in Nice's history — a winter season attended by queens, emperors, artists, writers, and composers, thus The Belle Époque.

Queen Victoria (1819–1901)

Royalty — United Kingdom Queen Victoria

Nice connection: Cimiez, 1895–1899
Addresses: Grand Hôtel de Cimiez (1895–96); Excelsior Hôtel Régina, Boulevard de Cimiez (1897–99)

Queen Victoria had wintered in other areas along the Riviera, but once she discovered Nice she kept returning, spending five successive winters there from 1895 to 1899. The Excelsior Hôtel Régina in Nice was effectively built for her: the history of its construction is linked directly to the Queen, who promised she would visit more often provided a royal residence matching her reputation was built.

When she arrived in Nice, Victoria was 76 years old, short, round and always dressed in black. She would arrive in her own special train, accompanied by close to 100 staff, including Scottish soldiers in kilts playing bagpipes and Indian soldiers in turbans. The train carried wagonloads of luggage, and her furniture arrived ahead of her, already set up in the 80 hotel rooms she rented in the hills of Cimiez[1)].

Victoria returned eight times, throwing flowers at Nice's Battle of the Flowers, riding on donkeys up narrow medieval roads, and admiring the picturesque local shepherds. Her maidservant reportedly observed that she enjoyed everything as if she were 17 rather than 72.

Near death in 1901, she reportedly said: “If only I was in Nice, I would get better.”

What remains today: A white marble statue of Queen Victoria stands at the foot of the Régina garden on Boulevard de Cimiez. An Avenue Reine Victoria is named for her in Cimiez. The Régina itself — now a private apartment building — is a listed historic monument. Holy Trinity Anglican

Church at 11 Rue de la Buffa, where she attended services, still displays her coat of arms inside.

> → *Candidate for its own page: Queen Victoria in Nice*

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900)

Philosopher — Germany Friedrich Nietzsche

Nice connection: Five winters in Nice, 1883–1887
Addresses: 38 rue Ségurane; Pension de Genève (rue Rossini); 26 rue François de Paule; 29 rue des Ponchettes

Between 1883 and 1887, Nietzsche spent five winters in Nice, drawn by its light, Mediterranean atmosphere, and what he called the cosmopolitan spirit of freedom the city gave him. He loved to hear Italian spoken in the old town, and was immersed in the musical life of Nice, regularly attending the opera[2)].

Some of his most significant philosophical works were written in Nice. He walked for hours on end, venturing to Mont Boron and along the path toward Èze — today known as “Nietzsche's Path” (Le Chemin de Nietzsche). Hiking this steep trail connecting the seaside to the medieval village of Èze, Nietzsche found the inspiration for the third part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. He also wrote *Beyond Good and Evil* and began *Le Gai Savoir* during his stays.

What remains today: Le Chemin de Nietzsche, the hiking trail from Eze-Bord-de-Mer up to Eze Village, is one of the most rewarding walks on the Riviera. A plaque marks the philosopher's association with the town. Several of his Nice addresses can still be located in the old town.

> → *Candidate for its own page: Nietzsche in Nice*

Auguste Renoir (1841–1919)

Painter — France Pierre-Auguste Renoir

Riviera connection: Cagnes-sur-Mer, from 1903 until his death
Address: Les Collettes, chemin des Collettes, Cagnes-sur-Mer

Renoir first visited Nice in 1882 and immediately fell in love with the Mediterranean light, declaring it unique and unlike anything in the north. From 1903, suffering increasingly severe arthritis, he settled permanently at his estate Les Collettes in Cagnes-sur-Mer, just west of Nice. Despite being confined to a wheelchair in his final years, he continued painting every day, with brushes tied to his wrists[3)].

From bohemian painters such as Monet, Munch, Renoir, Picasso and Van Gogh to royals including Queen Victoria and Tsar Alexander II, the French Riviera drew the greatest celebrities of the age.

What remains today: The Musée Renoir at Les Collettes in Cagnes-sur-Mer preserves his home,

studio, and gardens exactly as they were at his death, with his easel and wheelchair still in place. One of the most intimate artist's house museums in France.

Henri Matisse (1869–1954)

Painter — France Henri Matisse

Nice connection: Resident of Nice from 1917 until his death
Addresses: Hôtel de la Méditerranée, Promenade des Anglais (early years); Excelsior Hôtel Régina, Boulevard de Cimiez (1938–1954)

Matisse relocated to Cimiez around 1917, renting rooms in various apartments around the city before purchasing his flat in the former Régina hotel. Matisse moved to the Excelsior Régina Palace in 1938, and it was from his Nice apartment that he started working on the famous cut-outs that defined the later chapter of his career.

In 1938, Matisse bought two apartments on the 3rd floor of the Régina and converted them into one large studio-apartment. The building was the same one that had hosted Queen Victoria four decades earlier.

He wrote of the light: “Most come here for the light and the picturesque beauty. I am from the North. The large colorful reflections in January, the brightness of the day, are what attracted me to settle here.”

Matisse's final years were quiet. He often used a wheelchair after surgery in 1941, and died in 1954. He is buried near the apartment, his last home, in the cemetery of the Cimiez Monastery. Raoul Dufy is buried alongside him.

What remains today: The Musée Matisse in Cimiez holds the world's finest collection of his works[4]. His former apartment at the Régina (now private) is a listed building. His grave in the Cimiez monastery garden is freely accessible. The Cours Saleya market building at the eastern end was also famously his home in his early Nice years.

Marc Chagall (1887–1985)

Painter — Russia/France Marc Chagall

Nice connection: Resident of Vence and Saint-Paul-de-Vence, nearby Nice, for much of his later life

Chagall, the great Russian-French painter known for his dreamlike, colour-saturated biblical works, settled in the hills above Nice after World War II. He worked in Vence and Saint-Paul-de-Vence for decades, and his relationship with the Côte d'Azur was one of the most productive periods of his long career.

What remains today: The Marc Chagall National Museum (Musée National Marc Chagall) in Nice, in the Cimiez neighbourhood, is one of the most important artist museums in France, dedicated

specifically to his biblical works. It was opened in 1973 with Chagall himself in attendance and remains a landmark of Nice cultural life[5] .

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)

Painter — Spain/France Pablo Picasso

Riviera connection: Antibes, Vallauris, Mougins
Address: Château Grimaldi (now the Musée Picasso), Antibes

Picasso discovered the Côte d'Azur after World War II and it transformed his output. Antibes is most famous for Picasso, who lived and worked in the Grimaldi tower, which now houses the Picasso Museum. In 1946, the curator of the Grimaldi offered Picasso the use of the castle as a studio; in gratitude, Picasso donated all the works he created there to the museum. He subsequently settled in Vallauris, where he reinvigorated local pottery-making traditions, and later in Mougins, where he died in 1973.

What remains today: The Musée Picasso Antibes is one of the world's finest collections of his Côte d'Azur period[6] . The pottery workshops of Vallauris preserve his ceramics legacy. The village of Mougins holds the Musée de la Photographie André Villers, rich in images of Picasso.

II. The Interwar Golden Age (1920–1939)

After World War I, the Americans discovered the Riviera, and with them came jazz, champagne, and summer. It took a tradition-flouting American couple, the Murphys, and their entourage of fabulous friends — Cole Porter, F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway — to make the Côte d'Azur the fashionable summer resort it became.

F. Scott & Zelda Fitzgerald (1896–1940 / 1900–1948)

Writers — United States Scott Fitzgerald Zelda Fitzgerald

Riviera connection: Cap d'Antibes, Juan-les-Pins, 1924–1926

The Fitzgeralds' two summers on the Riviera, spent largely at the Hôtel du Cap-Eden-Roc in Cap d'Antibes, were among the most creatively charged of Scott's career. The parties, the excess, and the brilliant Mediterranean light fed directly into *Tender Is the Night* (1934), his novel set explicitly on the Côte d'Azur. Their circle included Ernest Hemingway, Cole Porter, and the Murphy family who first established the summer season in Antibes[7] .

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961)

Writer — United States Ernest Hemingway

Riviera connection: Antibes and Nice, intermittently in the 1920s

Hemingway was a frequent presence in the Fitzgerald-Murphy circle at Cap d'Antibes. He also passed through Nice repeatedly during his Paris years, drawn by the warm winters and the company. The Riviera years fed his famous terseness and his love of outdoor, sensory experience.

Somerset Maugham (1874–1965)

Writer — United Kingdom Somerset Maugham

Riviera connection: Villa La Mauresque, Cap Ferrat, from 1926 until 1961
Address: Villa La Mauresque, Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat

Maugham bought his legendary villa at Cap Ferrat in 1926 and made it his primary home for over three decades. The writer invited Picasso, Kipling, Churchill, T.S. Eliot, Ian Fleming, and many more to visit him for grand villa parties in the gardens and sunny days by the pool. He famously described the Riviera as “a sunny place for shady people” — a remark that still adorns tourist postcards.

The villa became one of the great literary salons of the 20th century. Maugham's guests were dazzled — and occasionally horrified — as he was notorious for using his acquaintances as thinly veiled characters in his fiction[8)] .

What remains today: Villa La Mauresque is a private residence and not open to the public, but can be admired from the coastal path of Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat.

Coco Chanel (1883–1971)

Fashion designer — France Coco Chanel

Riviera connection: Côte d'Azur, 1920s onward

Coco Chanel was sunbathing on the Côte d'Azur and making suntans fashionable in Paris. Her discovery of the Riviera in the early 1920s, when she was photographed with a tan — then considered a mark of laborers — reversed a centuries-old social convention and launched the modern cult of the sun. She kept her association with the Côte d'Azur throughout her life.

III. Post-War Glamour & Film (1945–1980)

The Cannes Film Festival, launched in 1946, transformed the Côte d'Azur into the world's most glamorous stage. The festival's debut of *And God Created Woman* just ten years later made Brigitte Bardot an international film star and synonymous with Côte d'Azur glamour.

Grace Kelly / Princess Grace of Monaco (1929–1982)

Actress & Princess — United States/Monaco Grace Kelly

Riviera connection: Monaco, from 1956; Cannes Film Festival, 1955

Grace Patricia Kelly was an American actress and Princess of Monaco as the wife of Prince Rainier III from their marriage on April 18, 1956, until her death in 1982. Before that marriage, she had already filmed Alfred Hitchcock's *To Catch a Thief* (1955) on the Côte d'Azur — a film whose sweeping Corniche road chase scenes now seem a haunting foreshadowing of her death on the same road.

Princess Grace quickly brought great prosperity to Monaco through her fame, glamour, and charm. Charles de Gaulle, who had long threatened to annex the principality, reportedly found her insistence on speaking French to him so charming — despite grammatical lapses — that he backed down.

On September 13, 1982, Grace and her 17-year-old daughter Stéphanie were returning from the family's country estate when Grace suffered a stroke at the wheel, lost control of the car, and plunged 30 meters down a slope. She died the following day.

A rose garden in Monaco's Fontvieille district is dedicated to her memory, opened in 1984. A hybrid tea rose named Rosa 'Princesse de Monaco' was created in her honour. Avenue Princesse Grace in Monaco — “the most expensive street in the world” — is named for her, as is Boulevard Princesse Grâce de Monaco in Nice.

What remains today: The Palais de Monaco (Palais Princier) is open to visitors in summer. The Princess Grace Rose Garden in Fontvieille is freely accessible year-round. Her grave is in the Cathedral of Monaco (Cathédrale Notre-Dame-Immaculée), open to the public[9].

Brigitte Bardot (1934-2025)

Actress & activist — France Brigitte Bardot

Riviera connection: Saint-Tropez, from 1958; Cannes Film Festival, 1956

Bardot's role in Roger Vadim's *Et Dieu créa la femme* (1956), filmed in Saint-Tropez, transformed both the actress and the town. In 1958 she bought a villa on the waterfront in Saint-Tropez named La Madrague, which became the scene of memorable parties with Alain Delon, Jean-Paul Belmondo and the French cinema elite. She later owned an estate in the hills above Cannes at Peymeinade[10] .

Bardot essentially retired from public life in the 1970s to devote herself to animal rights activism, and lived in Saint-Tropez until her death in 2025.

Yves Montand & Simone Signoret

Actor & Actress — France Yves Montand Simone Signoret

Riviera connection: Saint-Paul-de-Vence

The mythical couple of French cinema, Yves Montand and Simone Signoret, settled for many years in Saint-Paul-de-Vence. It was in this charming commune of the Alpes-Maritimes that the two celebrities met and got married. Their long presence made Saint-Paul-de-Vence a magnet for the French and international cinema world for decades.

What remains today: The Hôtel La Colombe d'Or in Saint-Paul-de-Vence, where Montand and Signoret had their first meals together, remains one of the most celebrated restaurants on the Côte d'Azur. Its walls are hung with original works by Picasso, Matisse, Léger, Miró and Braque, given in lieu of payment by artists who dined there.

Jean Cocteau (1889–1963)

Artist, filmmaker, writer — France Jean Cocteau

Riviera connection: Villefranche-sur-Mer, Menton, Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat

Cocteau spent years on the Côte d'Azur and left a permanent mark on two towns. In Villefranche, he decorated the interior of the Chapelle Saint-Pierre (the “Fishermen's Chapel”) with frescoes dedicated to the fishermen of the port. In Menton, he created the extraordinary Salle des Mariages in the Town Hall, and founded the Musée Cocteau.

What remains today: The Chapelle Saint-Pierre in Villefranche harbour (open to visitors, small fee). The Musée Jean Cocteau Collection Séverin Wunderman in Menton, one of the most visited museums on the Riviera.

IV. The Contemporary Riviera (1980–Present)

Sir Elton John (born 1947)

Musician — United Kingdom Sir Elton John

Nice connection: Mont Boron, resident since the 1990s

Address: Villa Mont Boron (known locally as the “Yellow Palace”), near Fort du Mont Alban, Mont Boron, Nice

John has owned the sunbeam-yellow summer home, a Belle Époque villa surrounded by the parklands of Mont Boron, since the 1990s. The villa is so large it can be seen from the waterfront Promenade des Anglais. Elton John and his husband David Furnish have an opulent 1920s mansion on Mont Boron that overlooks the sea and the town of Nice. Elton calls his French property his “summer house”.

Originally pink, the house was repainted yellow by Elton, and the interior and gardens were redesigned by the artist himself, including Andy Warhol originals on the walls. Guests have included Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, Neil Patrick Harris, and the Beckhams.

Elton John and David Furnish regularly walk the carpet of the Cannes Film Festival, just around the corner from their house, and can be seen enjoying family time at the celebrity haunt beach club Club 55 in Saint-Tropez.

Spotting tip: The yellow villa is visible from the Promenade des Anglais and from the heights of the Colline du Château. Elton has been known to attend Nice school events and explore the Old Town relatively quietly[11)].

A long shot to find Elton John and entourage at this restaurant but he was quoted that Nespo Restaurant in Nice was his favorite.

> → *Candidate for its own page: Elton John in Nice*

Bono / U2 (born 1960)

Musician — Ireland Bono U2

Riviera connection: Eze-sur-Mer, resident since 1993
Address: Villa Les Roses, Eze-Bord-de-Mer (visible from the coastal railway between Nice and Monaco)

U2 frontman Bono is a popular celebrity on the French Riviera, often spotted out and about, especially along the beach of Eze-sur-Mer, which is just moments from his palatial celebrity villa. The pink-hued villa called Villa Les Roses is easy to spot along the pristine waterfront. Among its highlights are a pool and spa, a lush exotic garden, and a custom white-walled recording studio where celebrity neighbours Adam Clayton and Larry Mullen Jr. reportedly join him for recording sessions.

Bono's guests in the past have reportedly included David and Victoria Beckham, George Clooney, Sacha Baron Cohen, Bill Gates, and Penelope Cruz[12)].

Spotting tip: Villa Les Roses is directly visible from the coastal railway (Nice–Monaco line) and from the beach at Eze-Bord-de-Mer. Bono is regularly seen on the local beach and in the village.

George & Amal Clooney (born 1961 / born 1978)

Actor & Human Rights Lawyer — United States/United Kingdom George Clooney · Amal Clooney

Riviera connection: Regular visitors to the Côte d'Azur; close friends with Bono, Eze-sur-Mer

George and Amal Clooney are frequent guests on the French Riviera, regularly arriving by yacht and known to stay with their close friend Bono at Villa Les Roses from the 2002 film located in Eze-sur-Mer. George Clooney — actor, director, and co-founder of the Casamigos tequila brand — and Amal, one of the world's most prominent human rights lawyers, are among the most recognized faces at Riviera summer gatherings. They have been spotted dining in Nice's Old Town and at beach clubs along the coast[13].

Brad Pitt & Angelina Jolie

Actors — United States Brad Pitt · Angelina Jolie · Château Miraval

Riviera connection: Château Miraval, Correns (Var), owned 2008–present
Address: Château Miraval, Correns, Var (approx. 1.5 hrs from Nice)

Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie purchased the legendary Château Miraval — a working rosé wine estate in the Var, inland from the Riviera — in 2008, and married there in 2014. The estate produces the celebrated Miraval rosé, one of the best-selling luxury rosés in the world. Following their separation, the ownership of Miraval became the subject of prolonged legal dispute, with Pitt retaining control of the wine operations. Both were regular attendees at the Cannes Film Festival during their years together, arriving to considerable fanfare on the Croisette[14].

> *Note: Château Miraval is not on the coast but is very much part of the wider Provence–Riviera celebrity world.*

Rihanna (born 1988)

Musician & entrepreneur — Barbados Rihanna

Riviera connection: Regular summer visitor, Cannes and Saint-Tropez

Rihanna — singer, founder of Fenty Beauty and Savage X Fenty, and one of the world's wealthiest entertainers — is a recurring presence on the Côte d'Azur each summer, typically arriving by superyacht. She has been photographed repeatedly at Cap d'Antibes, on the beaches of Saint-Tropez, and at the Cannes Film Festival. Her Riviera appearances are reliably among the most photographed moments of the summer social season[15].

Tina Turner (1939–2023)

Musician — United States/Switzerland Tina Turner

Riviera connection: Villefranche-sur-Mer, from the 1990s
Address: Private villa, Villefranche-sur-Mer

Grammy award-winning singer Tina Turner had a stunning villa in Villefranche-sur-Mer with panoramic views of the Mediterranean. In 1995 she was awarded honorary citizenship of Villefranche-sur-Mer. The town she chose is one of the most intimate and beautiful on the Riviera — a small natural harbour of pastel-coloured houses, just one station from Nice on the coastal train[16)].

The F1 Community — Monaco

Sport — International

Monaco's combination of glamour, a world-famous race circuit, and extremely favorable tax arrangements has made it home to generations of Formula 1 royalty.

Several F1 stars have made Monaco their home, drawn by the Grand Prix and hefty tax exemptions. Lewis Hamilton and Jenson Button have lived there, as has David Coulthard, who owns the Columbus Hotel in Monte-Carlo.

The Monaco Grand Prix itself, held each May, is the greatest celebrity spectacle on the Riviera — a week during which the principality hosts the entire F1 paddock, an armada of superyachts fills the harbour, and the streets become an open-air party.

Naomi Campbell (born 1970)

Model — United Kingdom Naomi Campbell

Riviera connection: Regular summer visitor, Saint-Tropez and the Côte d'Azur

Year after year, supermodel Naomi Campbell returns to enjoy the yachting life of the French Riviera, always making a glamorous arrival, well known for dancing the night away in the VIP Room, Saint-Tropez's most famous nightclub.

Rod Stewart (born 1945)

Musician — United Kingdom Rod Stewart

Riviera connection: Saint-Paul-de-Vence

Legendary British rock singer Rod Stewart owns a property in Saint-Paul-de-Vence, which he bought for £3.3 million in 2005, spending summer months and holidays there with his family.

Joan Collins (born 1933)

Actress — United Kingdom Joan Collins

Riviera connection: Saint-Tropez area villa

Dynasty star Joan Collins and her husband own a villa near the glamorous Riviera resort of Saint-Tropez. She told interviewers that they spend around four months a year in France, enjoying lazing by the pool, sunbathing and entertaining guests.

V. Where to Spot Celebrities Today

The Cannes Film Festival (May, annually)

The Cannes Film Festival, held every year in May over ten days, is the single greatest concentration of international celebrity on the Riviera — and possibly in Europe. Over 200,000 people, including 40,000 with official accreditation, descend on the Prommenade de Croisette each year.

How to see the stars without accreditation:

- **The Red Carpet, Palais des Festivals:** If you want a piece of the action, take your place near the red carpet entrance at the Palais des Festivals. The official screenings are reserved, but you can see the arrivals of stars whose films are showing. Star watchers start reserving their positions at around lunchtime, so get there earlier for a good spot.
- **La Croisette:** You can also go star-spotting in the town and along the promenade, La Croisette, a 2 km road lined with exclusive shops, hotels, bars and restaurants.
- **The Hotels:** The Hôtel Martinez, Hôtel Barrière Le Majestic, and the legendary Hôtel du Cap-Eden-Roc in Cap d'Antibes are the favoured celebrity hotels. From Marlene Dietrich to Madonna and Angelina Jolie, Hôtel du Cap-Eden-Roc has been desired by stars since it first opened.
- **Restaurant bâoli:** Jay-Z, Jude Law, and Prince Albert of Monaco have been spotted sipping cocktails at the swanky hotspot bâoli, a buzzy restaurant with a popular rooftop bar and nightclub.
- **Yacht tracking:** Some star seekers use the MarineTraffic website to find out where celebrity yachts are docked, then bring binoculars to the harbour.

Allée des Étoiles: La Croisette is home to the Allée des Étoiles, Cannes' equivalent of the Hollywood Walk of Fame, which boasts handprints of international stars as wide-ranging as Catherine Deneuve, Serge Gainsbourg, Wim Wenders, Angelina Jolie, Sylvester Stallone, and Sophia Loren.

Monaco Grand Prix Week (May, annually)

During the Monaco Grand Prix week, Monaco hosts the entire Formula 1 world — drivers, teams, sponsors, and their celebrity friends. The harbour fills with superyachts. The Casino de Monte-Carlo, the Café de Paris, and the bars of the Hôtel de Paris are the centre of the action. Tickets to the race itself must be purchased months in advance; however, spectator areas on public streets require no ticket.

Nice in Summer: Where Celebrities Relax

- **Nice Port / Quai Papacino:** Waterfront restaurants where the yachting crowd mingles, summer evenings.
- **Mont Boron district:** Walking the forested paths around Mont Boron offers distant views of Elton John's yellow villa.
- **Eze-Bord-de-Mer beach:** Bono's Villa Les Roses is directly visible; he is a regular on the local beach.
- **The Colline du Château gardens:** A favorite promenade for Nice residents of all kinds.
- **Club 55, Saint-Tropez** (day trip, ~1.5hrs): The legendary celebrity beach club where much of the Riviera glamour congregates in summer.

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