Place Masséna

Place Masséna is the main square and beating heart of Nice, France, located at the center of the city where Old Nice meets the modern districts. The square was designed by Joseph Vernier in 1843-1844 and named after André Masséna, one of Napoleon's most distinguished generals who was born in Nice.

Location and Layout

The square sits at a strategic crossroads where several key areas converge: to the south lies the Old Town (Vieux-Nice) and access to the famous Promenade des Anglais, to the north is Avenue Jean Médecin (the main shopping street), and to the east and west stretches the Promenade du Paillon[1][4]. The square was actually built over the Paillon River, which was covered in the 19th century after frequent flooding—the river now flows beneath the city center[1].

What to See

The Square's Design: Place Masséna is instantly recognizable by its distinctive black-and-white checkerboard pavement that covers the entire surface, and the striking red-ochre buildings with Italian architecture that frame it[1][3].

Fountain of the Sun: In the semi-circular southern section stands this impressive fountain featuring sculptures of the planets (Earth, Mars, Venus, Mercury, and Saturn) surrounding a large statue of Apollo in the center, created by French sculptor Alfred Janniot[1][7].

“Conversation in Nice”: Perhaps the most eye-catching feature is Spanish artist Jaume Plensa's installation of seven illuminated statues of kneeling figures perched on tall poles above the square. These represent the seven continents coming together in harmony and are spectacularly lit in different colors at night[3][4][5].

What to Do

- **Shopping**: The square connects to two major shopping districts—Avenue Jean Médecin with high street brands like H&M, Zara, and the Nice Etoile shopping mall, plus the pedestrian Zone Piétonne[4][5] - **Events**: The square serves as the main venue for major public events including the Nice Carnival, Nice Jazz Festival, and Christmas festivities[1][7] - **Explore the Promenade du Paillon**: This park stretches east and west from the square, featuring the Water Mirror fountain (popular with children in summer), playgrounds, the Albert I Garden, and various sculptures and monuments[1][5] - **People-watching**: With its palm trees, stone pines, and pedestrian-friendly layout, it's an ideal spot to relax and soak in the Mediterranean atmosphere[2][3]

Place Masséna truly serves as the perfect starting point for exploring Nice, with easy access to all the city's major attractions[1].

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