

48 hours in Cannes

Playground on the Riviera

Cannes Film Festival is exactly the time when a casual visitor should not go to the city

TEXT BY **RANJAN PAL**

When one thinks of Cannes, one thinks of the International Film Festival with which this small seaside town is inextricably linked. While the festival has brought the city global fame, it is exactly the time when a casual visitor should not go to Cannes. The festival is entirely a private affair to which one has to be specially invited so unless you enjoy being jostled by throngs of thrill-seekers dying for a glimpse of George Clooney or Julia Roberts and pushed around by zealous security guards, avoid the place like the plague during these May weeks. Prices are highest and the beaches are packed during the summer season so the best time to visit would be in the fall when the weather is still balmy.



WHERE TO STAY

GRAND HYATT CANNES MARTINEZ

Overlooking the Bay of Cannes,

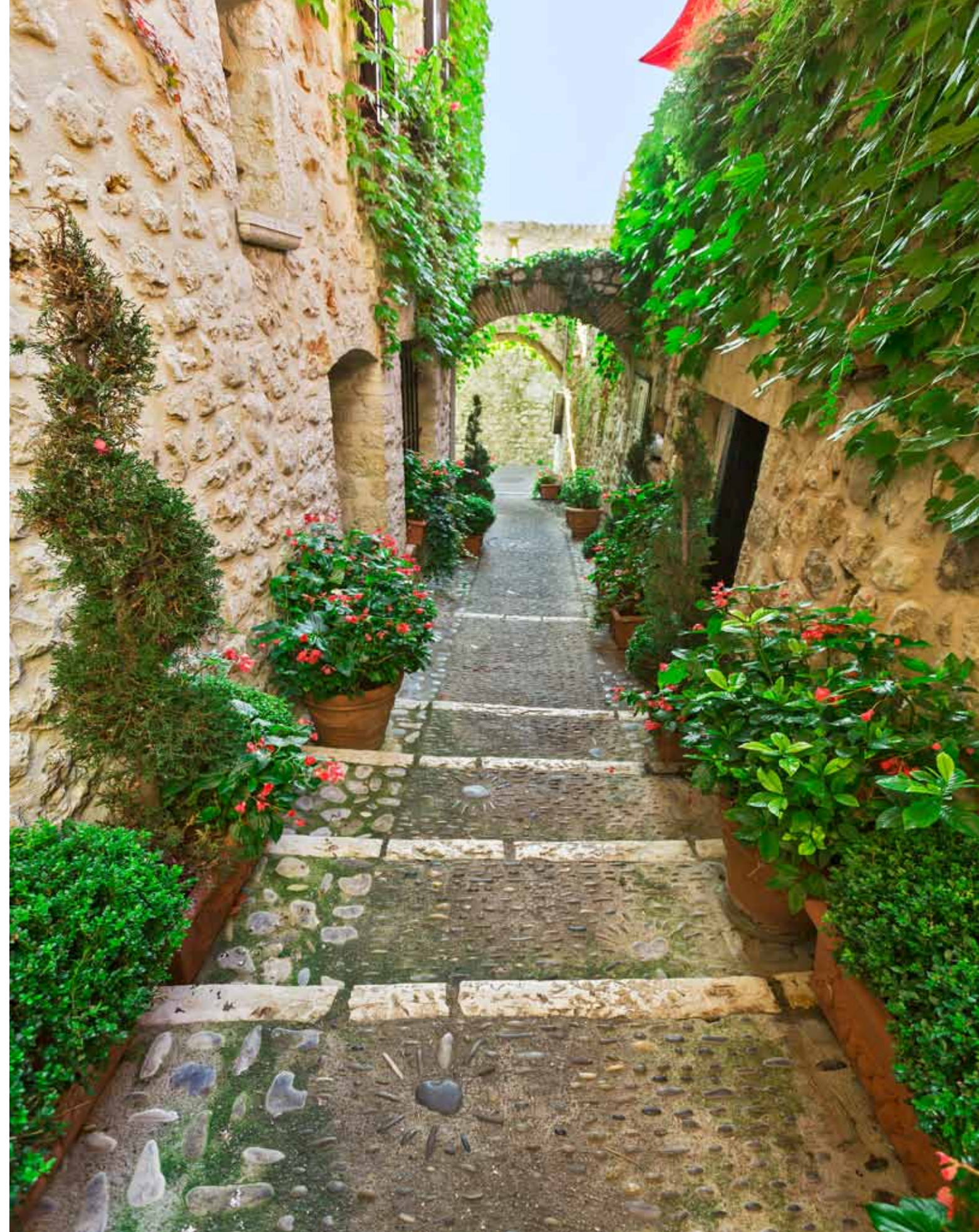
this upscale hotel is 1.2 km

from the Palais des Festivals et des Congrès and 2.8 km from the Musée de la Castre. Dining options at the

hotel include an acclaimed French restaurant. The relaxed restaurant, with varieties

of Spanish and Italian cuisine and a snazzy cocktail bar, offers a great blend of taste and luxury.

Other amenities include a private beach, an outdoor swimming pool, a fitness centre and a spa.





DAY 1

Morning

You can start your tour of Cannes at the Palais des Festivals et des Congrès which hosts the Riviera's most glamorous red carpet affair, the Cannes Film Festival. Designed by architects Bennett and Druet, this impressive complex was completed in 1982 and is used for events, conferences and festivals year round. Stroll over to the side of the building and see where many famous movie stars have left their handprints in coloured bricks in the Allee des Stars, the French equivalent of the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Continue your walk along the iconic Boulevard de la Croisette, Cannes' most famous and scenic promenade with the Mediterranean on one side and a row of elegant Belle Epoque hotels on the other. This one-mile long stretch is designed for people-watching and you can gawk at all the glamorous pedestrians, dressed in everything from designer apparel to high



heels against the sparkling blue backdrop of the Mediterranean Sea.

Afternoon

Being the glitzy place that it is, luxury shopping is obviously top of the agenda for any visitor to Cannes. For designer shopping, you will find every major French luxury brand plus famous names

such as Gucci, Armani and Prada on the landward side of the Boulevard de la Croisette. But if you don't have the deepest of pockets, a better bet would be Rue d'Antibes which is a charming street lined with 18th century houses that run behind and parallel to La Croisette. Here you will find a mixture of upmarket high street shops, trendy fashion brands like Esprit, Mango and Zara, perfumeries and boutiques. There are plenty of cafes

and wine bars to stop in at and the most delicious macaroons can be sampled at the patisserie L'Atelier de Jean-Luc Pelé. End your shopping spree by strolling over to Rue Meynadier which is behind Rue d'Antibes. Here you will experience a more local and relaxed environment in which to browse as the entire street is pedestrianised. Pop into the small boutiques which offer a more quirky and unique twist on fashion and you might find what you want at a fraction of the price!

Cannes has little to offer in the way of culture or history but, if you are so inclined, the old town of Le Suquet is worth a visit. Centuries ago, Cannes started out as a small fishing village and this old quarter still retains some of its original ambience and charm. You can wander through the labyrinth of narrow cobbled streets to the top of the small hill to get some amazing views of the Bay of Cannes to the east and the Esterel Mountains to the west. Pay a visit to the Notre-Dame de l'Espérance, Cannes' most famous church where you will be calmed by its inspiring and serene Gothic interiors. Look out for the notable 17th-century Madonna on the high altar.

Evening

End your visit to Le Suquet with a visit to the small Musee de la Castre which occupies a former 11th century medieval monastery. Surrounded by a picturesque Mediterranean garden, the museum itself has an impressive collection of Mediterranean antiquities, pre-Columbian primitive art and 19th-century Provençal landscape paintings as well as exotic art objects from Oceania and the Himalayas. If you have the energy, climb the steps to the top of the 11th century Tour du Mont Chevalier watchtower for a panoramic view of Cannes and its environs of coastline and sea.

Opposite page top: Cannes harbour;
Opposite page below: Hand prints of Sharon Stone; **Right:** A sailing boat in the Mediterranean





DAY 2

Morning

Get up early the next morning to pay a visit to the Marché Forville (literally covered market), just off Rue Meynardier which is a great place to experience traditional day-to-day shopping. From vegetables, fruits, flowers to fish, oysters, pâté and olives — all the exotic varieties are available here and are in fresh and hygienic conditions.

If the day of your visit happens to be a Monday, you will find Forville transformed into a popular flea market, selling all manner of bric-a-brac.

Afternoon

If you are feeling peckish after viewing all that delicious fresh produce, stroll over to the Old Town and have lunch at the Restaurant Mantel, an upscale little bistro tucked away on the Rue St Antoine. The lobster ravioli is their signature dish and it comes highly recommended as does the risotto with truffles. For a true Michelin starred experience, the Auberge Provençale da Bouttau is only a stone's throw away on the same street. Claiming to be the oldest restaurant in Cannes, it is larger and livelier than the Mantel and the food absolutely lives up to its ratings. On weekend nights the lower floor of the restaurant known as the 'cotton club'



becomes a jazz bar with live music.

If you want to get away for some peace and quiet from the hustle and bustle of Cannes, take a ferry boat out to the charming Iles des Lerins, a short 15-minute ride into the Gulf of Naples. The larger of the two islands is Île Ste-Marguerite where you could visit the Fort Royal built for coastal defence but mainly used as a prison whose most famous inmate was the legendary Man in the Iron Mask.

The smaller Île St-Honorat has a crumbling old monastery which, in its heyday in the fourth century, was one of the most important in Christendom. People frequent these picturesque islands for lovely coastal walks through forests of eucalyptus and pine. Take a picnic basket and a cup of coffee and discover the true meaning of French bliss! It is sure to be an experience to cherish for years to come.

Opposite page top: Aerial view of an island off Cannes; Opposite page bottom: A bowl of risotto; Right: Opening party of the Cannes Film Festival; Below: A ferry during the Palais des Festival

Evening

From bliss back to bling — you can end your visit to Cannes by losing your spare change at the Casino Croisette, France's most highly frequented casino. And its location — inside the Palais des Festivals

— is a great way to explore the interior of this giant convention centre.

The casino is a one-stop-shop with a restaurant and the popular nightclub, Le Jimmyz Club, since men are required to wear jackets, take this opportunity to transform into James Bond for Your Eyes Only! 🎰

