

Cote d' Azure

Why do we choose a place to visit? What entices someone to pack up for new adventures? Many would choose a nice safe cruise. Myself, I would choose somewhere where James Bonds Aston Martin sped along winding roads. Although not the same, I did do some unique driving in my rented Renault!

In the summer of 2002, I decided to see what the lure of the French Riviera was all about. I flew into Paris where I took the TGV out.

Now let me start by telling you about TGV. What a wonderful experience the train ride was. Large comfortable seats, aisles you can get up and walk in, and the "Spartan" dining car. It takes a little longer than a flight would, but far more comfortable and less hassles. I will warn you though. No one, I mean no one spoke English in the Paris station, Antibes, or Nice. But remember that the airport is pretty much the same too.

I took the train to Antibes, which is a quaint, little station. Out of the train and across the street to Hertz. ... no problem! The most helpful people I found, by accident, were the people working at Hertz.

I had chosen Antibes because of a number of reasons, mostly by recommendations on the web. Even though it is a nice town with sandy beaches, I did not stay there. It reminded me of the "Myrtle Beach" of France. One hotel after another packed to the brim with Europeans on holiday. Flowing out onto the crowded beaches.

I went to a hotel on the Cap d' Antibes that looked enticing on the web. The photographer should have received a Pulitzer for their work. It was this very small place with no circulation, air conditioning, or even good phone service. The brochure in the room was stuck to the many-layered painted table. It peeled off along with a few coats when I lifted it. I ran out the door.

With no where to go, I had then headed south to Nice. It's not very far unless you are driving on the coast road heading out of Antibes at rush hour. I managed to get up to 20 kilometers per hour once or twice. It took an hour.

I would always take the A8 highway if you want to get somewhere this century. Many of the roads are two lanes wide, and people park on the sides too. I suppose in off-season there less challenging.

Nice was a great place to visit. The beaches are all pebbles, but the boardwalk is wide with a beautiful view of the Mediterranean. I stayed there at the Le Meridien. What a wonderful motel if you don't mind spending a little more for a room. There is a quaint restaurant and pool on the roof. http://www.lemeridien.com/france/nice/hotel_fr1606.shtml

Just a block or two into Nice are endless stores, shops, and restaurants. You can go from St. Laurent to bargain bin stores in a couple of blocks. There is also a pretty little park with concerts across the street.

After a couple of days, I drove up to Cannes. Wow ... I guess they price it to keep out the riff raff. A similar room there was double the price of Nice. The beach was sandy, but I just didn't like it. Cannes would be good if you wanted to throw 4 or 5 grand a week away.

Heading south towards Antibes and quite tired, I stopped in Gulf Juan. What a pearl of a city. Mostly yachtsmen there, but there are some hotels and private apartments. I was lucky to find a private apartment across from the yacht club.

I had a view of the park, beach, yachts, and the boardwalk line with restaurants. The restaurants were excellent. The sand was beautiful and not crowded. I would have a condo in Golf Juan if possible.

I took a side trip up and I do mean up into the mountains. I went to Grasse. The city has many perfume manufacturers. (independent) It was an interesting trip, but hellacious drive to getting there. The city is very hard to get around in too. It might be ok with a tour.

If you want sun and sand, the Riviera does not hold a candle to the Caribbean. But if you want historical towns, opulent hotels, fabulous European shopping, or even yachting, the Riviera wins out.