

Understand Provence & the Côte d'Azur

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Provence & the Côte d'Azur Today

If you've always dreamt of staking out your own corner of paradise in Provence and the Côte d'Azur, you're certainly not alone. This most celebrated of coastlines is by far and away France's most desirable place to live, and with so much going for it, it's little wonder: the scenery is heart-stopping, the quality of life is second to none, there are *fêtes* (festivals) galore, and the politics? Well, nowhere's perfect...

Best on Film

To Catch a Thief (1956) Cary Grant and Grace Kelly cruise the coast in this Hitchcock thriller.

Et Dieu Créa la Femme (1956) A classic of the French New Wave, with Brigitte Bardot in a bikini.

Le Gendarme de St-Tropez (1964) Knockabout comedy caper, worth watching for the St-Tropez locations.

Jean de Florette & Manon des Sources (1986) Dreamy, sun-dappled, and stuffed with gorgeous scenery.

A Good Year (2006) Glossy Hollywood adaptation of Peter Mayle's Provence-set novel.

Best in Print

The Count of Monte Cristo

(Alexandre Dumas) Swashbuckling Marseille-set adventure by the author of *The Three Musketeers*.

My Father's Glory (Marcel Pagnol) Tales of rural life by Provence's best-loved writer.

A Year in Provence (Peter Mayle) The book that sent a generation of expats in search of the Provençal good life.

Perfume (Patrick Süskind) Pitch-black tale of the seductiveness of scents, partly set in Grasse.

Tender Is the Night (F Scott Fitzgerald) High life on the Riviera in the jazzy 1920s.

The Southern Dynamo

It might be known for its long lunch breaks and easy-going lifestyle, but Provence and the Côte d'Azur (or PACA, as it's often known) has long been one of France's economic powerhouses. It's the third-largest region in France by population (with around five million inhabitants, or 7.8%), has three of the largest urban areas in France (Aix-Marseille, Nice and Toulon), and comes third in the nation's richest areas by GDP.

Tourism remains by far the region's biggest industry: more than 35 million people visit the PACA area every year, bringing in some €5 billion to the region's coffers – it's estimated that between a quarter and a third of the region's jobs rely in some way on the industry's proceeds. But it's far from the only thing the region does well: agriculture, pharmaceuticals, IT, aeronautics and space engineering all have a big presence in the south, and in total the region accounts for nearly 8% of the nation's annual wealth.

Throw in a cracking cultural sector – epitomised by Marseille, Aix and Avignon's successful stints as European Capitals of Culture in 2013 – and you have a region that continues to punch above its weight in nearly every sphere.

The Cost of Living

Unfortunately economic success has its drawbacks. The region's popularity as a place to live and work means that it also has some of the highest property prices anywhere in France. In 2013 the average price of a house along the Côte d'Azur was nearly double the national average (€320,000 and €430,000 for the Var and Alpes Maritimes *départements* respectively). In 2014 La Leopolda Villa in Villefranche-sur-Mer officially became the third-most-expensive house in the world: it's currently