

Monaco: Lifestyles of The Rich and Richer

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Some places in the world just reek of money. Perhaps it's the yachts that are more like mini cruise ships or maybe it's the prevalence of Ferraris and Lamborghinis on the roads, but you just know that to live there, you need to be rich and not just a little bit rich, but amazingly rich. Monaco is one of those places.

This is quite a place and unlike anywhere we'd ever visited before. It's surrounded by France, but it's an independent principality with a monarchy, just like the UK, that dates back seven centuries. Not that there's much to govern; this is the second smallest independent state in the world, covering just 485 acres (the honor for the smallest goes to Vatican City in Rome). Don't be deceived by the size of this place. It's also the world's most densely populated country and, amazing as it seems, it's actually home to more than 30,000 people. From what we saw while we were there, I'm guessing a lot of them have rather large cash reserves.

Our first stop on our visit was the Royal Palace, but getting there is an adventure in itself. I'd heard that Monaco was built on a rock and the first thing you learn when arriving on a bus is just how tall that rock is! Bus parking is right at the base of the rock and then you take escalators and elevators, all carved into the rock, before arriving in what must rank as one of the most beautiful parts of the world.

The first sight that greeted us was the Oceanographic Museum and, although we didn't have time to go inside, from what we could gather, it's home to one of the best aquariums in the world. From there, it's a quick five minute walk to the palace and as soon as you walk into the square in front of the palace, you can immediately tell that this is a country that's very proud of its heritage, with the national flag flying everywhere.

Looking like a fairytale castle from outside, the first part of the palace you come to when you go inside is the Courtyard of Honours with the Monumental Flight of Steps as its centerpiece. Looking at the steps, it's impossible to believe that these were carved from the same slab of Carrara marble. We stood there for some time, just admiring the courtyard and soaking in the view. Sadly, like most palaces of the world these days, no photos are allowed.

The design of a lot of the palace rooms you see on the tour is similar to many you'll find throughout Europe, but there aren't many palaces that have a Gallery of Mirrors that makes the room seem as if it goes on forever. The tour finished with the Throne Room, the setting for state events in Monaco since the 16th century. What struck me was the portrait of the Royal family, the Grimaldis, painted just before the tragic death of Princess Grace in the early 1980s. Everyone stood there mesmerized in front of it for some time, just taking in every detail and lost in their own thoughts.

No visit to the Royal Palace is complete without seeing the Changing of the Guard ceremony, but be sure to stake a spot at least 20 minutes before it starts, as it's a very popular event to watch and crowds build quickly. Especially unfortunate during the heat of the Mediterranean summer, there's also no shade to watch the ceremony, so be sure to apply plenty of sun tan lotion before settling down to enjoy this.

From the vantage point in front of the palace, it's also worth taking a look down. On one side of the square is the Port of Monaco, and there are more superb yachts on the other side in the newly formed Port of Fontvieille, which was reclaimed from the sea in the 1970s. These really are picture postcard views and it's hard to drag your eyes away from these scenes as you stand there dreaming of enjoying life here.

The other part of Monaco that draws most visitors is Monte Carlo, most famous for its casino and opera house, a building that dates back to 1878. The building bears more than a passing resemblance to the stunning Opera House in Paris, partially down to the fact that both were designed by the same architect. It's certainly a great deal more refined than any casino you'll find in either Las Vegas or Atlantic City, as is shown by its location.

In the same square as the Casino stand grand hotels, including the stunning Hotel de Paris, all with the same beautiful facades as the casino. Add to that the Casino Gardens and Terraces, which form the main part of the square and it's easy to imagine that you've stepped straight into the middle of Paris - with the only giveaway being that there isn't enough traffic here!

Shopping is a fun passtime in Monte Carlo, although in truth, you're more likely to be browsing than buying. Most stores are familiar designer names and some even have staff at the door who almost appear to be checking to see if you should be admitted or not. When you see some of the price tags, you can understand why. This is not the place to head for if you're looking for a bargain!

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Monaco is truly a unique country and even if it is amongst the smallest countries in the world, the best part of a day here isn't enough to explore everything that this beautiful part of the world has to offer. After spending time here, it's not hard to understand why so many celebrities and wealthy businesspeople head here to make it their home.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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