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# Travel



St. Tropez Harbour.

GILLIE HUTCHINSON PHOTO

## FRANCE

# La Cote d'Azur: c'est formidable!

**GILLIE HUTCHINSON**  
Contributing Writer

Anyone who has spent time on the Cote d'Azur will appreciate its charms. For this is the land of the gods — chilled rosé summer wines, mussels, sea bream and sea bass fragrant with garlic, a warm Mediterranean beneath Le Grand Bleu and, of course, light that infuses everything with its pastel glow.

I have been holidaying here since I was a young girl, never to tire of its bounty, and when my cup is drained of that 'je ne sais quoi' I head for this little

stretch of heaven ready to refill my memory bank.

The French are notorious for living to eat, and they are masters of their craft.

From freshly baked pains au chocolat that literally melt in your mouth, to the plat du jour at the local bistro, there is no such thing as a bad meal. Indeed, life revolves around meal times in France, and a beach full of families will empty in minutes once the silent mid-day bell heralds lunch hour. Their love of food is captivating.

The outdoor markets alternate between the coastal towns offering fish,

meat, herbs, honey, fruit and vegetables so you can buy fresh food daily without ever having to visit a supermarket or check the freezer. The poulets rotis are delicious as are the wood oven baked pizzas cooked in a van by the side of the road.

The excited banter that permeates every aisle of le marche seems to relate to the food, and the ambiance is one of contentment. You can also buy colourful Provençal tablecloths, hand and tea towels, lavender, soaps, jewelry, bags, shoes and clothes, all the while keeping your mind on what's for lunch or dinner. If it gets too hot, you can stop in the corner café for a cool beer and watch the world go by.

Les Issambres, where I am staying, is a well-kept secret. It is part of the coast that is mostly passed by en route to the bigger draws like Cannes and Nice to the north or Sainte Maxime and St. Tropez to the south. The curved, sandy beach is a stone's throw from the coast road lined with its array of small shops, a tabac, a pâtisserie, a hotel, a bank and the square where the outdoor market visits on Mondays. Elsewhere, market days are Wednesdays in Frejus, Thursdays in Sainte Maxime and Saturdays in St. Tropez. I frequent them all! You can get the best bargains of your life here — not only in attire so you can sashay along the Promenade like a true local, but also in wonderful table and bed linens that you will never find at home.

The Bateau Vert (Green Boat — it sounds so much better in French!) leaves

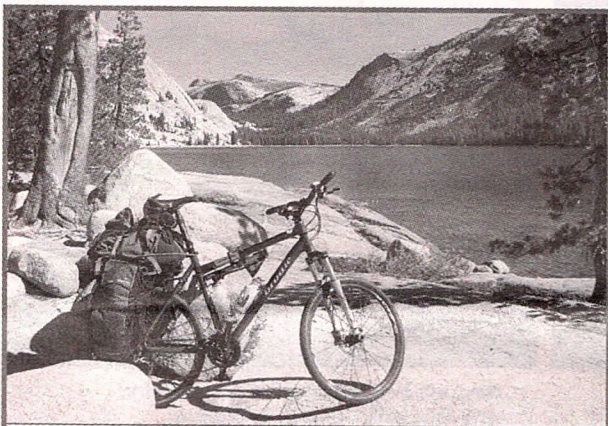
from the port in Les Issambres every hour and takes you across the Gulf of St. Tropez to this mecca, where beautiful people pose on beautiful boats and the world seems so much more glamorous.

People are ultra-tanned, slim and perfectly styled. A panama hat is a must, and temperatures soar to 33 degrees as you scan the market stalls for that coveted souvenir before heading for the pavement café and a refreshing Orangina.

I eat lunch at a restaurant called Le Girelier facing the port, its white décor and mirrors reflecting the afternoon sunlight. Super yachts can be glimpsed further out in the bay, their giant sails luffing in the breeze. It is pure hedonism where money reigns supreme.

The smaller town of Sainte Maxime, by contrast, is far less flashy. Here you can enjoy a drink at the Café de France with its newly-furbished red and black décor, and mooch the side streets and indoor food market for treats. You can buy hand-made shirts and ceramic painted house numbers, or shabby chic bric a brac for your home décor — if you can fit it all in your case!

When you look at the buildings, history looks back at you. The bright awnings and seats disguise the layers of time when life was much simpler but probably not that much different. The sense of community is strong and people kiss cheeks at every turn, exchanging smiles and news unperturbed by the throng of visitors who have invaded their town.



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**LEAVE HORSESHOE BAY**

SAILINGS DAILY AT:

7:25 AM \*9:00 AM 9:40 AM \*11:10 AM  
12:00 PM ^1:35 PM ^2:15 PM ^3:45 PM  
◇4:30 PM ◇5:50 PM ◇6:35 PM ■7:55 PM  
◇8:40 PM \*9:50 PM ◇10:35 PM

**LEAVE LANGDALE**

SAILINGS DAILY AT:

6:20 AM \*7:55 AM 8:30 AM \*10:05 AM  
10:50 AM ^12:30 PM ^1:05 PM ^2:40 PM  
◇3:25 PM ◇4:45 PM ◇5:30 PM ■6:55 PM  
◇7:35 PM \*8:55 PM ◇9:40 PM

\*Sat Only ^Mon, Thu, Fri & Sat only ^ Daily except Sat  
◇ Tue, Wed, Fri, Sun and Aug 5 & Sep 2, except Aug 30 & Sep 1 ◇ Daily except Tue & Wed  
● Daily except Sat & Sep 1 ■ Tue, Wed, Sun only except Aug 4 & Sep 1 ★ Tue & Wed only

Langdale: Ticket sales & loading end 5 minutes before sailing time for vehicles & walk-on passengers.  
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8:15 AM 10:35 AM 12:50 PM 3:10 PM  
5:35 PM 7:40 PM 9:35 PM 11:25 PM

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SAILINGS DAILY AT:

7:15 AM 9:25 AM 11:40 AM 2:00 PM  
4:30 PM 6:40 PM 8:35 PM 10:30 PM

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