



(insider's guide)

YES, YOU CANNES

Whether you're film-watching, celeb-spotting, cafe-hopping or beach-bumming, the classic Riviera gem has it all in spades.

WORDS ROWENA CARR-ALLINSON

Set on the glittering Mediterranean Sea, Cannes is the beating heart of the French Riviera. It's a name synonymous with luxury, thanks to its pristine palm-lined seafront, grandiose hotels and elegant locals, and, not to forget, its annual film festival. The event is celebrating its 66th anniversary this month (15–26 May) and attracts the world's biggest celebrities.

Much of the city 'hibernates' over winter but, come May, it's truly alive and kicking. Summer is super busy, so the best times to visit are spring and autumn. Sailing enthusiasts should time their trip with Cannes's boat show (10–15 September).

What's more, Cannes is ideally located, so you can also visit other Riviera gems, such as Nice or Monaco, along the most scenic road you're likely to encounter.

GETTING THERE To book your flight to France, visit www.virginaustralia.com or simply call 13 67 89 (in Australia).

Must dos **La Croisette**, or Boulevard de la Croisette, is the number one place to see and be seen. The two-kilometre-long seaside street is home to designer stores such as Dolce & Gabbana, Dior and Fendi, as well as glitzy hotels. Each has its own private beach lined with sun loungers — and that's where you're most likely to catch an A-list celebrity giving interviews during the film festival, reclining on a pristine white lounge, nibbling on a low-calorie salad or propping up the bar and relaxing to the DJ's mellow tunes. Nearby **Palais des Festivals** (1 La Croisette) is the festival's giant concrete home. Built in 1982, it was tailor-made to host the event,

and while the building may not be aesthetically pleasing, its red-carpeted staircase has become an icon of the movie world. It's also a good place to yacht spot, with some of the world's finest moored just steps away. One of France's most densely packed shopping areas, **Rue D'Antibes**, boasts high-street shopping and designer goodies such as Kenzo and Paul Smith — not to mention classic French brands Façonnable, Blanc Bleu and the chic Comptoir des Cottonniers. Here, people are so much in love with shopping there's even an annual shopping festival (www.cannesshoppingfestival.com) in March when stores celebrate with sales and catwalk shows.



Bon appétit

For a small town, Cannes boasts a vast choice of restaurants — from the Michelin-starred starched-linen types where you'll need to dress the part to the more relaxed 'toes-in-the-sand' beach haunts where the theme is barefoot luxury and it's all about the party vibe, light bites and late nights.

FOR GOURMETS **La Palme d'Or** (top; 73 La Croisette; +33 4 9298 7414; www.hotel-martinez.com) is intrinsically linked to the film festival — named for the prestigious award and also hosting the jury dinner. Chef Christian Sinicropi has earned two Michelin stars with his daring and creative menu, and stunning presentation rivalled only by the Mediterranean views.

FOR PEOPLE WATCHING **Le Bâoli** (above; Port Canto, La Croisette; +33 4 9343 0343; www.lebaoli.com) is where the A-listers like to party. With a huge al fresco restaurant and lounge overlooking the sea, it boasts an Asian-inspired menu and all the trimmings — ethereal cabanas, cosy couches, palm trees aplenty and an extensive stock of vintage Dom Pérignon.

FOR MINGLING **Le Cirque** (30 rue Hoche; +33 4 9330 0238; www.lecirquecannes.fr) is the latest favourite among locals. It's a cosy Parisian-style cafe with a modern decor and the menu covers classics such as tuna carpaccio and Calamar a la Plancha. The place is part lounge, part retro, and very whimsical. ▶



Bedding down

From splendidly luxurious abodes to yachts you can check into and spend a few nights on, Cannes offers a range of accommodation options.

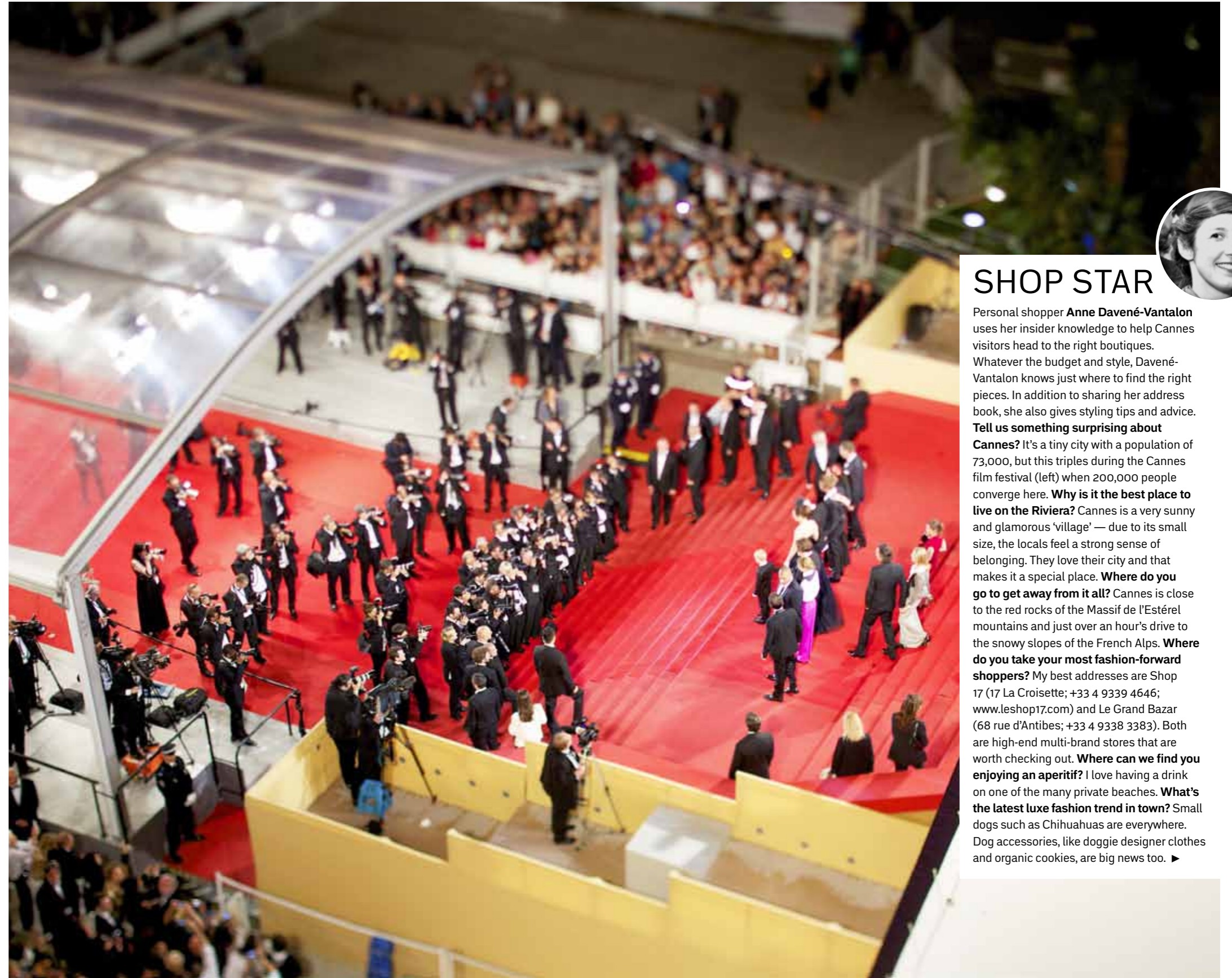
DREAMBOATS For something different, and if budget is no issue, push the boat out (literally) and make a yacht your glamorous temporary home. Whether you prefer sail or motor, **YCO Yacht** (top; www.ycoyacht.com) offers dreamboats in all shapes and sizes.

HIP & EDGY Ultimate party hotel **3.14 CANNES** (5 rue François Einesy; www.314cannes.com) has quirky customised rooms (try the corset-topped velvet bed, above, or the sandy Oceanic rooms in wicker and dark woods), but the highlight is its rooftop pool overlooking the sparkling blue Mediterranean.

VIP STYLE If you like the idea of staying in five-star luxury, book into legendary Art Deco hotel **Le Martinez** (73 La Croisette; www.hotel-martinez.com), and guiltlessly enjoy its stylish rooms, sleek bathrooms, gorgeous sea views, palm-fringed pool and fresh croissants for breakfast.

OUT OF TOWN Take a 20-minute drive into the hills to **La Bastide St Antoine** (48 Ave Henri Dunant, Grasse; www.jacques-chibois.com). Chef Jacques Chibois has transformed this 18th-century Provençal farmhouse into a gourmet getaway with rooms featuring plush furnishings.

CLASSIC CHIC Another grande dame, the **Carlton Cannes** (58 La Croisette; www.intercontinental.com) is one of the Riviera's most famous hotels. With celebrity kudos and sophisticated rooms, its exclusive beach has a zen-like teak deck, outdoor restaurant and an army of sun loungers.



SHOP STAR

Personal shopper **Anne Davené-Vantal** uses her insider knowledge to help Cannes visitors head to the right boutiques. Whatever the budget and style, Davené-Vantal knows just where to find the right pieces. In addition to sharing her address book, she also gives styling tips and advice. **Tell us something surprising about Cannes?** It's a tiny city with a population of 73,000, but this triples during the Cannes film festival (left) when 200,000 people converge here. **Why is it the best place to live on the Riviera?** Cannes is a very sunny and glamorous 'village' — due to its small size, the locals feel a strong sense of belonging. They love their city and that makes it a special place. **Where do you go to get away from it all?** Cannes is close to the red rocks of the Massif de l'Estérel mountains and just over an hour's drive to the snowy slopes of the French Alps. **Where do you take your most fashion-forward shoppers?** My best addresses are Shop 17 (17 La Croisette; +33 4 9339 4646; www.leshop17.com) and Le Grand Bazar (68 rue d'Antibes; +33 4 9338 3383). Both are high-end multi-brand stores that are worth checking out. **Where can we find you enjoying an aperitif?** I love having a drink on one of the many private beaches. **What's the latest luxe fashion trend in town?** Small dogs such as Chihuahuas are everywhere. Dog accessories, like doggie designer clothes and organic cookies, are big news too. ▶



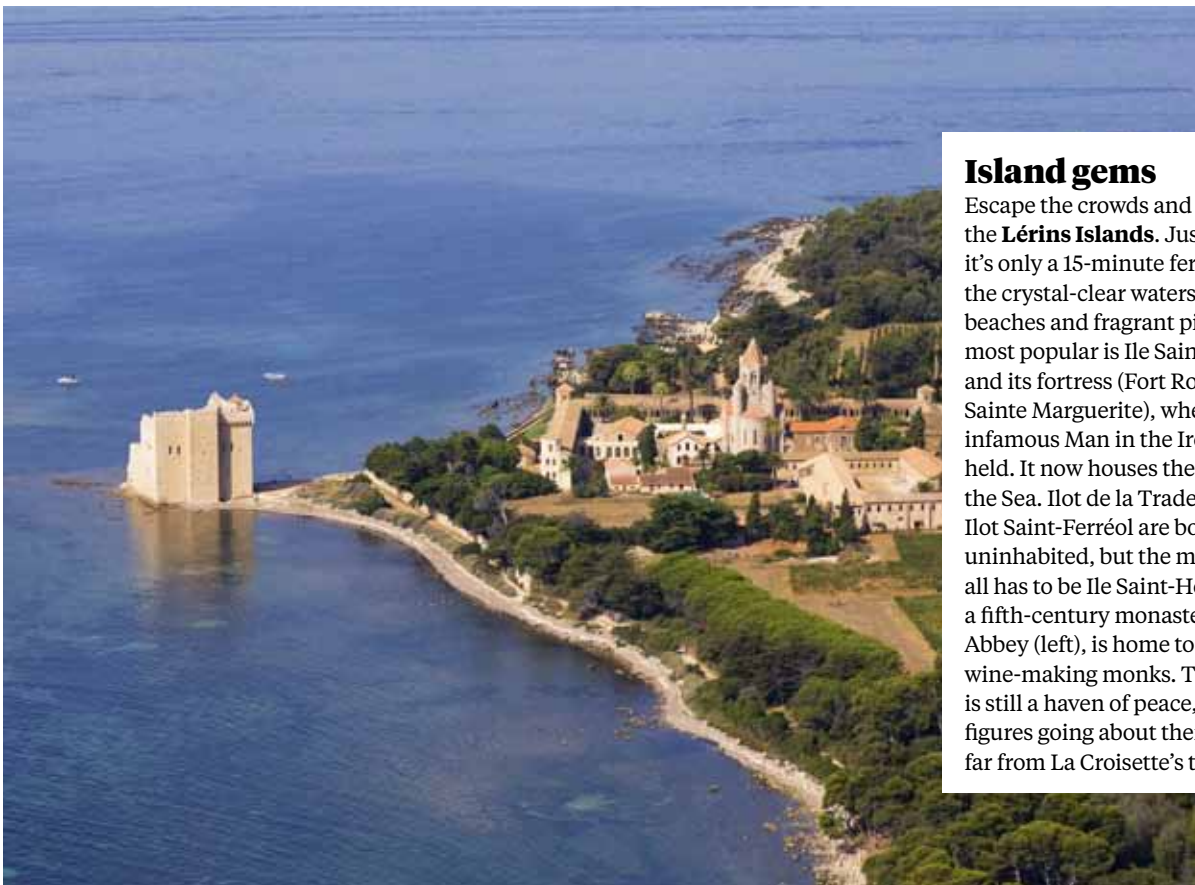
GET OUT OF TOWN

Go beyond the bling and take a short drive inland to the *arrière-pays* (hinterland), where the rolling hills ooze lavender, rosemary and thyme, and offer views over Cannes's sparkling bay and the Mediterranean. The commune of **Mougins** (above and below) has long been a VIP escape — Pablo Picasso, Edith Piaf, Christian Dior and Catherine Deneuve have all hidden away among the olive groves, relaxing to the never-ending soundtrack of chirping crickets. The chic hilltop village is utterly picturesque (with its terracotta-tiled stone houses, pastel shutters and smattering of olive and cypress trees) and, as you'd expect from a smart French hideaway, comes with a luxurious hotel, **Les Mas Candille** (Boulevard Clément Rebuffel; www.lemascandille.com), reputed for its excellent cuisine, chic Provençal style and beautiful Shiseido spa. ►



DON'T MISS

Head up the little hill from the harbour to the old quarter of **Le Suquet** (right) where the **Musée de la Castre** (Place de la Castre; +33 4 9338 5526) is well worth the hike. This small museum has artefacts from all over the world (and endless views over the city). If it's not for you, simply roam the narrow backstreets, once home to fishermen. Meander past rue Saint-Antoine's many restaurants; stop for a drink at the colourful **Le Jardin Secret** (2 rue des Frères; +33 4 9338 7263), or simply stroll down to Place du Marché to the **Marché Forville** — a classic morning food market and the place to breathe in the aromas of Provençal produce. On Mondays, it's a flea market, which some say is even better than browsing the food.



Island gems

Escape the crowds and cruise out to the **Lérins Islands**. Just off the coast, it's only a 15-minute ferry ride across the crystal-clear waters to secluded beaches and fragrant pine trees. The most popular is Ile Sainte-Marguerite, and its fortress (Fort Royal de l'Ile Sainte Marguerite), where the infamous Man in the Iron Mask was held. It now houses the Museum of the Sea. Ilot de la Tradelière and Ilot Saint-Ferréol are both wild and uninhabited, but the most unusual of all has to be Ile Saint-Honorat, where a fifth-century monastery, Lérins Abbey (left), is home to award-winning wine-making monks. The island is still a haven of peace, with hooded figures going about their business far from La Croisette's throngs. 🍷