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[Previous Issues \(/index.php/articles-by-issue\)](/index.php/articles-by-issue)



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BEYOND RYE: French Riviera Rediscovering (</index.php/beyond-rye/3672-beyond-rye-french-riviera-rediscovering>)

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It began innocently enough, with a trip into Parkers travel store to browse guidebooks on Spain.

By Lisa Miller



It began innocently enough, with a trip into Parkers travel store to browse guidebooks on Spain. Our 16-year-old daughter was headed to Barcelona on a Sacred Heart school-sponsored exchange, and I was the lucky parent accompanying her for moral support (and perhaps a few days on the Spanish coast) before handing her off to her exchange family.

I emerged from Parkers totally turned around, loaded up with books on Provence and the Cote d’Azur. And so our little taste of the French Riviera began.

It started off easily, on a super cheap easyJet flight from Barcelona to Nice. And I had visions of Emily as the backpacker of my youth. We’d rough it through Europe as I’d done in college. I envisioned train ride overnights and sleeping at train station platforms —youth hostels galore.

Well it wasn’t like that. I am no longer 20 and Emily is no 20-year-old me. We saw no hostels in our stay. We did however see the Carlton Hotel in Cannes, the Hotel Byblos in St. Tropez (thank you Eliza Harris, my travel guru), the infamous Club 55 in St. Tropez, La Chevre d’Or in Eze, and Hotel du Cap Eden Rock in Cap d’Antibes. Wowza to all! They were jaw-dropping experiences.

Among the highlights of our little French tour: shopping in the charming labyrinth of Vieux Nice; riding the train from Monaco to Cannes; sunbathing on the gracious Carlton Pier; eating ice cream cones at 10 p.m. twilight on the Cannes promenade; and having Emily all to myself to truly appreciate what a smart and sensitive young woman she has so quickly become.

Final exams were over and she was truly unfettered. The burdens of school were removed from her tiny shoulders and she was carefree. And she was all mine to appreciate and enjoy for five days in France.

We both began to move in slow motion. Perhaps it was the rich French food, but we found ourselves embracing the new pace. Sharing my iPhone's personal hotspot with her became a ritual, as was our constant picture taking of the breathtaking scenery and mellow lighting. (No wonder all those painters were so inspired!)

The decision to tour the three Corniches and lunch in the perched village of Eze was an easy one, as the guidebooks all touted it. Places I'd definitely wished we could have spent more time include Antibes and Eze, both of which were magical.

Our decision to follow the small print in our guidebook turned out to be our best decision of all: we had a taxi drop us off at Plage Mala (picture Leonardo DiCaprio in "The Beach") in Cap d'Ail and from there we walked along a jagged path that gripped the Riviera's rocky edge and left us to admire the Mediterranean up close and personal. It felt so natural to just dive right in off the cliffs to cool off, as everyone else seemed to be doing. The water was so inviting and rejuvenating.



The walk was long but insanely scenic, and it was worth every step when we realized we'd achieved our goal of walking from France to Monaco. We'd made it to this cool little country. The walk was as French Riviera as one can get. We were pretty proud of ourselves. Move over Brigitte Bardot and Grace Kelly!

One hiccup in the trip was when our heavenly stay in St. Tropez came to an abrupt end, when, on June 11, with tickets from home we arrived at the St. Raphael train station. The man behind the counter smirked as we asked for the track number for Barcelona. Unbeknownst to us it was the day of the Europe-wide taxi and train strike, and the station was deserted. We would be going nowhere via train that day.

I briefly entertained the idea of showing Emily what it was like to sleep stranded at the train station. But rats, we needed to make it to Barcelona for my return flight to New York the next day. Twenty-year-old me was stomping her feet at the party pooping going on, but 45-year-old me was not going to miss that flight.

So, we gratefully agreed to enlist the driver to take us all the way to Barcelona, at an insane and non-negotiable price. We really had no

other options. The airports were affected by the strike as well.

A silver lining to the nine-hour car ride did emerge: We were able to make a quick stop in Arles and visit the “Van Gogh Café.” It had been a memorable moment in my backpacking days. So to share it with Emily had 20-year-old me doing some sort of disco dance.

All in all, we savored and celebrated every delightful bit. It was remarkable how much we ate and how rich it all was. Our meals seemed to morph from one to another. But hurtling ourselves into the salty sea that was true perfection.

Obviously, one doesn’t need to go to the French Riviera to bond with your teen. What you do need is quite simple: a block of carefree one-on-one time. But with our overbooked teens that’s harder and harder to come by. My advice is: do everything you possibly can to create that opportunity this summer. You will not regret it.

Prev (/index.php/beyond-rye/3726-beyond-rye-surfs-up-in-cape-may)

Next (/index.php/beyond-rye/3612-beyond-rye-weekend-in-iceland)

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Columns

[After Rye \(/index.php/after-rye\)](/index.php/after-rye)

[A Little Local History \(/index.php/local-history\)](/index.php/local-history)

[Around Town \(/index.php/around-town\)](/index.php/around-town)

[Beyond Rye \(/index.php/beyond-rye\)](/index.php/beyond-rye)

[Morsels on Rye \(/index.php/morsels-on-rye\)](/index.php/morsels-on-rye)

[Out of Here \(/index.php/out-of-here\)](/index.php/out-of-here)

[Slice of Rye \(/index.php/slice-of-rye\)](/index.php/slice-of-rye)

[Business and Orgs \(/index.php/business-and-orgs\)](/index.php/business-and-orgs)

Life & Style

[Along for the Rye'd \(/index.php/along-for-the-rye-d\)](/index.php/along-for-the-rye-d)

[Ask Alice \(/index.php/ask-alice\)](/index.php/ask-alice)

[Dressing on the Side \(/index.php/dressing-on-the-side\)](/index.php/dressing-on-the-side)

[Off the Cuff \(/index.php/off-the-cuff\)](/index.php/off-the-cuff)

[Ruminations \(/index.php/rumination\)](/index.php/rumination)

A & E

- [At The Movies \(/index.php/a-e/at-the-movies\)](/index.php/a-e/at-the-movies)
- [Local Arts Scene \(/index.php/a-e/local-arts-scenes\)](/index.php/a-e/local-arts-scenes)

Dining & Wining

- [Dining In \(/index.php/dining-wining/dining-in\)](/index.php/dining-wining/dining-in)
- [Rye on the Rocks \(/index.php/dining-wining/rye-on-the-rocks\)](/index.php/dining-wining/rye-on-the-rocks)

The Great Outdoors

- [Around the Garden \(/index.php/the-great-outdoors/around-the-garden\)](/index.php/the-great-outdoors/around-the-garden)
- [Green Space \(/index.php/the-great-outdoors/greenspace\)](/index.php/the-great-outdoors/greenspace)
- [Right in Our Backyard \(/index.php/the-great-outdoors/right-in-our-backyard\)](/index.php/the-great-outdoors/right-in-our-backyard)
- [Home & Garden \(/index.php/the-great-outdoors/home-garden\)](/index.php/the-great-outdoors/home-garden)

[Archived Articles \(/index.php/old-articles\)](/index.php/old-articles)

Sports & Schools

[Schools \(/index.php/sports-schools\)](/index.php/sports-schools)

[Sports \(/index.php/sports\)](/index.php/sports)

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