



Skiing and Hiking

From mid-December until the end of March, tourists can join the local community and take to the nearby slopes for the weekend or even the day. An adult ski pass costs no more than €30. In summer too the mountains can be well worth a visit. Take a hike through tranquil meadows and forests where you can breathe in mountain air with flowery scents, admire awe-inspiring scenery, and observe birds and animals in their natural habitat.

The excellent bus service throughout the Alpes-Maritimes makes the mountains easily accessible. If you want to mix up your winter city break, or you've had enough of lying on the beach, a day's outing or an overnight stay in the mountains can be just the ticket. Especially when that ticket costs just €1 each way.

Isola 2000

www.isola2000.com

At 90 km from the coast, Isola is the closest ski resort to Nice, and a favourite for snowboarding. The 120km of slopes are divided into 43 runs: 4 black, 11 red, 21 blue and 7 green.

In the summer, as well as taking a mountain walk, you can pick up tickets from the tourist office to try out activities such as riding, tennis, archery and swimming, all centrally located in walking distance of the main village.

Public transport: Daily Santa Azur buses (www.santa-azur.com). Travel time: 2 hours each way.

Auron

www.auron.com

Close to Isola, Auron is part of the Mercantour National Park and boasts over 50km of cross-country pistes. The snow park includes a half-pipe, advanced tricks zone and dedicated snowboard club. The 135km of slopes feature 9 black runs, 15 red, 16 blue and 2 green. And, if you have ever fancied dog sledding or snowshoeing, this is the place to try it.

When the snow has thawed, visitors can enjoy many walking and hiking trails around mountain lakes and pretty villages such as Saint-Étienne de Tinée.

Public transport: Daily Santa Azur buses (www.santa-azur.com). Travel time: 2 hours each way.

Valberg

www.valberg.com

A great ski resort for beginners offering 90km of slopes over 52 pistes. The snow park comes with a half-pipe, big air jump, ramps and an outdoor speaker system. Ice climbing and paragliding are also available.

In the summer all manner of outdoor activities are on offer including climbing, canyoning, rafting, potholing, abseiling and even bungee jumping.

Public transport: Daily buses from Nice Centre and Nice Airport. Travel time: 2 hours each way. 90 minutes by car.

Rambling on the Riviera

-Veronica Sexton

My walk will take you along the main trail of Cap Ferrat which leads up to the lighthouse on the tip of the peninsula and then returns down the other side finishing at Passable beach. Depending on speed and stoppages, the 7km round trip will take an hour to and hour and a half and it's possible to walk either coast first; however, take into account the sun's heat and location. En route you can find location signpost maps of Cap Ferrat to guide you. Pack a picnic and, of course, wine or champagne is a must! Also take the camera for snapshots of the cap itself, Nice, Cap de Nice, Villefranche, and Beaulieu-sur-Mer. Prepare to be dazzled!



Sipping a glass of wine whilst taking a well-deserved break, I'm wondering how many times I can fall in love, or is this just good old-fashioned lust? What am I waffling on about you may very well ask—my unadulterated love affair with the French Riviera, or at this very moment St-Jean-Cap-Ferrat?

There are so many beautiful walks to enjoy on perhaps the most famous coastline in Europe, but my favourite is along the St-Jean-Cap-Ferrat peninsula jutting out between Villefranche and Beaulieu-sur-Mer. This coastline of the rich and famous is also home to an elegant village with three small beaches, a picturesque marina, and 14km of eucalyptus-scented walking paths.

A walk around Cap Ferrat can be divided into three parts: the tour of Cap Ferrat, the pine forest, and the Maurice Rouvier walk which links Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat to Beaulieu. Regardless of your fitness level, there is a walk to suit you. I've taken the paths around the peninsula at different

times of year; each season is equally beautiful. My favourite season to walk the cap is actually in winter. I may have to wrap up a little, but it's less crowded and I love watching the crashing waves against the white rocks and enjoying a rugged sense of abandonment. No one will feel cheated if they take this walk in spring, summer, or autumn, as all can enjoy blooming mimosa, the smell of pine trees, blue skies above, and the shimmering Mediterranean below.

So let's get started...

From the Place du Centenaire (harbour car park), walk up the main street and turn left into Avenue Claude Vignon, at the start of Chemin de la Carrière. This route takes you around the cap; you will pass a disused quarry from which stone was taken to build the harbour in Monaco in the late 1800's. The path follows the coast and each bend brings another breathtaking view. That's if you can take your eyes off the magnificent villas perched up on the hilltops, protected from prying eyes behind locked gateways. The path is flat and well surfaced with a few steps to navigate along the way, but nothing too taxing. If you feel a little tired, then just pause for a while on the rocks and enjoy the view.

Continue up the east coast, and you will often see sailboats and yachts passing by below. Also

Roni loves to walk and cycle when she is not buried under emails in the office. If you like this walk, and want some more options, feel free to pop into the Pebbles rentals office and Roni will point your feet in the right direction.



look out for divers, kayakers and windsurfers enjoying the cove. Soon you will see a long stretch of winding path leading to Le Phare, a lighthouse built in 1732. It was destroyed in 1944 and rebuilt in its present form after the war. From the top of the lighthouse there is a view from the Esterel to the Italian coast, but sadly it is presently closed to the public.

This area is a popular nude sunbathing spot for primarily gay men (though I've never spotted a nude as yet). If you blush easily you might want to avert your eyes upwards, where you can view the seaside gazebos of the glamorous Grand Hôtel du Cap. Built in 1908, this stately white palace is one of the most glamorous hotels in the world, which over the years has welcomed presidents, princesses, dukes and duchesses, as well as glitzy A-list celebs. To keep you on track, look out for another landmark, the large white coastguard station called the Semaphore that was built in 1862 by Napoleon III. The French Navy now owns it. The top is 143m above sea level.

Once past the Le Phare, continue up the west side that is the most spectacular, with panoramic views of Nice from the airport, along the Promenade to Cap de Nice. Hey, is that the Hôtel Negresco? The Mercantour mountains hover in a haze like an apparition hanging over Nice. Further along, Villefranche shows her stunning

bay decorated with a mix of sumptuous yachts, sail boats, and Mediterranean buildings nestling between Cap de Nice and Beaulieu-sur-Mer.

Soon you will reach the end of this coastal path where there are a few steps upwards to enable you to view one of the most beautiful villas on the peninsula open to the public—Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild. This mansion is decorated with the treasures of the baroness Béatrice Ephrussi de Rothschild (1864-1934) set in stunning gardens. Her passion for travel and fine art combined with an iron will, led to the creation of this magnificent villa completed in 1912. She supervised this labour of love but sadly only got to enjoy its finished beauty for four years, as after the death of her beloved husband, she never lived in her dream villa. The villa is always worth a visit and should be on your itinerary, especially if it's your first time to the French Riviera. During August, the villa hosts the Les Azuriales Opera Festival, which I went to last year along with other members of the Pebbles team. It is a perfect introduction to opera and an opportunity to experience the gardens at night for a real fairytale setting.

Now it's a gentle stroll back to the village. You turn left at the top of the steps that will lead you onto Passable beach. You may be tempted to relax here for a while and catch a few sunrays. Then take the steps leading to the Chemin de Passable and so on to Avenue Denis Séméria passing the tourist office, then back to the village. *Et voilà. Un verre de rosé, s'il vous plaît!*



PEBBLES TIP

The Ligne d'Azur 81 bus from Nice to Menton stops at a number of places in Cap Ferrat.

The Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat tourist office is on 59 Avenue Denis Séméria, the main road leading into Cap Ferrat. Grab a map before heading out on the walking trails.