

# Cannes is best - Bar none

## One Irishman who came to Cannes and never looked back

By KIMBERLEY MANNION

Rob Ryan knows the Riviera bar scene better than most. Considered a “hospitality legend,” the Irishman has run bars around the world, but found Cannes the perfect spot to settle. He now runs four bars in Cannes: *Morrisons Irish Pub*, *The Lounge*, *The Quays at the Old Port* and *Le Bar à Vin*. Riviera Insider speaks with Rob about what makes a great bar and how to weather this pandemic.



Rob Ryan (r) and business partner, Jean-Pierre © D.R.

### RI: How did you end up on the French Riviera?

RR: I came here in 1999. I had worked in the bar industry in New York, Spain and Germany, went home to Ireland for a bit and realised I hadn't finished travelling. I met my business partner, Jean-Pierre, who had opened Morrisons with another Frenchman. I became manager pretty quickly as I had the most experience and it wasn't my first rodeo. Jean-Pierre's partner left so I bought into the bar and we have run it together ever since.

### What made you settle in Cannes after travelling for so long?

I'm on the phone daily to friends back in Ireland and when I hear their weather report, the decision is made pretty quickly. I look out the window every morning to a blue sky - you're more positive and you don't get sick of it. In terms of running a bar, Cannes is an unbelievably international destination and is active all year round, there is always something happening. Morrisons is located 450 m from the *Palais des Festivals*, where there can be thousands of people at any one time who are going to be looking for something to do at 5 pm. We have a fantastic local clientele, so it's a local bar with all the benefits of a local bar, as well as a tourist bar with all the benefits of a tourist bar.

### What makes a good Irish Bar?

It depends whether you mean a genuine Irish bar. If you just throw up some decorations and call it an Irish bar...it could be anything - you change the decorations tomorrow and it's a Japanese bar. The secret behind a good Irish bar is the service. We've gone through very little staff in our almost 25 years which we are very proud of, and we have a small number of staff in each bar. Our clientele knows the staff's names, and they know the clientele. It makes you feel at home, and that's what we provide. [We] give people a lift too - it's not just about coming to have a beer but about leaving feeling more positive. That's the difference between a real bar and a place to drink. We also don't do table service -- we want people to come up and interact with us and one another. We put a lot of thought into the experience.

### How has the last year been as a bar owner?

It has been very tough because this is what we do. We meet people, we laugh with people - and it is incredibly difficult not to be doing that. Having expat bartenders is also hard as they don't necessarily have a family structure around them - they have each other though, and I think that will bring them even closer together. There are lots of people worse off than us, and I really do understand why the bars are closed, but that doesn't help when you're sitting at home in the evening and should be out working. It's a total shift in mental dynamic and that's hard to get used to. It's tough, I really miss it, and it's hard not knowing what's coming next, when we're going to be [able to] open.

### What tips can you give businesses to get through this situation?

Try to stay active on social media to stay relevant. During the first lockdown, our regular musicians played live concerts online and we encouraged people to interact in the chat as they would in the bar, and have a beer. We keep in touch with our corporate clients about future plans. Other than that, there's not a lot you can do. Luckily, we have the tools to get through this. We have a very loyal clientele. But this pandemic is a big challenge, and if I were another bar without such a strong structure, I would be seeing difficulties ahead as I don't think this pandemic will just fade away.

### How do you see the bar industry changing after Covid-19?

We are fortunate with our weather here, as I think a lot of business will move outside. At Morrisons we also have a huge terrace area which we can exploit. There may be a slight parallel with when the smoking ban came into place, and activity moved outside so they could continue smoking. The challenge will be to bring people back inside, by ensuring clean air and good ventilation. Hopefully our problem will be having too many people here! ▲

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