

A COASTAL WEDDING IN THE FRENCH RIVIERA

The epicentre of Hollywood's golden age, the French Riviera – extending from Saint-Tropez to Menton on the French-Italian border – is known the world over for its glamour and beauty. Dubbed *La Côte d'Azur* for the stunning aquamarine waters that surround it, this approximately 180-kilometre stretch of Mediterranean shoreline is packed full of gorgeous beaches, luxury hotel and spa complexes, historic villas, designer bars and offshore islands – each providing a superbly unique setting for the coastal wedding of your dreams. With more than 2,700 hours of sunlight each year, the region also promises to deliver on the weather front. Beyond the big day itself, both couples and guests can enjoy sightseeing up high on the coastal trails, wine tasting in the mountain vineyards, some healthy gambling at the Monte Carlo Casino, sea tours aboard extravagant yachts, and a dose of culture at the numerous art galleries, studios and museums.



Images by Holly Ann Photography

Venue: Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild

Providing the ultimate combination of romance and opulence, the iconic Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild is a dream destination for nuptials by the sea. Situated ideally between Nice and Monaco, the villa of extravagant pink and white décor is perched high overlooking the prestigious peninsula of Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat. It was built during the Belle Époque period by request of its once-resident Baroness Béatrice Ephrussi de Rothschild and is surrounded by nine meticulous gardens of varying styles – from Japanese to Florentine and Spanish.

Museum by day, Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild attracts curious visitors keen to catch a glimpse of the priceless art and antique collections housed within its historic walls. Spread across several floors, the beautifully appointed interiors also provide a number of breathtaking events venues. The 30-metre-high vaulted Grand Patio makes a majestic setting for more intimate celebrations. Its Italian Renaissance-inspired architecture features mighty pink columns and marble arches, perfect for capturing those dreamy wedding shots beneath. Its expansive marble floor is expertly suited to evening festivities, stretching all the way to

the Oriental Dining Room, where guests can enjoy elaborate multi-course dinners. Encompassed by bay windows that open onto the captivating Sèvres garden, this room, fit for royal feasts, becomes all the more magical at night when the lights from the nearby anchored yachts flood the space.

For those hoping to enjoy an alfresco summer reception, the French Garden poses the ultimate setting. Enclosed by swaying palm trees, these ever-green lawns feature a stunning replica of the Temple of Love found in the renowned Grand Palace Trianon Gardens, ample flower beds filled with sweet-smelling blossoms, large Italian Renaissance urns, and numerous ornamental basins. For the grandest of entrances, the garden's fountains can be illuminated and synchronised to a music playlist of your choice. This can even be paired with a spectacular firework show coordinated by nearby Villefranche-sur-Mer for that utterly unforgettable night guests are sure to be talking about for years to come. The vast area overlooking the emerald blue Mediterranean can cater to 300 guests in total, with the option of a seated dinner right out on the grounds for all.



What to do beyond the wedding day

A destination of sun and sea, the French Riviera is much loved for its sweeping stretches of golden sands. As scenic spots for swimming, sunbathing and snorkelling, the region's beaches are well equipped to keep you and your guests thoroughly entertained in the days before or after the wedding. A hit amongst the elite crowd of villa renters and owners in Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, the iconic Plage Paloma (named after the daughter of Pablo Picasso, who was a regular visitor) is characterised by the private beach club that dominates it. Here, scrumptious seafood delights and expertly crafted cocktails are served in hand as visitors bask beneath the golden sun on the area's secluded crescent of soft sand. Boat trips on the club's tenders can be arranged throughout the day, and a full range of rental equipment is on offer, perfect for those looking to try out water skiing, kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding.

Whether it's a pre-wedding bridal pamper incorporating the whole works or a quick treat to get you in the right mood for the big day, the world-class spas dotted throughout the French Riviera are bound to deliver. Treatment menus are almost always mind-bogglingly long, and packages come with endless add-ons, including delectable Michelin-starred meals.

Voted the Best Luxury Spa Destination in Europe by the World Luxury Spa Awards, Spa Saint-Martin by La Prairie is a true standout. Set amidst 34 acres of landscaped grounds in a hilltop castle dating back

to the Knights Templar, this scenic wellness retreat provides the ultimate setting for uninterrupted relaxation. Treatments can take place in one of the spa's four cabins or outside within the gardens and include La Prairie's signature caviar facials, as well as a whole range of massages, scrubs, masks and beauty treatments. Services specifically catering to men, children and teenagers are also available.

The cultural richness of the French Riviera is best displayed in the art museums scattered along its coastline. Situated at the entrance of the old village of Mougins, the Musée d'Art Classique de Mougins houses a whopping 600 works spanning 5,000 years. Compulsive art collector and British entrepreneur Christian Levett can be thanked for the outstanding collection, which is organised according to their civilisations – Roman, Greek and Egyptian – in a show of just how much these ancient worlds inspired neoclassical, modern and contemporary art.

For fascinating pieces created by Nice's neorealists (Niki de Saint Phalle, César, Arman and Yves Klein) Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain is the place to go. Set across multiple levels, including the roof, this ever-popular exhibition space is centred around European and American avant-garde works from the 1950s to the present day. Musée Matisse, Villa Arson and Musée Masséna are all additionally worth a visit, if only for their sweeping views over the Mediterranean.