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PROMENADE DES ANGLAIS WALK

Welcome to the Riviera. There's something for everyone along this four-mile-long promenade. Stroll like the belle-époque English aristocrats for whom the promenade was paved. Watch Europeans at play, admire the azure Mediterranean, anchor yourself on a blue seat, and prop your feet up on the made-to-order guardrail. Later, you can come back to join the evening parade of tans along the promenade.

The broad sidewalks of the Promenade des Anglais ("Walkway of the English") were financed by upper-crust English tourists who wanted a secure and comfortable place to stroll and admire the view. The Brits originally came to Nice seeking relief from tuberculosis; both the dry climate and the salt air helped ease their suffering. It was an era when tanned bodies were frowned upon (aristocrats didn't want to resemble lower-class laborers who had to work outside). The walk was paved in marble in 1822 so the aristocrats wouldn't have to dirty their shoes or smell the fishy gravel. Visitors wouldn't swim in the Mediterranean for another hundred years, when the region took off as a tourist destination.



This leisurely, level walk is a straight line along this much-strolled beachfront. It begins near the landmark Hôtel Negresco and ends just before Castle Hill. While this one-mile walk is enjoyable at any time, the first half makes a great pre- or post-dinner stroll (perhaps with a dinner on the beach). If planning to extend this stroll to Castle Hill, it's ideal to time things so you wind up

on top of the hill at sunset. Allow one hour at a promenade pace to reach the elevator up to Castle Hill.

The Walk Begins

• *Start at the pink-domed...*

❶ Hôtel Negresco

Nice's finest hotel is also a historic monument, offering up the city's most expensive beds and a museum-like interior. While the hotel is off-limits to nonguests, the doorman explained to me that shoppers and drinkers are "guests" as much as people actually sleeping there. So, tuck in your shirt, stand tall, appear confident, and march in. If someone questions you, say you're going in for a drink or to shop (a string of clothing and jewelry shops is inside), and you're legit.

The huge ballroom (walk straight until you see the big chandelier) is the **Salon Royal**! The chandelier hanging from its Eiffel-built dome is made of 16,000 pieces of crystal. It was built in France for the Russian czar's Moscow palace...but thanks to the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, he couldn't take delivery. Bronze portrait busts of Czar Alexander III and his wife, Maria Feodorovna—who returned to her native Denmark after the revolution—are to the right, facing the shops. Circle the interior and then the perimeter to enjoy both historic and modern art. Fine portraits include Emperor Napoleon III and wife Empress Eugénie (who acquired Nice for France from Italy in 1860), and Jeanne Augier (who owns the hotel). She's quite elderly now, lives up in the cupola, and has willed the Negresco to organizations that care for orphans and stray animals.

If the **Le Relais bar** door is open (after noon), wander up the marble steps for a look. Farther along, in the little shopping lane, nip into the toilets for either an early 20th-century powder room or a Battle of Waterloo experience. The chairs with the high, scooped backs were typical of the age (cones of silence for an afternoon nap sitting up). The hotel's **Chantecler restaurant** is one of the Riviera's best (allow €100 per person before drinks).

On your way out, pop into the **Salon Versailles** (right of entry lobby as you leave), with a grand fireplace and France's Sun King, Louis XIV, on the wall (English descriptions explain the room).

If you wonder why such a grand hotel has such an understated



the right for a view of the beach action. Topless bathing is now out of fashion. Locals say that the awareness of skin cancer and the proliferation of North African and tourist looky-loos have made it less appealing. Some say the only people still bathing topless are older ladies who remember fondly the liberation of 1968...and tourists.

The elegant back side of Nice's opera house faces the sea. In front of it, a tiny bronze Statue of Liberty reminds all that this stretch of seafront promenade is named for the USA.

The long, low building lining the walk on the left once served the city's fishermen. Behind its gates bustles the Cours Saleya Market—long the heart and soul of old Nice.

Ahead, on the right, find the three-foot-tall white **metal winch**. It's a reminder that long before tourism and long before Nice dredged its harbor, hard-working fishing boats rather than vacationing tourists lined the beach. The boats were hauled in through the surf by winches like this and tied to the iron rings on either side.

• *Your walk is over. From here you have several great options: Continue 10 minutes along the coast to the port, around the foot of Castle Hill (fine views of the entire promenade and a monumental war memorial carved into the hillside); hike or ride the elevator up to Castle Hill (catch the elevator next to Hôtel Suisse—free, daily 10:00-19:00, until 20:00 in summer, see listing for Castle Hill on page 304); head into the old town (you can follow my "Old Nice Walk"); or grab a blue chair or piece of beach and just be on vacation—Riviera style.*

the Germans destroyed it during World War II. When La Jetée was thriving, it took gamblers two full days to get to the Riviera by train from Paris.

Although La Jetée Promenade is gone, you can still see the striking 1927 Art Nouveau facade of the **4 Palais de la Méditerranée**, a grand casino, hotel, and theater. It became one of the grandest casinos in Europe, and today it is one of France's most exclusive hotels, though the casino feels cheap and cheesy.

The unappealing Casino Ruhl (with the most detested facade on the strip) disfigures the next block. Anyone can drop in for some one-armed-bandit fun, but to play the tables at night you'll need to dress up and bring your passport.

5 Albert I Park is named for the Belgian king who enjoyed wintering here—these were his private gardens. While the English came first, the Belgians and Russians were also big fans of 19th-century Nice. That tall statue at the edge of the park commemorates the 100-year anniversary of Nice's union with France. The happy statue features two beloved women embracing the idea of union (Marianne—Ms. Liberty, Equality, and Brotherhood, and the symbol of the Republic of France—and Catherine Ségurane, a 16th-century heroine who helped Nice against the Saracen pirates).

The park is a long, winding greenbelt called the Promenade du Paillon. The Paillon River flows under the park on its way to the sea. This is the historical divide between old Nice and the new town. Continue along, past the vintage belle-époque carousel. You're now on Quai des Etats-Unis ("Quay of the United States"). This name was given as a tip-of-the-cap to the Americans for finally entering World War I in 1917. Check out the laid-back couches at the Plage Beau Rivage lounge. The big, blue chair statue celebrates the inviting symbol of this venerable walk and kicks off what I consider the best stretch of beach—quieter and with less traffic.

The tall, rusted **6 steel girders** reaching for the sky were erected in 2010 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Nice's union with France. (The seven beams represent the seven valleys of the Nice region.) Done by the same artist who created the popular Arc of the Riviera sculpture in the parkway near Place Masséna, this "art" infuriates many locals as an ugly waste of money. But I know how to make it easier to appreciate the erection every local loves to hate: Stand directly under it, look straight up, and spin 720 degrees. Then look across the way to marvel at the 18th-century facades that line the Esplanade Georges Pompidou. Then find the one that is entirely fake-painted on a flat stucco surface. Then, look down and notice the buried uplighting—a French forte. And then, give it another 720 degrees of spin and try to walk on.

At the first palm tree, ladies enjoy looking left (at the delightful back side of Apollo, a couple of blocks away), and men head to



entry, it's because today's front door was originally the back door. In the 19th century, elegant people stayed out of the sun, and any posh hotel that cared about its clientele would design its entry on the shady north side. If you walk around to the back you'll see a grand but unused front door.

Across the street from the Hôtel Negresco is...

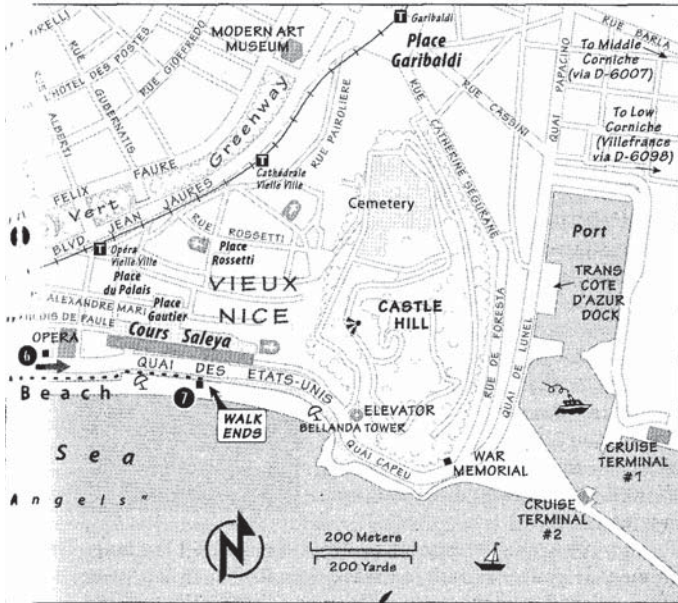
3 Villa Masséna

When Nice became part of France, France invested heavily in what it expected to be the country's new high society retreat—an elite resort akin to Russia's Sochi. The government built this fine palace for the military hero of the Napoleonic age, Jean-Andre Masséna and his family. Take a moment to stroll around the lovely garden free, open daily 10:00-18:00. The Masséna Museum inside (described on page 302) offers an interesting look at belle-époque Nice.

From Villa Masséna, head for the beach and begin your Promenade des Anglais stroll. But first, grab a blue chair and gaze out to the...

3 Bay of Angels (Baie des Anges)

Face the water. The body of Nice's patron saint, Réparate, was supposedly escorted into this bay by angels in the fourth century. To your right is where you might have been escorted into France—Nice's airport, built on a massive landfill. The tip of land beyond the



runway is Cap d'Antibes. Until 1860, Antibes and Nice were in different countries—Antibes was French, but Nice was a protectorate of the Italian kingdom of Savoy-Piedmont, a.k.a. the Kingdom of Sardinia. During that period, the Var River—just west of Nice—was the geographic border between these two peoples (and to this day the river functions as a kind

of cultural border). In 1850 the people here spoke Italian and ate pasta. As Italy was uniting, the region was given a choice: Join the new country of Italy or join France (which was enjoying prosperous times under the rule of Napoleon III). The vast majority voted in 1860 to go French...and *voilà!* (While that was the official story, in reality the Italian king needed France's support in helping Italian regions controlled by Austria break away to join the emerging union of Italian states. Italy's price for France's support against Austria: the city and region of Nice.)

The lower green hill to your left is Castle Hill. Farther left lie Villefranche-sur-Mer and Cap Ferrat (marked by the tower at land's end, and home to lots of millionaires), then Monaco (which you can't see, with more millionaires), then Italy. Behind you are the foothills of the Alps, which trap threatening clouds, ensuring

that the Côte d'Azur enjoys sunshine more than 300 days each year. While half a million people live here, pollution is carefully treated—the water is routinely tested and is very clean. But with climate change, the warmer water is attracting jellyfish in the summer, making swimming a stinging memory.

• *With the sea on your right, begin strolling.*

The Promenade

Nearby sit two fine belle-époque establishments: the West End and Westminster hotels, both boasting English names to help those original guests feel at home (the West End is now part of the Best Western group...to help American guests feel at home). These hotels symbolize Nice's arrival as a tourist mecca in the 19th century, when the combination of leisure time and a stable economy allowed visitors to find the sun even in winter.



As you walk, be careful to avoid the green bike lane. The promenade you're walking on was originally much narrower. It's been widened over the years to keep up with tourist demand, including increased bicycle use.

You'll pass a number of separate rocky beaches. In spite of the lack of sand, they're still a popular draw. France has a strong ethic



of public access when it comes to its beaches. In response to a greedy development project in the 1970s designed to privatize a stretch of coastline, a law was passed in 1980 guaranteeing the public free access to beaches like these. All along the Riviera you'll find public beaches (and public showers).

You can go local and rent gear—about €15 for a *chaise longue* (long chair) and a *transat* (mattress), €5 for an umbrella, and €4 for a towel. You'll also pass several beach restaurants. Some of these eateries serve breakfast, all serve lunch, some do dinner, and a few have beachy bars...tailor-made for a break from this walk. (Plage Beau Rivage, farther along on Quai des Etats-Unis, is cool for a drink.)

Even a hundred years ago, there was sufficient tourism in Nice to justify building its first casino (a leisure activity imported from Venice). Part of an elegant casino, La Jetée Promenade stood on