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Garden tour on the French Riviera An amazing trip "round-the-world"

The diversity of its landscapes and the mild climate make the Maritime Alps an ideal place for the art of landscape gardening. The English introduced many exotic plants in the 19th century, creating veritable mosaics of plants and gardens of the world side by side.

In the 1920s, this taste for eclecticism was enhanced by Mediterranean vegetation when olive and cypress trees came back into fashion.

A visit to this green paradise is like meeting the master gardeners, landscapers and botanists who left their signature and a lasting impression on the gardens.

The visit begins in Menton, city of gardens, and continues to the verdant setting of Vence, a few kilometres up the coast.



Day 1: Exotic Paradise

Arrival in **Nice**, you will be welcomed by your guide and a tour bus.

The first stop, only a couple of minutes from the airport, is Phoenix Park. About twenty gardens on specific themes can be visited on this 7-hectare site. The greenhouse, one of the world's largest, recreates seven tropical and subtropical climates. Drive through Nice with a stop at the **flower market** in **Cours Saleya**. Followed by a spectacular drive on the corniche to **Monte Carlo**: visit to the **Exotic Garden** where more than 6,000 varieties of cacti and semi-desert flora are situated in a stunning site overlooking the Principality. Late afternoon, arrival in Menton, settle into a three star hotel for dinner and accommodation.

Day 2: Menton and the Hanbury : Plants of the world

Menton, last city before the Italian border, offers its mild winters, charming old town and an ideal coastline for walks along the sea. In the 14th century, English botany lovers created magnificent gardens introducing rare plants to enhance their properties. **Menton**, the city of gardens, has preserved a remarkable heritage from this period, and today has rehabilitated many of these exceptional gardens and opened them to the public. We will visit the **Garden Val Rahmeh**, an annex of the National Museum of Natural History, whose collection offers a round-the-world botany tour. It boasts the only specimen of the *Sophora Toromiro*, the mythical tree of Easter Island.

Then to "**La Serre de la Madone**" garden: classified as an historic site, this garden was created between 1919 and 1939 by the renowned landscape gardener Lawrence Johnstone, the designer of Hidcote Manor. Rocky terraces, pergolas, ponds and orange groves, innumerable rare species and perfumed plants make this a privileged place.

The day continues with a visit to the **Hanbury Garden**, which occupies a magnificent site perched above the sea practically on the Italian border. The gardens were created in 1867 when Sir Thomas Hanbury bought a property surrounded by olive groves and vineyards with the intent of acclimatising plants from around the world – a true paradise for botanists and nature lovers. Far from a typical landscaped garden with neatly planted rows of plants and cut grass, the Hanbury Garden is a place where the plants live freely following their natural biological cycle - blossoming, ripening and producing fertile grains.

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Day 3: Belle Epoque Palaces

Moving farther up the coast, we arrive in **Cap Ferrat**, which boasts many Belle Epoque villas and splendid gardens. **The Villa de Rothschild** and its **7 different gardens** are worth a visit alone: Spanish, Florentine, Japanese, Provençal, oriental, exotic and classic French.

A tour of the ground level of the villa will round out this visit before having lunch in the elegant old-style dining room of the **Baronne de Rothschild**.

In the afternoon by special reservation, we will visit a marvel amongst the Riviera's gardens: the villa des Cèdres, formerly the property of King Leopold II of Belgium. Today the villa is the property of the Marnier Lapostolle family, passionate botanists who planted a magnificent garden of tropical, subtropical and Mediterranean plants. The arboretum, bamboo greenhouse, orange grove and other greenhouses contain more than 10,000 varieties of plants.

Then, a drive to the next stop, **Vence**: We will be staying at a 3-star hotel in a verdant setting. Dinner will be in a restaurant in the historic part of town - an occasion to discover the Provençal atmosphere of this small town, with people strolling by the cathedral, through little streets to the square of the park where people play pétanque, etc. Painters and notably, Matisse, who built his chef d'oeuvre, the Matisse Chapel, loved the quality of light and atmosphere of Vence.

Day 4: Perfumes of Grasse

The route from **Vence to Grasse** - luscious green with beautiful views of the mountains and the coastline - passes through **Tourrettes-sur-Loup** where **violets** are sold in March (a visit to a violet producer is possible in season). Grasse is the world capital of perfumes, and flowers are an essential ingredient. Grasse is home to many superb private gardens, some of which are open to the public: **The Villa Noailles**: In 1947, the Vicomte de Noailles built gardens, choosing the site because of its source that would provide water for its fountains and canals even during the scorching summers. The seasons can be distinguished by the aromas of the plants: in winter, one smells the delicate perfume of the Chimonanitrus, in spring, jasmine and roses, and in autumn, Osmanthus auranticus. For botanists, the collections of camellias, magnolias and roses are precious. **The Villa Fort France**, was built in 1935 by Lady Fortescue, an English writer, who planted more than 500 varieties of plants and trees, whose beauty changes with the seasons.

Return to Vence, dinner and accommodation.

Day 5: The Painters' Riviera

Free time in Vence before visiting Saint Paul: a stop in the medieval village for a stroll and lunch (on your own). Then to **Cagnes sur Mer** to see **Auguste Renoir's property**: his house-turned-museum and the 100-year-old olive grove, which encircles an enchanting orange grove and rose terrace. The view of Haut-de-Cagnes is extraordinary.

Our services :

- 5 days/4 nights, dinner, accommodation and breakfast in a good 3-star hotel in Menton (2 nights) and in Vence (2 nights).
- Dinner in a restaurant near the hotel
- Pre-reservation of each visit to the gardens
- Entrance fees to the gardens included in the program (10 gardens)
- Luncheon at the Villa Rothschild, Saint Jean Cap Ferrat
- A professional guide who specialises in gardens will accompany all your visits.

Groups of 30 maximum

On-site transport from arrival to the airport to departure on request.

