



# HIDDEN GEMS



## ST TROPEZ AND THE CÔTE D'AZUR

WORDS LOUISE LONG

Saint-Tropez is known more for its international yachting lifestyle than its authentic French culture: a honey-pot for celebrity beach clubs, world-class regattas and luxury boutiques. But beyond this sparkling veneer, there are secret beach cafés and snorkelling spots to be uncovered in and around the Côte d'Azur jewel.

Balancing the best of rugged Provence and Riviera dazzle, the Gulf and its environs are blessed with as much tranquillity and authenticity as you're willing to seek out. What remains at the heart of it all? The sea. In all its worshipped turquoise glory.

### BYBLOS BEACH, PAMPELONNE

Some might think that Brigitte Bardot herself discovered Saint Tropez, during the filming of *And God Created Woman* on Pampelonne Beach in Ramatuelle (the unassuming beach hut used by the film crew became the world-famous club 55). Over 6 decades later, the legacy of Bardot's 1956 film lives on in the vintage glamour that characterises this 4.5km stretch of azure coastline. Amidst the hype, it's still worth witnessing, albeit with a discerning eye. In recent years, a new environmental focus means that all restaurants are dismantled during winter for the natural recovery of the beach. Half-way along lies Byblos Beach: one of Pampelonne's newest and most welcome arrivals - opened in 2019 to the design of François Frossard. Weathered wooden posts and hessian shades are a nod to traditional ship design, whilst its plastic-free policy and use of discreet, low-pollution lamps relay Byblos' sustainability concerns.

Beyond Byblos' Mediterranean lunch menu and afternoon-to-evening DJ sets (commonplace along the beach), the spot stands-out for its focus on local produce and its surprising drinks list. Look no further than a lemon meringue pie cocktail, or a



green detox juice, for those still feeling the effects of the night before. There is more than meets the eye at Pampelonne - and you'll be looked after like an A-lister on Byblos's waterfront.

*Byblos Beach Ramatuelle*  
42 Bd Patch, 83350 Ramatuelle

## VERGERON BEACH

The spectacle of Pampelonne means most visitors rarely venture beyond its southerly point. But if you do, you are richly rewarded. With the peninsula's easterly wind, the sparkling coves and rocky inlets on its south-facing stretch are sheltered and relatively unspoilt - none more so than tranquil Vergeron, in La Croix-Valmer. Accessible by road only, unless you've got your boat, via a steep path above next-door Sylabelle, Vergeron is this coast's best kept secret: a secluded, palm-sized cove with crystal waters, golden sands and polished granite rocks. Those with athletic inclinations can venture up onto the coastal path, lined with wild lavender, eucalyptus, and sprays of yellow 'Jupiter's Beard' - with the promise of vistas as far as Cap Lardier and the Hyères Islands. And if lunch then calls - the stylish 'Pepe' cantina on nearby Gigaro Beach might be the only place to guarantee a table without a booking in high season. Designed by Philippe Starck for the Lily of the Valley hotel (reopened in 2019), there's no need to move for the rest of the afternoon.

## SAINT-TROPEZ LOUNGE CLUB

For the best views of Saint-Tropez harbour, you can walk the length of the Jean Réveille jetty, and gaze back at the Quai's pastel-hued houses, matrix of masts, flow of promenaders, and majestic clocktower. Otherwise, you can simply ascend the spiral staircase of the Saint-Tropez Yacht Club, from where both town and gulf stretch out in a single panorama. Only in 2022 is this a guarantee; thanks in part to the arrival of Tony Oller as Saint Tropez Harbour Manager, with commitments spanning sustainability and marine ecology projects, as well as (most importantly for visiting yachtsmen), the promise of open-armed hospitality. Notably, 2022 marks the first season for non-members to be welcomed into the Yacht Club's newly renovated Lounge. Here, on the edge of the iconic harbour, the Club's timeless bar and terrace ooze laid-back Riviera charm, not to

mention unrivalled views across the sea wall for the event season. A perfect home-from-home amongst fellow-minded yachting folk; make haste before the secret's out!

*Saint-Tropez Lounge Club*  
1 Quai de l'Epi, 83990 Saint-Tropez

## CAP TAILLAT

Those in the know will speak not of the 'Gulf of Saint-Tropez', but of its three caps: Camarat - with hilltop lighthouse (the second highest in France); Lardier - the southernmost end of la Croix Valmer, and Cap Taillat - a miracle of nature, even amongst the many marvels of the Côte d'Azur. Moor up either side of the Cap to marvel at its unique formation: a teetering outcrop shaded by pine forests, attached to the land only via narrow sandy isthmus. Sheltered from the winds between the bay of Briande and Bonporteau, the cap is a biodiversity haven known for Herman's tortoises, bluebirds, and 'jewelled' lizards. Revel in the tranquil waters, soft sands and gentle hum of cicadas as the sun goes down.

## PORT-CROS ISLAND

The wildest and best preserved of the four Hyères 'Golden Isles', Port-Cros makes for a refreshing day trip from Saint-Tropez. There are no cars here, not even bicycles, and with most of the visiting hoards heading to larger Porquerolles, there's reason to believe you've landed on your own Robinson Crusoe island. Three marked trails allow the island's capes, coves and canyons to be explored on foot; peppered with ancient archaeology, tracts of wild strawberries and 'umbrella' pines. The island's star offering, however, is its marine life - best discovered with snorkel and fins from La Palud beach. Diving excursions are available here too, with visibility often up to 10m and underwater riches to impress any serious diver. Since 1963, the archipelago has been under the marine protection of the pioneering National Park of Port-Cros, with 602 land species, 144 birds and 180 fish amongst its protected flora and fauna. Look out for dorado, small dolphin and even ancient merou between the island's shipwrecks, military forts, and underwater 'meadows' of sea fans and corals. An underwater paradise that deserves proper attention.

