

# THE GLOSS



LIFESTYLE & TRAVEL

## An Insider's Guide to St Tropez: Where to Stay and What to See

AS A FORMER TROPÉZIENNE THE GLOSS DEPUTY EDITOR PENNY MCCORMICK SUGGESTS WHERE TO STAY AND WHAT SEE IN THE PICTURESQUE PORT ...

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It's been estimated that during the peak summer period of July and August around six million visitors descend on St Tropez – some for a day, others to recline portside on boats to get the obligatory pap shot, or to live it up at the many clubs which populate Pampelonne beach, such as Byblos and Nikki beach clubs. These are posh, pristine establishments, but for me they are not the essence of St Tropez.

There is a bohemian vibe to the port and surroundings which originally attracted artists such as Paul Signac, Georges Seurat and Henri Matisse in the early 20th century –many of their paintings can be found in the l'Annonciade museum, which is worth a visit as is its Butterfly house.

Of course, St Tropez became more famous when Brigitte Bardot starred in the 1956 romantic drama *And God Created Women*. Directed by her husband Roger Vadim, the film was set in St Tropez and established Bardot's reputation as a "sex kitten" and by association the little port's allure for celebrities and other actresses such as Romy Schneider. The National Gendarmerie and cinema museum is a must-see to uncover the history of St Tropez in the 1960s – a key event being Mick and Bianca Jagger's 1969 wedding – arguably the most stylish of all rock 'n' roll nuptials. The bride wore a white YSL trouser suit, as contemporary today as it was then.

No doubt Bianca and Bardot were drawn to the town's simple pleasures: its light, its coloured roofs, cobbled streets and rustic beaches. Some of St Tropez's original charm still exists at La Ponche which is a miniscule beach (with a chic hotel of the same name) in one of the older, quieter districts of the town. Further away still is Les Graniers, 1 Plage des Graniers, where you can have lunch with your toes in the sand, or at the newer Jardin Tropezina an eco-friendly garden in Ramatuelle, a far cry from the throbbing beach parties of say Moorea Plage or Loulou. A must-do though is a visit to Club 55 – where I always think the cost of lunch is offset by the calibre of people watching (Kate Moss, Elton John, models galore and royals). Order the cold fish – not on the menu but delicious. The Club serves divine Petale des Roses – from the Chateau Les Barbeyrolles. I recommend a visit to its vineyard (Chateau Minuty is also close) and squirreling home a case if you are driving.

The focal point of St Tropez, aside from its port, is the Place des Lices. It reminds me of a Robert Doisneau photograph – a picturesque square fringed by sycamore trees which hosts regular *boules* matches or acts as the backdrop for lovers embracing on benches which edge its periphery. The scene changes on Tuesdays and Saturdays when the bi-weekly market is held. I always love getting in early and having a coffee at Le Clemenceau (or Le Clem to locals) before browsing the *brocante* (which is on Saturday). Keep your eyes peeled. I've spotted so many celebrities from Giorgio Armani to residents such as Jerry Hall or Tracey Emin.



You'll often see people leaving the market with a Tarte Tropézienne to enjoy after lunch. This signature cake is an egg and butter brioche filled with a mixture of buttercream, pastry cream and heavy cream and topped with pearl sugar. The best ones I found were at Le Senequier patisserie (behind the café) or Aux Deux Freres, rue des Commerçants.

Talking of shopping, since I first visited St Tropez almost 30 years ago now some of the small boutiques have been eclipsed by the major fashion houses setting up impressive flagship stores. Chanel took over La Mistralée townhouse and the Dior des Lices Maison is another pretty location (a more chi chi place for coffee cannot be found). Also of note is "La Grande Braderie de St Tropez" which is shopping heaven and held late October, when boutiques sell off their wares at reduced prices and set up rails on the little cobbled streets.

While not a sailor, one thing I enjoy is watching the portside action from the best vantage point – the balcony of Hotel Sube (on quai Suffren). It's above the throng, not as expensive as Le Senequier café and a spot where locals enjoy a *verre* before dinner. The annual Les Voiles de St Tropez is an end of summer regatta which takes place in early October. I think that's one of the best times to visit St Tropez, and also marks the last hurrah of the season. As for where to stay: here are my recommendations ...



## Hôtel Lou Pinet

Away from the hustle and bustle of Saint-Tropez, this hotel channels retro glamour. Its rooms, decorated in natural textures such as linen, wood and stone, by interior designer Charles Zana, border the swimming pool, officially the largest in the St Trop area, while the sleek Tata Harper Spa is a must visit. Its Remodelage body treatment by Martine de Richeville is a particularly impressive non-invasive treatment that detoxifies and breaks down cellulite. In the evening, guests can dine at restaurateur Riccardo Giraudi's Beefbar and enjoy live music in the gardens; [www.loupinet.com](http://www.loupinet.com).