

Harper's Bazaar Travel Supplement – January 2016

Hôtel Byblos

Harper's  
**BAZAAR**

TRAVEL WITH STYLE

JANUARY 2016  
[www.harpersbazaar.co.uk](http://www.harpersbazaar.co.uk)

The insider's guide  
to the Caribbean

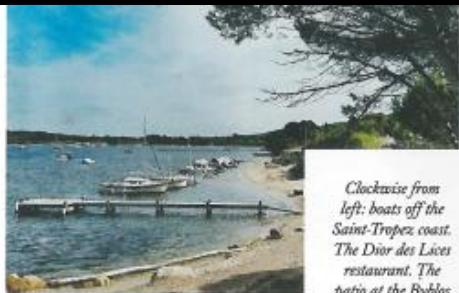
Secret islands  
**Honey moon magic**  
& the best hotels  
in the world

THE GREAT  
ESCAPE

An aerial photograph of a beach. The top half shows the ocean with white-capped waves crashing onto a sandy shore. The bottom half shows a large number of turquoise lounge chairs arranged in neat rows on the sand. The overall color palette is dominated by the blues and greens of the water and the tan of the sand.

# RIVIERA RENDEZVOUS

The author HELEN FIELDING reveals  
in a Saint-Tropez mini-break that  
would gladden the heart of Bridget Jones



Clockwise from left: boats off the Saint-Tropez coast. The Dior des Lices restaurant. The patio at the Byblos Hotel spa. Sunbeds on the beach



Since Bridget Jones is obsessed by mini-breaks, I am often asked how a mini-break is actually defined. This is as follows:

NUMBER OF NIGHTS: 1-3 (4-6 becomes a 'short break').

OBJECTIVE: escape from everyday life and peevish, real or imagined.

PLANNING PHASE: just the right amount of Googling to avoid what you're actually supposed to be doing.

IN-MINI-BREAK PHASE: feel completely reinvented, rejuvenated and free, marvelling repeatedly at how quickly this has happened.

FINAL MOMENTS: attempt to prolong mini-break by missing plane.

POST-MINI-BREAK: Sulk. Begin Googling imaginary future mini-breaks.

ILLUSTRATION OF SUCCESSFUL MINI-BREAK:

WEDNESDAY 7AM

Me (single mum) and Charlotte (married mum bff) grumpily organising school run in north-London rain; Tim (single straight male bff) struggling with school-run FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out), all three feeling pale, unglamorous and self-pitying.

WEDNESDAY 3PM

Me, Tim and Charlotte, bronzed, smug, lounging on terrace of Villa Marie (ancient Provençal 'mas': olive-trees, lavender, terraces, cicadas, etc) overlooking distant glittering waters of Gulf of Saint-Tropez, eating exquisite truffle linguine, sipping rosé, marvelling at how reinvented, rejuvenated and free we feel when a mere FEW HOURS ago we were... (see above).



## Saint-Tropez! Nightclubs, yachts, retro glamour, Hotel Byblos, Kate Moss! It sounded *parfait*, as indeed it was

Extensive Googling work-avoidance led us to the French Riviera, especially since Nice is served by London's City Airport – so tiny and chic as to be almost a mini-break destination in itself. We first heard of Villa Marie when a glamorous school mum mentioned in the café that

they ALWAYS stayed there: so quiet, rural and *intime*, close to beaches and 10 minutes from the glamour and bustle of Saint-Tropez.

Saint-Tropez! Nightclubs, yachts, retro glamour, Hotel Byblos, Kate Moss! It sounded *parfait*, as indeed it already was as we finished our lunch and retreated to lounge by the natural-rock-formation pool, and enjoy our escape from the rain. Imagine our surprise, then, to be roused by the rumble of thunder and the first giant drops of a deluge.

Ironically, the thunderstorm was one of the best bits. I love hotel rooms, with their air of blank-canvas tidiness and possibility. Villa Marie is part of the Sibuet group – first famous for the rustic chic of Les Fermes de Marie in Megève, with a signature style mixing the old and authentic with a contemporary take on luxury, which our hostess explained as the art of *chouchouter* – to pamper. My room was boudoir-style, with ancient beams and stone, muted shades, fluffy towels and a large bathtub. I lay on the soft white sheets, watching the storm beyond the open French windows, drinking in the scent of rain on pine-trees, dropping off and almost missing dinner.

In the Dolce Vita restaurant we admired one another's new-found glamour while enjoying a taste explosion of empilades, ceviches, craquelins, papillotes and gelées of the freshest of seafood and home-grown vegetables – a far cry from the kale salad with food-based smiley face we had recently enjoyed in a Kurdish café in Chalk Farm.

Tim, Charlotte and I had formed an unlikely neighbourhood support group helping one another through the winter by laughing at each other's misfortunes in north-London cafés. The travel piece/mini-break was (boastful) my idea – not an indulgence, but work! Tim fancied no rain, sea and some sort of spa action, Charlotte no rain, food/wine and perhaps some art. I wanted sun, no rain, sea, beach, swimming, countryside, pampering, chic hotel, nightlife, good food/wine, spa action, fun, abandon – simple needs – practically camping!



The next day the sky was blue and, to *chouchouter* us to the extreme, the hotel organised a picnic on a 'secret beach'. Two ripped and glistening *garçons* escorted us along a rocky coast path, carrying beach chairs, umbrellas and an entire *pique-nique*. Who knew the peninsula of Saint-Tropez could be so wild, and the sea so clear? We could have been in Corsica or Greece. We sat, like king babies, watching the yachts bob and the waves lap, gorging on cheese and charcuterie, then realised a giant pan-bagnat and chocolate dessert was to follow, ate it anyway, and swam, marvelling at how 36 hours ago we were... etc, etc.

That evening we were invited for dinner at the restaurant at Hotel Byblos – synonymous with the chic of Saint-Tropez since the days of Bardot's honeymoon, and Mick and Bianca's wedding. Christophe, the dashing Byblos manager, hosted us for poolside drinks among the charming hamlet-like cluster of ochre buildings that make up the hotel. It was early in the season and evening, but Christophe regaled us with stories of the thousands who line up to reach the red rope of Les Caves du Roy nightclub in high summer and his absurdly godlike position of deciding who shall and shall not enter the gates of nightclub heaven. We had Caves du Roy FOMO, since it was closed that night, but Christophe escorted us to the Alain Ducasse restaurant below: an unexpectedly different world; tranquil, under plane-trees, with a menu refreshingly simple in description and so overwhelmingly sensual in taste and presentation that we showed zero restraint in spite of the recent pan-bagnat and pudding.

Stuffed and squiffy, we lurched through an ancient warren of Dolce, Prada and Gucci searching for the village harbour, and turned a corner to find a line of gigantic yachts and, on the harbour front, an astonishing throng of the young, the gorgeous and the scantily clad, parading up and down, presumably to impress the yacht's occupants. These were, comparatively speaking, demurely dressed and very, very old. Soldiering through the heaving mass we came across a girl, dressed in red,

so tall – six or seven foot – and of such breathtaking beauty that people had formed a circle around her to stare, as if she were a circus act. Suddenly our own sense of new-found glamour evaporated and we felt so sensibly dressed and elderly that we could confidently BOARD one of the yachts, pretending we had – in a senior moment – confused it with our own, bond with the owners by prostituting our literary connections, and possibly get one up on the youthful beauties by eating yet another dinner right in front of them. Fortunately we were far too drunk to make it up a gangplank, collapsed into a taxi and, 10 minutes later, were back in the calm of Villa Marie.

Later, we were lounging by the softly lit rocks and pool, Tim reflecting that the Byblos would be perfect for a glamorous retreat in the centre of hot-girl action while Charlotte and I gazed at the stars, dreamily seeing our picnic hosts, Christophe and the newly bronzed Tim and deciding that the Villa Marie was all we could want and a mere 48 hours ago...

The next morning we remembered that in 18 hours we'd be back in the rain and needed a massage. We took it in turns for amazing treatments in the small, top-notch Pure Altitude Spa while reminding ourselves in-between that only the French can really do croissants and – oh, it was time for lunch! We were transformed. We had been *chouchouted* to perfection. But we had a plane to catch.

Or did we? I mean, Charlotte had wanted art. The Picasso Museum in Antibes would be the tiniest detour and we had PLENTY of time. We got stuck in traffic, lost in the Antibes underground car park, which was oddly like the John Lewis car park off Oxford Circus, and the Picasso Museum was closed. But so? We still had time for some rosé and... NO WE DIDN'T, insisted Tim and Charlotte, and sadly we just made the plane.

Despite our guilt at leaving children and responsibilities, no one seemed to have noticed we'd gone, though our new air of bronzed joie de vivre was unmissable. I

opened my laptop; sulky at the loss of the dreamy mini-break, then turned with a dutiful sigh to Googling the imaginary next one. □ *Villa Marie* ([www.experience-sibuet.com](http://www.experience-sibuet.com)), from about £255 a room a night B&B.

## Two glistening *garçons* escorted us along a rocky coast path, carrying beach chairs and an entire *pique-nique*



Clockwise from top left: Brigitte Bardot at her Saint-Tropez house in 1960. Dining at Hotel Byblos. Mick and Bianca Jagger on their wedding day in the town in 1971



*Clockwise from above:  
Jane Birkin in Saint-Tropez  
in 1968. Shops near the  
port. The pool at Villa  
Marie. A room at the hotel.  
Audrey Hepburn shot by  
Terry O'Neill in 1967.  
The harbour photographed  
by Slim Aarons in 1971*

