



Guest senior writer PRL, Philadelphia PA: We were there last year, and had a great time. When most people think of Monaco, the last images they imagine are cheap hostels and budget restaurants.

Our fantasies were more likely to conjure up elegantly expensive hotels, posh casinos and gourmet restaurants. Of course, there would also be smartly dressed gamblers and James Bond in a tux at a casino table, checking out his cards and a nearby bevy of beautiful babes.

When we arrived in the Principality of Monaco, we weren't driving Aston Martins nor were we carrying Louis Vuitton luggage. We wore casual hiking clothes and backpacks served as our luggage. We wanted to visit some of glamorous places there, but were on a tight budget.

We'd been traveling in France, and decided to hit that little 500-acre gambling mecca on the French Riviera, especially the glamor area of Monte Carlo. When we arrived, we were not disappointed. The fairytale structures of Monaco sit on a bluff overlooking the Mediterranean, with warm sandy beaches and harbor full of expensive yachts.

How To Get There: Many European train schedules include Monaco on their routes. The primary train and air schedules are to and from the French city of Nice, just a half-hour bus or taxi drive away from Monte Carlo.

The Tomb of Princess Grace: Because we're Philly natives, the first item on our list was to pay our respects at the tomb of Monaco's late Princess Grace. The former actress Grace Kelly grew up in our home town. We were told we'd find her memorial in the stately Cathedral of St. Nicholas.

Expecting a statue or other grand structure, we found Princess Grace had been buried simply below the cement floor of the church, with just a small plaque to identify her final resting place. A bit disappointing.

Monte Carlo Casino and Opera House: We wanted to get a bit of the James Bond experience by going into the castle-like, 140-year-old building and playing at its casino. (www.casinomontecarlo.com) A tour of the entire complex costs \$10, but gamblers are admitted free.

We played on the lower level, where there are Las Vegas-type slot machines and a few table games. The James Bond area for big-time gamblers is on the second floor, and after just a peek, decided it was too rich for our budget.

Other Points Of Interest: In addition to our visits to the cathedral and casino, we watched the daily changing of the guard outside the Prince's Palace (palais.mc). It's where Grace's son, Prince Albert II, lives with his family. Cost to go inside: \$8

We also visited the Oceanographic Museum and Aquarium (rp@oceano.mc). One of the founders and major contributor to its interesting displays of sea life was the famed ocean explorer, Jacques Cousteau. Cost: \$10

Studio Monaco: Studio 133, Monte Carlo, Monaco
bosianok@gmail.com. We found this small hostel very convenient, just around the corner from the Casino, a short walk down to the beach, as well as near the bus line to the Nice Airport. Private rooms with baths cost from \$135, about one-third of what most Monaco hotels charge.

Explorers Pub, 30 route de la piscine, Monte Carlo 98000, info@explorers-pub.com. As expected, there are many upscale restaurants in Monaco. They serve great Continental food if you're willing to pay \$100 or more for a meal. While this oceanside pub isn't cheap, the funky atmosphere and live music on weekend nights make the gastropub a worthwhile place to spend an evening. Dinner prices from \$22.