Americans in Nice

Tags: nice history culture expats community english_speakers

The relationship between Americans and Nice is longer, deeper, and more consequential than most visitors realise. Americans did not simply discover the French Riviera — in a very real sense, they invented the summer season on it. From the Gilded Age newspaper magnates who built villas overlooking the Baie des Anges, to the Jazz Age writers who drafted their finest novels in hillside retreats nearby, to the tens of thousands of contemporary residents who now constitute the fastest-growing expat population on the Côte d'Azur, Americans have left an indelible mark on the city and on the region's identity as a whole.

This page surveys notable Americans who lived in or had strong connections to Nice, traces the growth of the modern American community, and lists the associations and English-language groups available to residents and newcomers today.

Historical Americans in Nice and on the Riviera

James Gordon Bennett Jr. (1841–1918)

The publisher of the New York Herald was among the most colourful and consequential Americans ever to make the French Riviera his home. Educated partly in France, Bennett spent the final four decades of his life primarily in and around Nice and the surrounding coast, managing his paper by telegraph from a succession of villas. His most famous property was **Villa Namouna** — named after his legendary 616-ton steam yacht — which he maintained on the Riviera and where he kept, among other curiosities, a monkey presented to him by Emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia.

Bennett's contribution to Franco-American culture on the Riviera extended well beyond his personal eccentric celebrity. In 1887 he founded the **Paris Herald**, the European edition of the New York Herald, which for generations served as the daily paper of record for the American expatriate community in France — the ancestor of the modern International New York Times. He also sponsored **Gordon Bennett Cup** automobile and balloon races that brought international attention and wealthy visitors to the region.

Following a scandalous New Year's incident in New York in 1877 — he reportedly relieved himself into a fireplace at his fiancée's parents' house, an act for which her brother immediately horsewhipped him outside the Union Club — Bennett relocated permanently to France, never to return to New York as a resident. He died on 14 May 1918 of pneumonia at his villa in nearby Beaulieu-sur-Mer, just as the Armistice was approaching. His three newspapers were immediately sold; the Herald was eventually merged into what became the New York Herald Tribune.

Gerald and Sara Murphy (1888–1964; 1883–1975)

jazz age, riviera history, lost generation

No Americans did more to shape the modern French Riviera than Gerald and Sara Murphy. Wealthy

New York expatriates who decamped to France in 1921, they became the catalysts for one of the most celebrated social circles in twentieth-century cultural history. Their greatest contribution to the region was audaciously simple: in 1923, they persuaded the owner of the Hôtel du Cap in Antibes to remain open through the summer months — at a time when all fashionable hotels along the Côte d'Azur closed on 1 May, the summer heat being considered unbearable by the European aristocracy who wintered there.

The Murphys made La Garoupe beach their headquarters, introduced sunbathing as a fashionable activity — Gerald is sometimes credited with having invented the practice — and eventually purchased a villa just below the Antibes lighthouse, which they named **Villa America**. The interior was strikingly modern: black floors, white walls, a flat-roof terrace at a time when such things were nearly unknown. The house became the gathering point for the most dazzling artistic circle of the era: F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, Ernest and Hadley Hemingway, Pablo Picasso and Olga, John Dos Passos, Cole Porter, Dorothy Parker, Robert Benchley, Archibald MacLeish, Fernand Léger, and Jean Cocteau, among many others. In so doing, they effectively invented the Riviera summer, transforming a winter resort for European nobility into the glamorous summertime playground the world recognises today.

Gerald Murphy was also a serious painter in a Precisionist-Cubist style that prefigured Pop Art; his work is now held by the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Dallas Museum of Art. Sara Murphy was immortalised by Picasso, who painted her on multiple occasions. The two became the real-life models for Dick and Nicole Diver in Fitzgerald's novel *Tender is the Night* — a work dedicated to them — and their tragic later years (two of their three children died young) are rendered with heartbreaking precision in Fitzgerald's farewell: “The golden bowl is broken indeed, but it was golden.”



The Murphy era is richly documented in Amanda Vaill's biography *Everybody Was So Young: Gerald and Sara Murphy — A Lost Generation Love Story* (1998), and fictionalised in Liza Klaussman's novel *Villa America* (2015).

F. Scott Fitzgerald and Zelda Fitzgerald (1896–1940; 1900–1948)

jazz age, lost generation, literature, riviera history

F. Scott Fitzgerald first arrived on the French Riviera in the summer of 1924, having sailed from New York with his wife Zelda and their daughter Scottie in search of a quieter, cheaper life that would allow him to complete his third novel. The couple spent their first season at the **Villa Marie** in Saint-Raphaël, where Scott cloistered himself to finish the final drafts of *The Great Gatsby*. He wrote of the Mediterranean: “It is a blue sea; or rather it is too blue for that hackneyed phrase which has described every muddy pool from pole to pole.”

The Fitzgeralds visited Nice frequently during their Riviera years, swimming at the Ruhl Plage on the boulevard des Anglais and lodging at the **Hôtel Beau Rivage** in the Old Town — a short walk from the Cours Saleya flower market. Their social lives centred on the Murphy circle at Cap d'Antibes, where their notorious entertainments helped crystallise the legend of the Jazz Age Riviera. In 1926, on returning after the enormous success of *Gatsby*, Scott rented the **Villa Saint-Louis** in Juan-les-Pins

(now the Hôtel Belles-Rives), where he began drafting *Tender is the Night*. He described the moment of their return in a letter: “With our being back in a nice villa on my beloved Riviera (between Cannes and Nice) I'm happier than I've been for years.”

The Fitzgeralds' Riviera years were both their most creatively fertile and personally turbulent: Zelda's brief affair with a French aviator at Saint-Raphaël, Scott's gathering alcoholism, and their increasingly erratic social life all found their way into the fiction that emerged from these sojourns. *Tender is the Night* opens on a beach near Antibes; the landscape of the entire novel is the Côte d'Azur.

Arman (Armand Pierre Fernandez, 1928–2005)

art, sculpture, nouveau realisme, french american

Though born in Nice and initially French, Arman became an American citizen in 1973 and spent much of his career between New York and France, making him one of the most significant Franco-American figures in the city's cultural history. Born Armand Fernandez on 17 November 1928 in Nice to a Spanish-French father who ran an antiques dealership on the rue Paul Déroulède, Arman received his earliest training from his father in oil painting, photography, and music. He studied at the École Nationale des Arts Décoratifs in Nice before enrolling at the École du Louvre in Paris.

His formative years in Nice included a pivotal friendship with Yves Klein, whom he met at a police judo school in the city. Together with Klein and the critic Pierre Restany, he co-founded the **Nouveau Réalisme** group in 1960 — one of the defining movements in post-war European art. Arman's most celebrated works are his **Accumulations**: masses of identical found objects — car parts, violins, saxophones, clocks, cutlery — sealed in polyester or Plexiglas to critique consumerism and seriality. His **Long Term Parking** (1982), a 18-metre column encasing 60 crushed automobiles, stands permanently near Paris at the Château de Montcel.

After becoming a U.S. citizen in 1973, Arman divided his time between New York and Vence, near Nice. His work is held in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Tate Gallery, the Centre Pompidou, and the MAMAC Nice, which held major retrospectives of his work in 2001, 2004, and 2006. He died in New York in October 2005.

Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt — birth of the twins in Nice (2008)

celebrity, contemporary

In July 2008, actors Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie were staying in the Riviera region — reportedly at the Villa Maryland in Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat — when Jolie gave birth to their twins, Knox Léon and Vivienne Marcheline, at the **Fondation Lenval** hospital in Nice on 12 July 2008. The first photographs of the twins were sold jointly to *People* magazine and *Hello!* for a reported $14 million — the most expensive celebrity photographs ever taken at the time. The couple donated the entire proceeds to the Jolie-Pitt Foundation. Knox and Vivienne Jolie-Pitt are thus among the most famous American children ever born in Nice.

Prominent Non-American Figures with Strong American Connections

Elton John — Mont Boron, Nice

celebrity, contemporary, music

Though British rather than American, Sir Elton John has been Nice's most famous foreign resident for over three decades and is deeply embedded in the city's international identity. He purchased a large **Belle Époque villa on Mont Boron** — the forested hill separating Nice from Villefranche-sur-Mer — in the early 1990s. The sunbeam-yellow property, visible from the Promenade des Anglais, is surrounded by the parklands of the protected Mont Boron forest and commands what locals describe as the finest panoramic view of the city: the Baie des Anges, the rooftops of Vieux-Nice, the Château hill, and the Alps Maritime on the horizon. Elton has described it as his “summer house” and is said to have received an honorary citizenship of Nice. The villa — decorated with Andy Warhol originals, Roy Lichtenstein sculpture, and rotating china collections — hosted Prince Harry and Meghan Markle in 2019. The property has been estimated at over £15 million.

Elton John’s villa is a Belle Époque property located in the Mont-Boron hills of Nice, France, overlooking the Mediterranean. Known as Castel Mont-Alban or the “Yellow Palace,” the residence is valued at approximately 15 million euros and features interiors designed by architects Fred Dilger and Monique Gibson, adorned with original works by Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein.

Key details about the property include:

History: John has owned the villa since the 1990s, originally painting it pink before changing the exterior to yellow to match his excentric style. **Guests**: The home has hosted numerous high-profile figures, including Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, David and Victoria Beckham, Liz Hurley, and Novak Djokovic (who lives nearby). **Recent Incident**: In August 2023, John was treated at a hospital in Monaco after a fall within the villa, though scans revealed no fractures. **Residency**: He resides there with his husband, David Furnish, and their two sons.

The Modern American Community in Nice

Scale and Growth

Nice has undergone a remarkable transformation in recent years, rising rapidly as the preferred French destination for American expatriates and retirees outside of Paris. According to INSEE (France's national statistics office), approximately 9.4% of all U.S.-born residents in France live in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region, with the department of Alpes-Maritimes — which includes Nice — accounting for 38% of Americans in that region. The numbers have grown sharply since 2021, and reports suggest the trend has accelerated further since 2022.

Côte d'Azur France Tourisme records 620,000 stays by Americans in hotels in the region in 2024, with U.S. tourists now outstripping British, German, Dutch, and even Italian visitors for the first time. The

acceleration in tourism is closely linked to a parallel boom in long-term residency: international estate agent Adrian Leeds told *Le Monde* that demand has “exploded,” with Nice now accounting for a third of her business — and she settled approximately one hundred Americans in Nice in 2024 alone.

The wave of post-2022 arrivals has been fuelled by a combination of factors: the city's Mediterranean climate, walkability, direct flights to major U.S. cities, proximity to Italy and Monaco, a lower cost of living than comparable American coastal cities, France's universal healthcare system, and — significantly since late 2024 — political dissatisfaction in the United States. American expats in Nice note the strength of the English-speaking community, with regular Friday beach gatherings of around 40 people described as one of the primary social anchors for new arrivals.

Why Nice, Not Paris?

Paris has historically captured the vast majority of American immigrants to France — over 46% of all U.S.-born French residents live in the Île-de-France region. But Nice is gaining ground quickly, and the reasons are consistent across accounts. The city is compact, walkable, and navigable without a car. Its tram network, international airport with six daily summer flights to U.S. cities, and rail connections to Italy and Monaco give residents strong mobility without the density and expense of the capital. One long-term American resident described Nice as “a small city, but not small-minded,” adding that newcomers typically make more friends in 90 days in Nice than they had in their entire previous lives.

Associations and English-Language Groups

The American Club of the Riviera

association, american, expat

The most established American social institution on the Côte d'Azur. Founded in 1962 as a successor to the U.S. Propeller Club (an American association created in 1927 to support the American Merchant Marine), the club formalised its association status in France in 1964 with a stated aim to “promote intellectual exchanges, the development of traffic and tourism between the Côte d'Azur and other parts of the world.” Membership is open to all nationalities — the club currently represents citizens from the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Monaco, Germany, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Canada, and many more. Membership is nearing 400, with the newsletter reaching some 2,000 readers.

Events have grown from one to 12 per month; the greatest attendances are in Nice and Cannes, where close to 80 people gather for social events. Annual highlights include Fourth of July celebrations, a traditional Thanksgiving luncheon (historically held at the Hôtel de Paris in Monte-Carlo), and a black-tie dinner dance at the Grand Hôtel du Cap-Ferrat. The club also organises neighbourhood networking coffees rotating between Nice, Antibes, Cannes, and other coastal towns.

Membership: €40 initiation fee + €60 annual dues per person.

Detail	Info
Website	americanclubriviera.com
Facebook	The American Club of the Riviera

Democrats Abroad — France Riviera Chapter

association, american, politics

The official overseas arm of the U.S. Democratic Party for Americans in the Alpes-Maritimes (06), Alpes-de-Haute-Provence (04), Var (83), and the Principality of Monaco. The Riviera chapter is one of the most active in France, organising monthly “Political Wine” evenings in Nice, voter registration assistance, discussion groups, and civic events. In early April 2025, several hundred Americans living on the Côte d'Azur and Var gathered in front of Nice's Statue of Liberty replica on the Quai des États-Unis to demonstrate against U.S. trade tariff policy. The chapter has also run a two-day Carnaval de Nice weekend event for out-of-region Democratic members.

Detail	Info
Website	democratsabroad.org/fr_riviera
Facebook	Democrats Abroad France – Riviera
Area served	Nice, Monaco, Cannes, Antibes, Menton, Grasse, and Var

International Women's Club of the Riviera (IWCR)

association, women, international

Founded in 1987 as a club for expatriate women whose partners worked for an international company on the Riviera, the IWCR became an independent association in 1992. Today it has over 600 members from more than 35 nationalities and offers a comprehensive range of social, cultural, and sporting activities: coffee mornings, art visits, bridge, pétanque, a poetry group based in Nice, embroidery and knitting, quilting, book exchanges, and guided excursions. Open to English-speaking women of all nationalities. Headquarters at The Grange, Mouans-Sartoux.

Detail	Info
Website	iwcr.org
Facebook	IWCR

The Business Club Côte d'Azur

association, english, business, networking

A professional networking and social club for English and French speakers on the Riviera, running relaxed monthly events between Monaco and Cannes. Described by members as having a practical business focus alongside genuine social warmth — “very well balanced between business connections and relaxed talks with new people.” Open to all nationalities working or living on the Côte d'Azur.

Detail	Info
Website	businessclubcotedazur.com

Meetup Groups — Nice

social, meetup, english, expats

Several active Meetup.com groups serve the English-speaking and international community in Nice:

Hangout in Nice — one of the longest-running English-leaning social groups, organising beach picnics, apéros, restaurant nights, hikes in the Mercantour, day trips to Italy, ski weekends, and informal gatherings in Vieux-Nice. Attracts a mix of expats and French members; primarily English-speaking. Organiser: Tanya. meetup.com/hangout-nice

Nice/Cannes/Antibes/Monaco — Expat, New In Town or Local? — a diversity-focused expat group spanning the wider Riviera area, noted for its multi-age, multi-background membership and welcoming of newcomers. meetup.com/nicenice

New To Nice — specifically designed for recent arrivals and internationals who have just moved to Nice or neighbouring towns. Events focus on settling in, local discoveries, language exchange, and community-building. meetup.com/new-to-nice-community-group



The AngloInfo French Riviera directory (angloinfo.com/riviera) maintains a comprehensive and regularly updated listing of English-speaking clubs, associations, and community groups across the Côte d'Azur, including Commonwealth, Australian, Scandinavian, South African, and other nationality groups.

The Franco-British Association — Nice

association, british, french, language

A club aiming to foster understanding between France and Britain, offering English classes for French people, a French class for British residents, and informal get-togethers in Nice. Though British in focus, it welcomes all English speakers and provides a useful point of contact for language exchange.

InterNations — Nice

social, international, expats

InterNations is a global expat networking platform with an active Nice group hosting social events throughout the year. Open to all nationalities and free to join at the basic level. A good first port of call for recent arrivals seeking to meet other English-speaking professionals and residents. Events are typically held in Nice's restaurants, bars, and hotel venues.

Practical Resources for American Residents

U.S. Consulate Services

There is no U.S. consulate in Nice itself; the nearest full U.S. Consulate General is in Marseille. American citizens in the Alpes-Maritimes are served by the U.S. Embassy in Paris for most consular matters, including passport renewal, notarial services, voter registration, and American Citizen Services (ACS). Emergency consular assistance is available 24 hours.

Taxes and Banking

Americans resident in France remain subject to U.S. federal income tax on worldwide income (FBAR reporting obligations apply for foreign bank accounts over $10,000). The U.S.-France tax treaty prevents most double taxation, but compliance requires annual FBAR and FATCA filings. Several international tax firms and accountants operate in Nice and the surrounding area, and the Democrats Abroad Riviera chapter occasionally organises information evenings on tax and financial matters for expats.

Healthcare

France's universal health system (Sécurité Sociale) covers legal residents, including those with long-stay visas. Americans on a visitor visa without work permits can apply for the PUMA (Protection Universelle Maladie Assurance) scheme after three months of continuous residence. The Fondation Lenval hospital — where Angelina Jolie gave birth in 2008 — remains the city's leading children's and general hospital. The Centre Hospitalier Universitaire (CHU) de Nice is the main university hospital for the region.

See Also

- A History of Nice
- Russians in Nice
- Celebrities of Nice
- Vieux-Nice: A Guide to the Old Town
- Top Restaurants in Nice

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- Connexion France — Where Americans live in France (April 2025)
- Wikipedia — Gerald and Sara Murphy
- Wikipedia — James Gordon Bennett Jr.
- Wikipedia — Arman

- Riviera Edition — F. Scott Fitzgerald and the French Riviera (2024)
- Iconic Riviera — Villa America, the Murphys and Fitzgerald
- Monaco Life — History of the American Club of the Riviera
- Connexion France — American Club of the Riviera profile (2025)
- Democrats Abroad — France Riviera Chapter
- International Women's Club of the Riviera — Official Site
- American Club of the Riviera — Official Site
- Hollywood Reporter — Elton John's Villa in Nice (2019)
- Arman Studio — Official Biography
- Google Maps ratings and information verified April 2026.

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