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Special Golf Equipment Supplement

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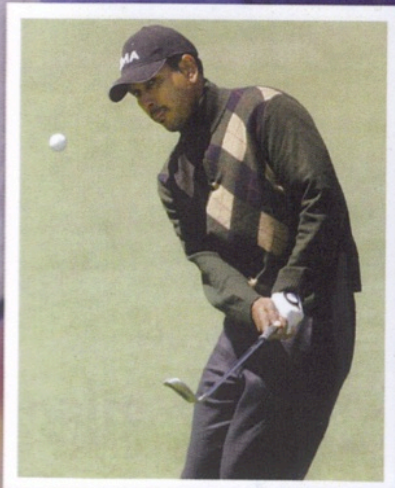
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# ASIAN GOLF MONTHLY



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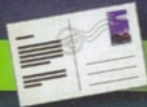
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HOLIDAY HOTSPOT



FRENCH RIVIERA

# Riviera Escape

Fancy a flutter in France? Then head for a golfing break along the French Riviera. *Asian Golf Monthly* contributor **Al Campbell** guides you through a sampling of the finest facilities that the region has to offer. Pictures by **France Golf Tours**.

**O**n a coastline boasting more than 60 courses from Marseilles to Nice, the French Riviera is indeed a golf haven that is just waiting to be discovered.

Lifestyles of the rich and famous await in the lush countryside above the Cote d'Azur on a variety of layouts that range from ultra-exclusive with Michelin star-rated clubhouses to resort and public courses that are equally challenging and accessible.

In fact, accessibility is a major attraction of golfing in France as the majority of the country's 550 clubs welcome visitors.

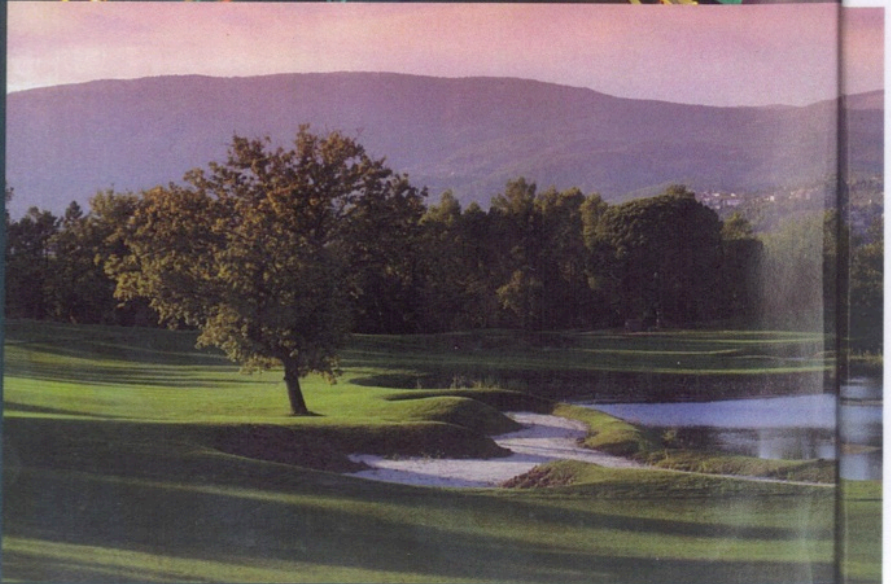
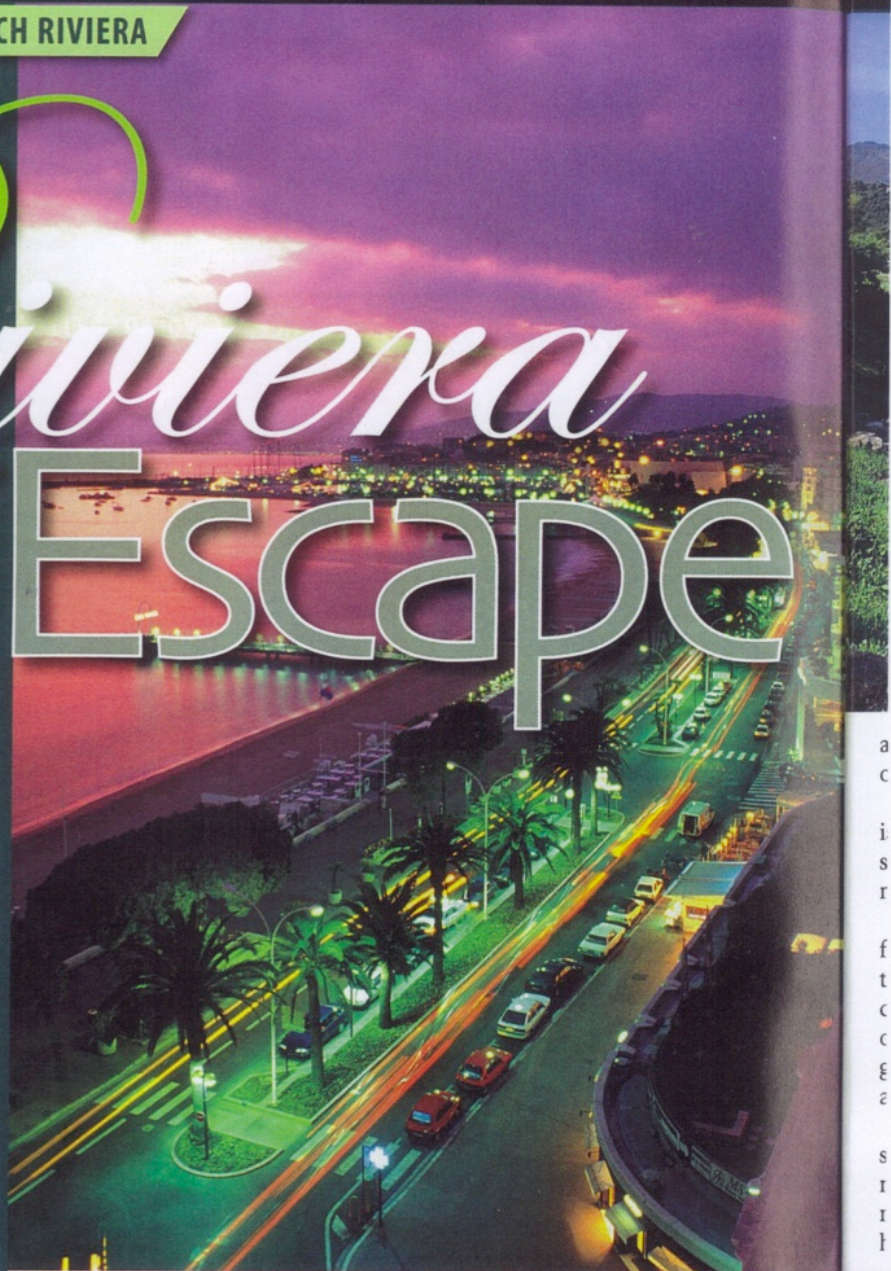
Such an open-door policy is largely based on economic reasoning. In the early 1980s, a golf boom was anticipated and about 300 new courses were constructed. But the boom never materialised and many clubs went bankrupt.

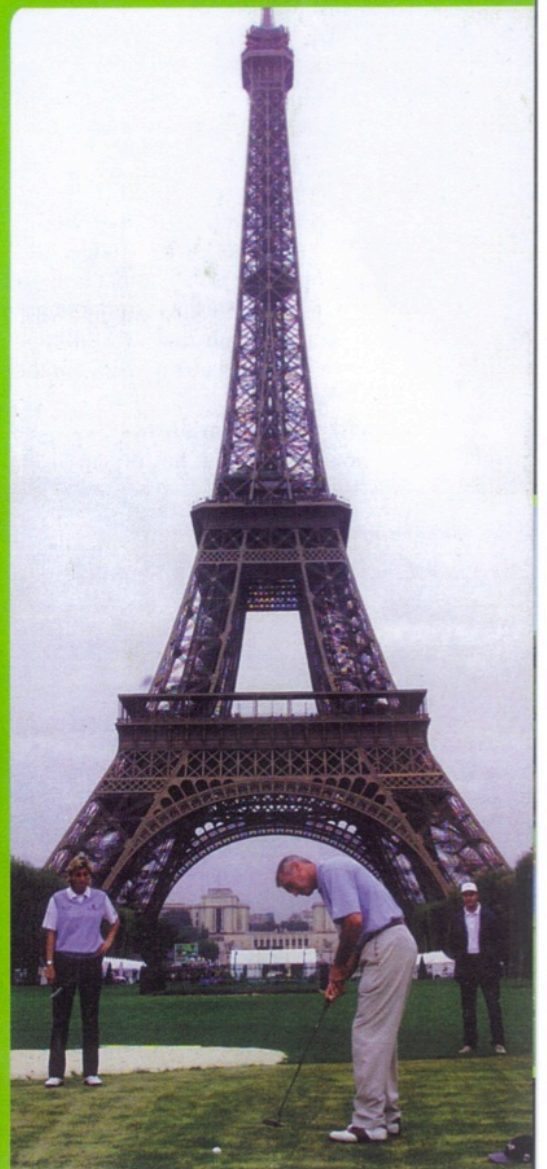
As things stand today, a relatively small indigenous golfing population of less than 350,000 enjoy a diverse cross-section of world-class golf locations that are just begging for visitors.

While Pau in the southwest Basque was the country's first club to open in 1856, it is the French Riviera that is most coveted by golfers in search of pristine conditions, warm seas and scenic golf, says **Francois Bras** of France Golf Tours.

"For the weather conditions, the prestige of Cannes, Monte Carlo, the casino and the hotels, and the excellent golf ... it's all there for a memorable vacation," he said.

Bras, a frequent visitor to Asia in recent years promoting golfing holidays in his homeland, says the country now has the best of both worlds – an





abundance of courses and a small number of domestic players.

He calls France unique for Asian tourists because of the different types of sightseeing that offers plenty for golfers and non-golfers alike.

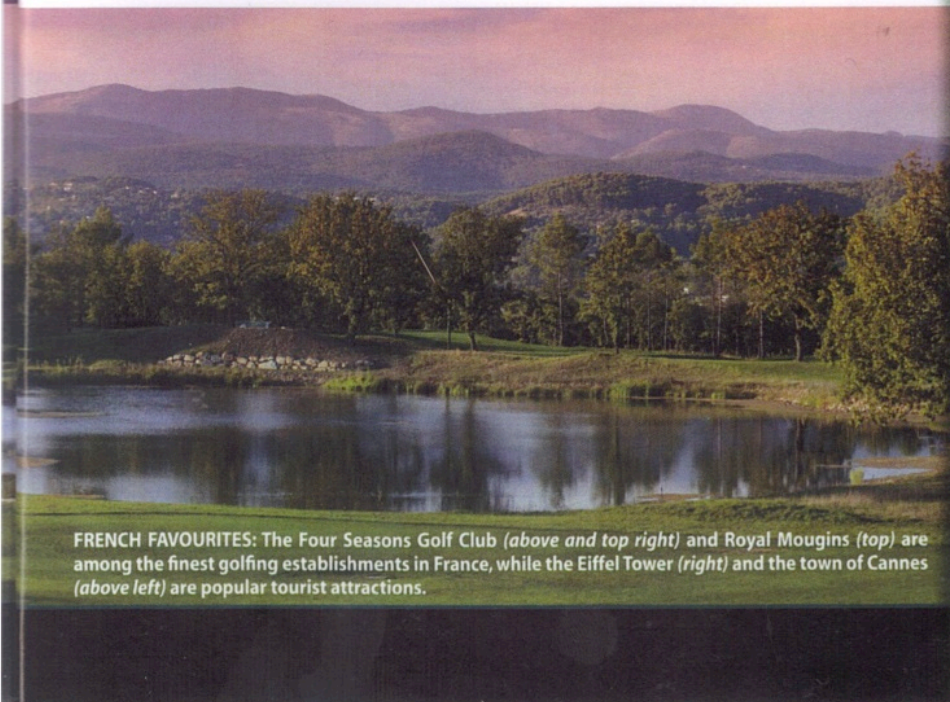
"You have the arts, flea markets, perfumes in Grasse, paintings in Provence ... that is why it is really easy to fill up the day. The golf is easy and you are not always obliged to play with four people or take a golf cart. You can easily play in four hours and spend the afternoon sightseeing."

France Golf Tour's relatively inexpensive golf packages include hotels, some meals and access to several of the country's most exclusive golf clubs. Driving your own hire car is recommended.

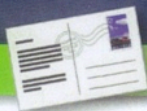
While chauffeured trips are available, the driving between courses and hotels is half the fun. The winding coastline of the Cote d'Azur is never far away and the sun-drenched Provence hillside is excellent for post-game exploring.

"France is attractive to ladies. A lot of women don't like to play golf and we have to keep them happy," Bras says. "The French Riviera has vino therapy, the world's best spas and hotels, cooking classes and art appreciation. We don't get many complaints. Make your partner happy. Bring her to France and enjoy golf at the same time."

Thomas Levet, one of the top professionals out of France, echoes the sentiments of Bras about availability, confirming that tee-times can be found year-round.



**FRENCH FAVOURITES:** The Four Seasons Golf Club (above and top right) and Royal Mougins (top) are among the finest golfing establishments in France, while the Eiffel Tower (right) and the town of Cannes (above left) are popular tourist attractions.



"We have lots of tough and very good courses and the weather in France makes it easy for greenkeepers to maintain courses because it is warm enough and wet enough to produce great conditions," said Levet, joint runner-up at the 2002 Open Championship.

"In France you can do lots of shopping, you can bring your kids on the golf courses. On some courses you can even bring your dog! So it is open to lots of tourism."

#### ARTISTIC LICENSE

The medieval town of Mougins, with its abundant sunshine and excellent quality of light, has, over the years, inspired such diverse talent as Pablo Picasso, photographer Man Ray, Winston Churchill and designer Christian Dior.

With its location just eight kilometres up the hill from the bright lights of Cannes, Mougins continues to draw the rich and famous to this once-fortified town with its plethora of art galleries and the country's highest concentration of Michelin-rated restaurants.

Undoubtedly, such history also inspired course architect **Robert Von Hagge** when he created Royal Mougins Golf Club in 1993. The club is the epitome of luxury with million-dollar homes bordering the often steep property.

Arriving at the stylish and open clubhouse, with its excellent collection of historic golf photos, it is evident this is going to be a special experience. The outdoor caddie area features an impressive waterfall that is as artistic as it is beautiful. Such is the importance of aesthetics at the club that two full-time gardeners are employed just to maintain the flowers!

At 6,004 metres from the black tees, the par-71 layout is not long. But it plays tight,

sitting on a relatively small piece of property between a steep mountain and a rail line.

The course starts high up the mountain with the 317-metre 'La Restanque'. The uphill approach pretty much sets the tone for the round with a straight blast needed to avoid the mountain on the left and the steep drop into the abyss all the way down the right side.

Then it's on to a hole that must qualify as one of the world's most beautiful and challenging par-threes. 'Angel's Dive' is a 187-metre monster where the tee is 40 metres higher than the sloping green.

“ Accessibility is a major attraction of golfing France as the majority of the country's 550 clubs welcome visitors. ”

While the tranquillity of the setting, embellished with another artistic waterfall, is guaranteed to amaze, a confident stroke is needed to ensure clearing the large body of water before the green.

As the mountain portion of the course ends, the slope continues with few holes offering a flat lie. Accuracy is most important on the first par-five as the 479-metre 'Le Lac' sees water come into play on the second and third shots.

Indeed, water is a key element in the overall design of the course. In all there are eight interconnected lakes that can be a factor with the steep nature of the layout.

The 337-metre, par-four seventh, the 'Roller Coaster', lives up to its name as an accurate tee shot is required to reach the

high side of the heavily tree-lined sloping fairway to set up the preferred angle of approach.

Von Hagge, the celebrated designer of Les Bordes, Golf National and Seignosse, three of France's best courses, repeats the hole again on the 385-metre, par-four 11th, 'Le Croissant'.

The 18th at Royal Mougins is a strong 515-metre, par-five, 'Les Arenes'. With heavy bunkering and a split-level fairway, there are various routes to reaching the water-protected green.

The safest way, while taking in the serenity of the beautiful setting, is via the high portion of the fairway. From there, a textbook approach will see your ball onto the difficult green.

Big hitters can attempt to go for the tighter landing area of the lower fairway to set up a chance of reaching in two and having a putt for a closing eagle.

Royal Mougins is a beautiful yet physically punishing course that can easily put your average score up by 10 strokes on first attempt. However, its lure will quickly rub off. Rest assured, you'll want to line up a return visit.

The club, which annually hosts the Air France Cannes Open, permits only 20 non-members daily. Such exclusivity comes at a price of 160 euros (about US\$210) on weekdays and 200 euros (US\$263) on weekends, cart included. Nine holes will set you back 100 euros (US\$131.5).

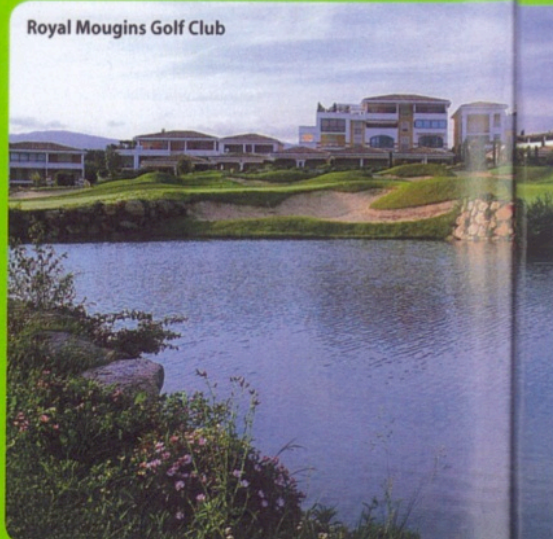
#### SECRET PROVENCE

It may only be a couple of years old, but Provence at Terre Blanche, the Four Seasons hotel chain's first European resort, already boasts an impressive history.

Royal Mougins Golf Club



Royal Mougins Golf Club



The 350-hectare resort, located inland from the coast near the medieval town of Tourettes, is built on land that was originally purchased by Sean Connery in 1979. When the Scottish actor's plan to build a golf resort failed to come to fruition, the land was purchased by Dietmar Hopp, founder of German software giant SAP.

Staying true to the James Bond icon's vision, Hopp has spared no expense in creating an exclusive five-star resort with two Dave Thomas-designed 18-hole layouts as its centerpiece.

The Le Chateau (par-72, 6,616 metres) and Le Riou (par-72, 6,005 metres) are similar in that both are built over heavily treed, mountainous terrain where the holes are usually either on uphill or downhill lies.

With its pine and oak tree-clad fairways and views of the Southern Alps, Le Chateau is truly a visual treat and an excellent test of golf that will one day undoubtedly host a professional tournament.

The trick here is to understand positioning off the tee as it is very much target golf. If you miss, it is easy to get in trouble in the penal rough. The large, undulating greens add to the challenge as they are very fast and difficult to read. There are very few flat putts.

Le Riou, named after a nearby river, is the tighter of the two layouts. Thomas, best known for his three courses at The Belfry in England in addition to a redesign of the Macau Golf & Country Club, has created a far more technically challenging test than Le Chateau.

Le Riou may be 600 metres shorter than its sister course but it is certainly not any easier. Accuracy off the tee is paramount.

If either of these two courses has you

doubting your game, expert help is close by with the presence of an on-site David Leadbetter Golf Academy. Alternatively, you can retreat to one of the 115 luxury suites to rest or dine on the balcony of Faventia, the resort's main dining room, which was recognised for its excellence with a Michelin star.

“ While chauffeured trips are available, the driving between courses and hotels is half the fun. The winding coastline of the Cote d’Azur is never far away and the sun-drenched Provence hillside is excellent for post-game exploring. ”

Considering this resort allows only between 80 and 100 players on its courses daily, this is truly a place for unhurried golf and a spot to enjoy fine three-course meals between rounds, sampling the local wine, olives, truffles and seafood. A gastronomic experience *par excellence*.

Green fees at Le Chateau are 95 euros (US\$125) and it's 80 euros (US\$105) at Le Riou.

#### BEST OF THE REST

There's no shortage of golfing choice on the French Riviera. Within 30 minutes of Cannes, there are six first-class clubs, Golf Country Club of Cannes-Mougins being among the most prominent.

## Swing Solution

If you have tried all the lessons and the various swing theories and still haven't elevated your game to the desired level, then consider the Biomeca Swing solution approach.

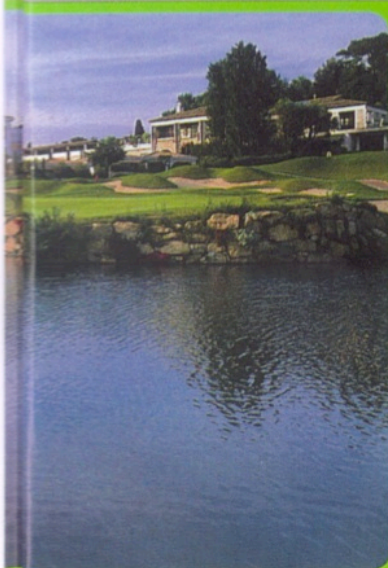
Located in a luxurious training centre at the Four Seasons Resort Provence at Terre Blanche in the hills of the French Riviera, just inland from Cannes, the Biomeca approach is a scientifically-designed system that identifies restrictions in your body and swing and then recommends places to improve and the best exercises on how to achieve them.

Dr Jean-Jacque Rivet, a French bio-mechanist who invented the system more than 10 years ago while working with swing guru David Leadbetter, said most people waste money on lessons in having their swing analysed without really knowing how their body is working.

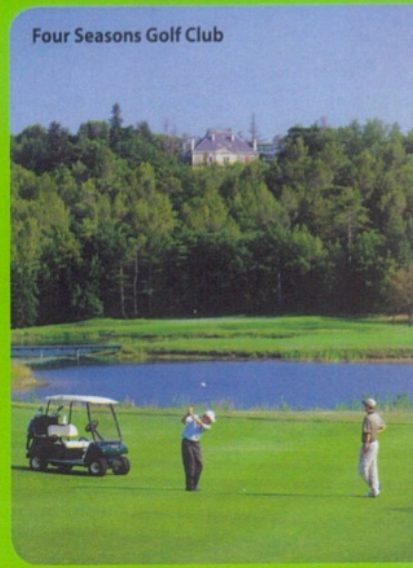
To identify problem areas, Rivet looks for the root cause of any swing faults. Problem areas are identified with the goal of setting up a solid base for developing good balance and swing technique.

Rivet, who has worked with professionals including Justin Rose, Nick Price and Jean Van de Velde, as well as top Chinese amateur Hu Mu, says even one session is useful for helping to identify problem areas that can compound as a person and the body ages.

"I am sad when I see people doing exercises that don't work," he said. "Good posture and balance is the foundation for a solid swing. What we are trying to understand is how the body is working and find a solution."



Four Seasons Golf Club



Four Seasons Golf Club

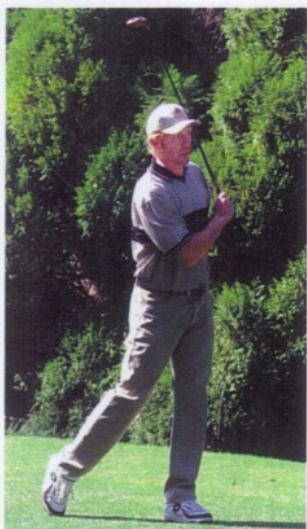
## HOLIDAY HOTSPOT



## FRENCH RIVIERA

The par-72, 6,207-metre course was opened in 1923. Among its high profile founders were the Prince of Monaco, the Aga Khan and Baron Rothschild. The original Harry Colt and Tom Simpson layout was redesigned by Dave Thomas and Peter Alliss in 1978 with the English duo staying faithful to the original parkland design, with its abundance of pine and oak.

The club has hosted the Cannes Mougins Open on more than a dozen occasions and is extremely elite, but accessible through France Golf Tours.



Green fees for Saint Donat are priced at 67 euros (US\$88).

Other clubs worth checking out include the ultra-exclusive Monte Carlo Golf Club (par-71, 5,679 metres). Nestled in the cliffs about 900 metres above sea level, the club has hosted a Pro-Celebrity tournament on numerous occasions with actor Kevin Costner and former Wimbledon tennis champion Boris Becker (pictured) among the high-profile contestants.

Then there is the Ronald Fream-designed Fregate Golf Course (par-72, 6,210 metres), which provides an opportunity to drive toward the Mediterranean

Sea and enjoy the panoramic views.

Located between the perfume capital of Grasse and Cannes is the Robert Trent Jones Jr.-designed Golf Country Club Saint Donat. The par-71, 6,031-yard course was considered one of the first modern architecture clubs in the area.

Jones has moulded an undulating 18 holes into the landscape with creative use of the existing vegetation and water, which comes into play on 10 holes. It is considered one of the most beautiful courses on the Riviera.

For the truly adventurous, the Golf de Sperone (par-72, 6,130 metres), the only 18-hole layout on the island of Corsica, is considered a Robert Trent Jones Sr masterpiece. The late designer stacked the six holes along the seaside cliffs, not dissimilar to what's on offer at Pebble Beach and Cypress Point. Green fees start at 33 euros (US\$43) to 80 euros (US\$105) during high season. A handicap certificate is required. ♪

## Useful Information

The French Riviera offers year-round golf, but April to November is the recommended period when temperatures are regularly in the mid-20s to low-30s Celsius. The area also boasts one of the mildest winter climates in Europe, though it can get cold.

France requires a pre-arranged visa for nearly all Asian countries except Japan. Visitors from most Western countries can enter visa-free. Visas can be obtained from any French consulate and allow for 90 days in the country.

To drive in France, a valid driving license from your home country and an international driving permit are required. An international license is easily obtained at most motor vehicle branches or through automobile associations.

The euro is the currency of France with one euro the equivalent of US\$1.31.

The international country code for France is 33.

## Contact Details

### FRANCE GOLF TOURS

T: +33 (1) 4122-0081  
E: info@francegolftours.com  
W: www.francegolftours.com

### FOUR SEASONS GOLF CLUB PROVENCE AT TERRE BLANCHE

T: +33 (0) 4 9439-9000  
W: www.fourseasons.com/provence

### ROYAL MOUGINS GOLF CLUB

T: +33 (0) 4 9292-4969  
E: playgolf@royalmougins.fr  
W: www.royalmougins.fr

### GOLF COUNTRY CLUB OF CANNES-MOUGINS

T: +33 (4) 9375-7913  
E: info@golf-cannes-mougins.com  
W: www.golf-cannes-mougins.com

### GOLF COUNTRY CLUB SAINT DONAT

T: +33 (4) 9309-7660  
W: www.golfsaintdonat.com

### MONTE CARLO GOLF CLUB

T: +33 (77) 9341-0911

### FREGATE GOLF CLUB

T: +33 (4) 9429-3800  
E: golf-fregate@wanadoo.fr  
W: www.dolce.com

### GOLF DE SPERONE

T: +33 (4) 9573-1713  
W: www.sperone.net

### BIOMECASPORT CENTRE

T: +33 (4) 9219-1850  
E: biomecaswing@wanadoo.fr

### FRANCE GOLF TOURS - GOLF AND FRENCH ART DE VIVRE

32 rue Nungesser et Coli 75016 Paris, France  
T: +33 (1) 4122-0081 (Office)  
F: +33 (1) 4122-0082  
E: info@francegolftours.com  
W: www.francegolftours.com

## Stylish Places to Stay

The hotels on the French Riviera are as good as the golf!

Boscolo Plaza Hotel (pictured right) is right in the heart of the Nice action, bordering the Old Town, the destination for restaurants and nightlife.

The funky location is reflected in the four-star hotel with its Belle Epoque architecture and interior design style. The *piece de resistance* is the 1904 frescos in the glass roof built by Gustav Eiffel. On the rooftop, 'Terrasse' is a combined restaurant-bar space to relax and enjoy excellent food and drink and marvel at the views of the Cote d'Azur.

Closer to Cannes, Le Mas Candille is a favourite hideaway of the rich. With just 39 bedrooms, guests can be pampered in the Shisheido Spa (right) or



may opt to relax by one of three pools on the sun-drenched hillside. Check out the hydrotherapy pool where you swim against the tide.

Picasso stayed at the Le Mas Candille's sister hotel, the 11-room Le Muscadins. The then unknown artist painted his room with a burst of energy one night and was told

by the owner the next day he would have to paint over it.

Bras of France Golf Tours says the price of a weeklong stay-and-play package depends on your choice of hotel. Typically, seven nights bed and breakfast, four to five rounds, chauffeur driven transport and maybe two meals will be around 2,500 to 3,000 euros (US\$3,283 to US\$3,940). The price can drop to 2,000 euros (US\$2,627) for four-star hotels and self drive.