

SOCIAL COMMENTATOR PAR EXCELLENCE **VICTORIA MATHER** DESCRIBES THE MOST DESIRABLE, DELIGHTFUL AND DOWNRIGHT DECADENT DESTINATIONS.

DESTINATION IRRESISTIBLE

The glamour of cruising on a glorious yacht is that it is travelling in a cocoon of luxurious certainty. There is no travelling-being-better-than-arriving nonsense. As surely as the champagne is cold, so is the Mediterranean allure of St Tropez, Portofino and Porto Cervo, or the mystique of Mustique and the scent of money in St Barts. These are the quintessential landfalls of the rich and famous, approached by cerulean seas and exuding a roseate sophistication.

To anchor in these harbours is an adventure in sybaritism undertaken in Ralph Lauren shorts. The yacht's uniformed crew, the cooling mist sprayed over the hot to trot at Club 55 in St Tropez, the Dom Perignon champagne in Les Caves du Roy, is all marvellous overkill for the underdressed in wispy designer beachwear. When you are cruising, choosing the most fun place in which to alight from your floating palace is the best part. You can go anywhere – the quietest cove with only the plop of flying fish, or the tiny bay with one taverna and its lemony-thyme smell of grilled lamb - but there is also, compellingly, the siren call of the sin bins.

Capri is so Noel Coward, St Tropez is so Joan Collins, Portofino was Jackie O, now it's Gwyneth. Porto Cervo would not exist without the Aga Khan; Mustique is Mick, and St Barts is simply everybody. Mykonos is naughtiness. What a wonderful world. Only accessible in the best way by boat, because a superyacht means you can always leave the party at the top and, as in the Coward song, sail away.

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PORTOFINO, ITALY

Picture perfect Mediterranean harbour, like an opera set. Ari and Jackie trod these cobbles, hand in hand. Perched high above is the Splendido, one of the world's classic hotels, where Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor stayed; on the port is the Splendido Mare, its contemporary little sister, with the Chufly restaurant. The tables, with cool-blue linen tablecloths, spill onto the square, there's risotto with sea urchin and courgette flowers and ravioli with walnut sauce is a taste sensation. Can't eat because of bikini panic? Go buy cashmere at Fissore, or fabulous linen from the stall at 39 Via Roma. The price will be so ridiculous as to necessitate an immediate Bloody Mary with fresh basil at La Gritta American Bar.

The woman in the enormous straw hat really is Joan Collins

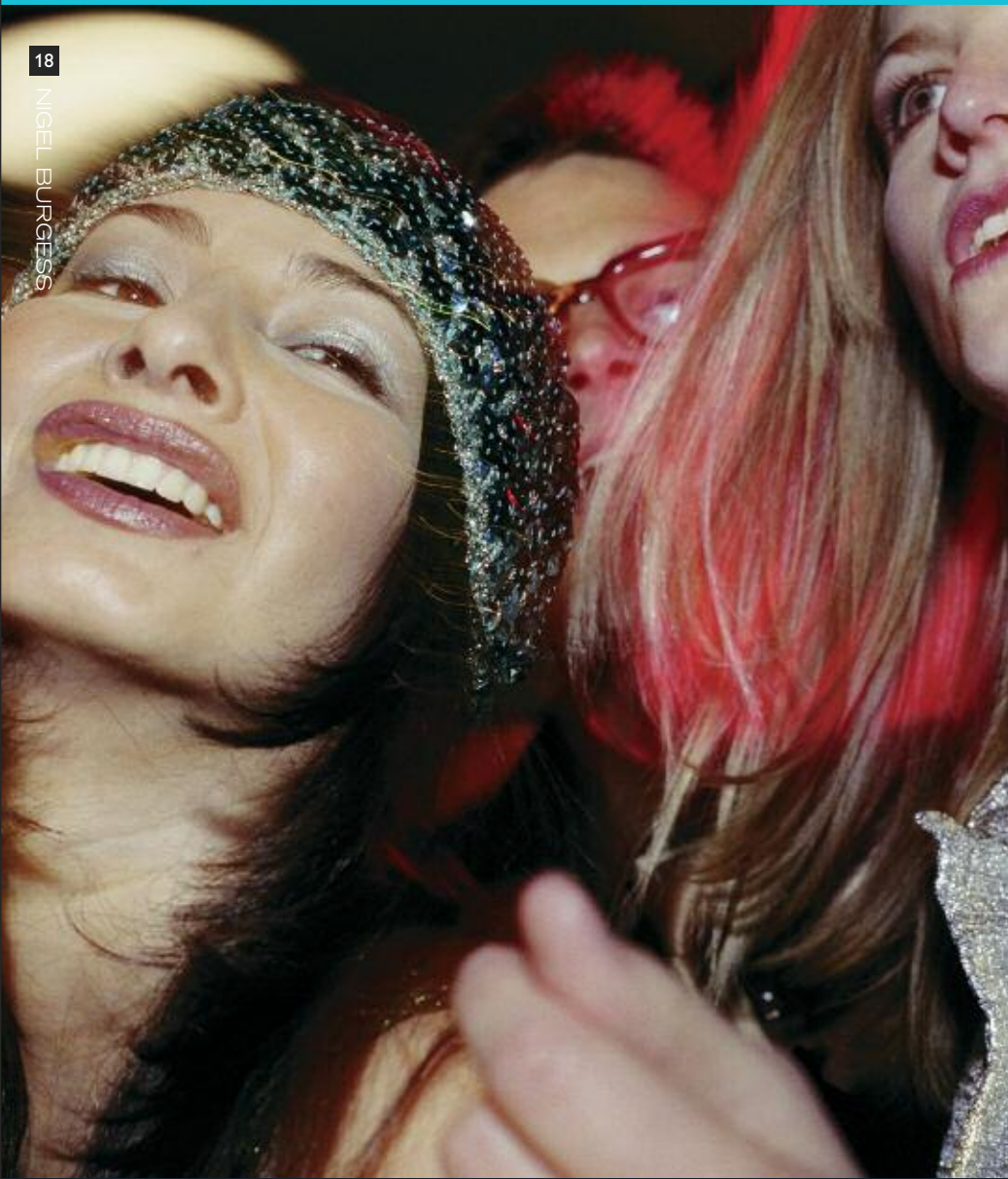
ST TROPEZ, FRANCE

So over the top it is out of sight. How weird that St Tropez initially seems so normal. A darling port, like an Impressionist painting, a chic swathe of blondes promenading past the boats of wondrous beauty, including MARIETTE, probably the most famous classic yacht in the world with an illustrious race record that has claimed both the Prada Cup and the Grimaldi Cup. Sip coffee under the red awnings of Sénéquier; wander behind the port in the old town, it is lovely, and there's a terrific Swatch shop. The nightclub Les Caves du Roy is at the Byblos, Club 55 is out at Pampelonne beach (it's only cool to eat the crudités and drink rosé). Nikki Beach is a must, as is the market on Tuesdays and Saturdays. The woman in the enormous straw hat really is Joan Collins; she'll be buying clear acacia honey from a local producer, Monsieur Coulon. And so should you.

CAPRI, ITALY

Tiberius moved the Imperial headquarters here from Rome in AD27, probably the most obvious celebrity until Julia Roberts patronised the Art of the Sandal shop, or Harrison Ford espoused the medicated mud 'Leg School' at the spa in the Capri Palace. Capri is where you'll bless your boat. The island is an enchantment, a fairytale of reckless beauty but with 5,000 visitors a day: so don't even think about visiting without a yacht. Arrive early evening when the madding crowd leaves. Will it be a shopping orgy on the glitzy, ritzy streets scented with jasmine, or a Quisi Royale (peach, strawberry and prosecco) on the streetside terrace of the Quisisana, Capri's grande dame hotel? Let's have another: Early tomorrow morning is the time to visit the Blue Grotto.





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PORTO CERVO, ITALY

A purpose-built pleasure zone, heartbeat of the Costa Smeralda, a panoply of multicoloured buildings tumbling to the port, which has all the whizzbang infrastructure for boats. Is that Valentino's yacht? Probably. Is that PHOCEA? Almost certainly. Is that Naomi Campbell looking at beach jewellery? Definitely maybe. Every celebrity is illustriously anonymous on Sardinia. To acknowledge anyone on the terrace of the Cala di Volpe would be crass; this is fashionista central, admirably mixed with Juventus players.

MYKONOS, GREECE

Party island. As the night goes on, the volume is pumped up from the bars and clubs in the white-washed streets. Of all the Greek islands to which one can sail, Mykonos is a badge of courage on the lapel of the most dedicated dancing queens. It has fabulous beaches – the best in the Cyclades – on which to recover and 400 churches in which to repent. The town is beautiful, cosmopolitan, irresistibly fun. Eat sushi at the Belvedere in Chora or eat at Sea Satin, below the windmills, and be seen at the Astra Bar.

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ST BARTS, CARIBBEAN

The Mediterranean port of the Caribbean. Antigua in April is Race Week, full of the sheer, sleek beauty of racing yachts. But St Barts at Christmas and New Year is New York and Hollywood on sea. And they're all eating in Maya's, the Rick's Bar of Gustavia. Everyone goes to Maya's in the end, including Gerard Depardieu, Kate Moss and photographer Patrick Demarchelier. St Barts is marvellously exclusive: the Hermès boutique closes if a cruise liner comes into the harbour, but not many do: it's too small, too chic, too stratospherically expensive and too French. Paris is a local call, since the telephones are run by France Telecom. There's no pâté, only foie gras. No fat people, yet everyone eats; no crowds, only pretty beaches reached by foot or bike. Or boat.

MUSTIQUE, CARIBBEAN

The playground of the Grenadines. Its charm is really the only reason for going to them, other than the louche attraction of Bequia's harbour for about a nanosecond. Mustique is a fable of barefoot excess: the extravagant houses in polyglot styles, the owners who have sprung fully formed from the pages of Tatler: Mick Jagger, Tommy Hilfiger, the Earl of Lichfield. It is private-private, yet everyone drinks, dines and dances at Basil's Bar, a rickety wooden structure built out over the water in Britannia Bay. Parisienne Grace Leo-Andrieu revamped the hotel, the Cotton House; Macaroni Beach is one of the best in the Caribbean. Do not expect designer shops and neon-lit bars; Mustique is a manicured rustic idyll.

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