France
WITHOUT THE TOUR

Plan Your French Riviera Trip

DESTINATION RESEARCH WORKBOOK

One decision at a time. A little preparation. A lot more confidence.

Your planning path

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Independent travel. Thoughtfully planned.

Plan Your French Riviera Trip

A step-by-step research workbook for planning the Riviera on your own. Work through it in order, one decision at a time. Every box can be typed into, saved and printed.

Trip name

Travelers

Travel dates

Date I started planning

How to use this workbook

1. **Save a copy first**, then open it in Adobe Acrobat Reader (free) or Preview on a Mac to type in the boxes and save your answers. Some phone and browser viewers can fill boxes but may not save them.
2. **Go in order.** Each step settles one decision that the next step depends on. Tick **Before moving on** at the bottom of each page when that decision is made.
3. **Use the linked guides** on the last page for the full explanations behind each step.
4. **Check current details for your dates.** Fares, timetables, passes and opening times change.

Your planning steps

Step	Decision	Page	Done	Notes
1	**Count the days you can actually enjoy**	3	☐	
2	**Decide on car, train or both**	4	☐	
3	**Choose one base**	5 to 6	☐	
4	**Compare properties at the address level**	7	☐	
5	**Plan your arrival to the door**	8	☐	
6	**Choose your outings and shape your week**	9 to 11	☐	
7	**Tickets or a pass**	12	☐	
8	**Check the total budget**	13	☐	
9	**Secure the essentials and keep a booking record**	14	☐	
10	**Travel-day readiness**	15	☐	

> **My approach:** a few beautiful villages, lunch by the water and time to swim. You don't need to see the whole Riviera in one week. Choose a few outings, leave room for a long lunch and enjoy having somewhere familiar to come home to each evening.

STEP 1

Count the days you can actually enjoy

Start with full days, not nights booked. Arrival, departure and moving between places use more of your holiday than you expect.

Travel milestone	Date	Local time	Notes (flight, connection)
Leave home			
Arrive on the Riviera			
Arrive at my accommodation			
Leave the Riviera			
Arrive home			

Nights on the Riviera

Full sightseeing days

Useful part-days

> **My first planning trick:** put the trip on a calendar before choosing anywhere to stay. Mark departure and arrival days (including overnight flights), transfer days and the flight home, then count what is left. Four nights often means three full days. I suggest five to seven nights on the Riviera, which gives roughly four to six full days.

What would make this your kind of holiday?

Pick two or three: beach time, food and markets, coastal towns, museums, shopping, festivals, or simply slowing down.

Priority 1

Priority 2

Priority 3

Our group: walking ability, stairs, heat, energy and how often we're happy to change accommodation

Any fixed event driving our dates? (Nice Carnival, Menton Lemon Festival, a concert, a festival)

Confirm its dates and ticket release before building the rest of the trip.

☐ **Before moving on:** I know my usable days and the experiences I most want to make room for.

STEP 2

Decide on car, train or both

Start with what you want to do, then choose how to get there. The coastal railway links Cannes, Antibes, Nice, Villefranche-sur-Mer, Monaco and Menton, so a car-free trip is very possible.

Question	My answer
Where will most of my outings be? Coast, hill villages or both?	
Do I want to avoid driving and parking in towns?	
For each outing: where do I arrive, and how do I get from the station to what I want to do?	
How will I get back, and is there an earlier return than the last train?	

My transport plan

- ☐ **Train only.** Coastal outings, a car-free base.
- ☐ **Train, plus a one-day car rental** for hill villages such as Saint-Paul-de-Vence and Tourrettes-sur-Loup.
- ☐ **Car for most of the trip.** I'll check parking before choosing where to stay.

Why this plan suits us

My tip: you don't need one transport choice for the whole trip. One of our best days involved renting a car early from the train station, visiting Saint-Paul-de-Vence and Tourrettes-sur-Loup, and returning it that evening. No overnight parking to arrange in Nice. Check rental hours and village parking before booking.

Èze needs its own plan: the train stops at Èze-sur-Mer on the coast, not the hilltop village. The Nietzsche path is a steep, uneven hike. We took an Uber up and hiked down, and my knees complained for days. Take a bus, taxi or Uber directly to the village instead.

☐ **Before moving on:** I know whether I'm using trains, a car or a mix, and for which parts of the trip.

STEP 3

Choose one place to stay

For a short trip, compare one base with day trips. Only add a second base if it solves a real problem. Choose somewhere you'd enjoy even on days without a train trip.

Base	Consider it if	Check before booking	Shortlist
Nice	You want a city base with outings east and west	Real walk or local transport to your day-trip station and preferred beach	☐
Villefranche-sur-Mer	You prefer a smaller harbor setting	Slopes, steps, luggage route and station access	☐
Antibes	Old-town life and outings to the west appeal	Walk between property, station and beach	☐
Cannes	You want a promenade and waterfront base	Major event dates, accommodation prices and station access	☐
Menton	You prefer an eastern coastal base	Travel time to western outings; Menton or Menton-Garavan station	☐
Beaulieu-sur-Mer	You'd like a smaller-town feel (one I'd try next time)	Station access and evening dining options	☐
Monaco	It suits your budget and outings	Accommodation prices, hills and your actual outings	☐

Orientation, west to east: Cannes, Antibes, Nice, Villefranche-sur-Mer, Monaco, Menton. Selected stops only, not every station or a timetable.

Three questions to settle my base	My answer
Where will most of my outings be?	
What do I want nearby on quiet days?	
How often will I use the station?	

My first-choice base

My alternative

☐ **Before moving on:** I have a preferred base and, if helpful, one alternative.

STEP 3, CONTINUED

If you choose Nice: pick a neighborhood

There is no single best neighborhood for everyone. Start with your daily routine: day trips, market mornings, beach lunches, evening walks. Then look for a café, a grocery store and a comfortable walk home.

Area	Best for	Watch for	Fits us?
Near Nice-Ville station	Frequent train day trips, early departures, arriving with luggage, price	Less seaside atmosphere	☐
Jean-Médecin and central streets	A mix of sightseeing, shopping, restaurants and day trips	Busy streets, crowded trams at commuting times, tram noise. Near the station feels different from near Place Masséna.	☐
Old Town	Markets, restaurants, atmosphere, exploring on foot	Stairs or small lifts, harder luggage access, restaurant noise	☐
Carré d'Or and the waterfront	Seaside walks, beach lunches, evenings near restaurants	Higher cost. The Promenade is long: near the beach doesn't mean near the Old Town or station.	☐

Where we stayed: Jean-Médecin on our first visit and the Carré d'Or on our second. I'd happily stay in either again. Carré d'Or brought us closer to the sea and the pedestrian shopping streets.

Which station will I use most?

Don't assume every journey starts at Nice-Ville. Depending on where you stay, Nice-Riquier or Nice-Saint-Augustin may suit you better. Search with the full station name and confirm your train stops there.

- ☐ Nice-Ville
- ☐ Nice-Riquier
- ☐ Nice-Saint-Augustin

My neighborhood choice and why

☐ **Before moving on:** I've chosen an area that suits our daily routine and know which station I'll use.

STEP 4

Compare properties at the address level

Exact streets and properties matter more than the neighborhood name. Compare two options side by side.

Check	Option A	Option B
Name, address, hotel or rental		
Full price: nightly rate, cleaning fee, tourist tax, deposit		
Walk to station / tram stop		
Walk to waterfront, markets, places I'll go often		
Café, bakery, grocery nearby		
Entrance steps, lift, luggage storage, check-in hours		
Bedroom air conditioning		
Recent noise reviews (restaurants, busy roads)		
Kitchen, laundry, outdoor space (private or shared?)		
Cancellation deadline and payment dates		
Late-arrival arrangements		

> **My tip: take a virtual walk.** Use Google Street View to follow the route from the property to the station, waterfront or tram stop. Note the entrance, cafés and groceries, and whether the route is simple. Check the imagery date, and pair it with reviews: Street View won't show noise or how a street feels after dark. For us, a kitchen and a separate sitting area are must-haves.

Bringing a car? Check where the car will stay before you book where you'll stay.

- [ ] Parking is on-site or in a public garage, and I know the cost and whether to reserve
- [ ] My vehicle fits the height and size limits
- [ ] I know where I can legally unload luggage and how far parking is from the entrance
- [ ] I checked access hours and whether I can come and go

- [ ] **Before moving on:** I have a property I can reach comfortably and would enjoy coming home to.

STEP 5

Plan your arrival to the door

Trace the whole journey to the door, not just to the town. A lovely address needs to work with your arrival time and luggage.

Arrival point	Local transport	Final walk	Check-in

Airport or station, terminal

Expected arrival time

Time to reach the door

My chosen transfer (taxi rank, tram, bus, booked transfer) and where it drops me

Nice Airport has tram and bus options. Choose the route and stop that serve your accommodation, and check current services for your date.

Backup if I land late, my flight is delayed or I miss the last service

Accommodation contact and late-arrival instructions

- [ ] Address and check-in instructions saved offline
- [ ] If a transfer is booked: meeting point, waiting policy and contact saved
- [ ] Luggage storage arranged if I arrive before check-in

What we did: we arrived by air both times and took a taxi from the official airport queue to our apartment. For departures we've used the tram and Uber, depending on our flight time. Keep arrival day light: unpack, pick up groceries, take a short walk. Dinner nearby is enough of a plan.

- [ ] **Before moving on:** I have a realistic arrival plan for my property and a backup.

STEP 6

Build your outing wish list

Give each outing one main reason to go. You'll enjoy fewer places more deeply.

Place	Direction	Reason to go	Check before choosing	Want
Villefranche-sur-Mer	East	Harbor, seaside lunch, beach or beach club	Slopes and steps in the village	☐
Antibes	West	Provençal market, old town, Picasso Museum	Market days, museum hours, walk from station to centre. Cap d'Antibes is a separate plan.	☐
Menton	East	Colorful streets, waterfront day	Menton or Menton-Garavan station; old-town climbs	☐
Monaco	East	Harbor, Monaco-Ville or Monte Carlo	Steep climbs; public lifts and buses; mobile roaming (separate country); bus fares may be separate	☐
Cannes	West	Promenade, waterfront, Le Suquet	Choose the central Cannes station; uphill walk; events calendar	☐
Èze village	East	Hilltop lanes and coastal views	Train stops at Èze-sur-Mer, not the village. Plan a bus, taxi or Uber up.	☐
Saint-Paul-de-Vence and Tourrettes-sur-Loup	Inland	Medieval villages, lunch in Saint-Paul	Best by one-day car rental; rental hours, village parking	☐
Nice itself	Base	Old Town, markets, Promenade, a beach day	Leave room to enjoy your base	☐

My top outings, in priority order

Rain or low-energy backups (a Nice museum, a church concert, Opéra Nice Côte d'Azur)

> **Cannes?** For my own week, I'd prioritize the other places here. If high-end shopping is your happy place, Cannes might deserve a spot on your list.

☐ **Before moving on:** I have a short list of outings with one main reason for each.

STEP 6, CONTINUED

Research one outing properly

Use this page for each outing you're seriously considering. Print or duplicate it as needed.

Destination

Date

Main reason to go

Departure station (full name)

Arrival station

Walk or onward transport from the arrival station to what I want to do (hills, steps, pace)

Journey	Train / time	Backup option	Ticket
Outward			
Return			

Opening days, booking needs and a lunch idea

Optional second stop (same direction only)

Day-trip checks

- [ ] Checked outward and return services for my actual date, including disruption notices
- [ ] My return is not the last evening train; I have an earlier option and an alternative
- [ ] Usable ticket saved offline, not only the booking confirmation
- [ ] Allowing a 20 to 30 minute buffer at an unfamiliar station, more if buying tickets
- [ ] Regional seats are unassigned; we may not sit together at busy times
- [ ] Enough time between my return train and any evening booking
- [ ] Water, comfortable shoes and a charged phone

> **My tip:** two towns in one day can work, but weigh the extra travel against the time you lose. Keep the second stop optional. If Monaco fills your day, skip Villefranche. The harbor will survive without you until next time.

STEP 6, CONTINUED

Shape your week

Give each full day one main plan, with quieter days between bigger outings. There's no prize for collecting the most train tickets.

Day	Date	Main plan	Getting there / back	Booked?	Flexible
1				☐	☐
2				☐	☐
3				☐	☐
4				☐	☐
5				☐	☐
6				☐	☐
7				☐	☐
8				☐	☐
9				☐	☐

My example week (six nights): Day 1 arrive and settle in. Day 2 Nice and the Old Town. Day 3 Antibes. Day 4 beach day or stay local. Day 5 Èze village. Day 6 Monaco, with an optional Villefranche stop. Day 7 head home. Swap in the village car day if you'd like.

☐ **Before moving on:** I have a loose outline with travel time and breathing room.

STEP 7

Tickets or a pass?

List your expected journeys, including returns, before buying a pass. For a few trips, single tickets may be simpler.

Journey (from / to)	Date	Return?	Single-ticket price
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	
Total of single tickets			

Pass I'm comparing	Price / days	Covers my destinations, buses, trams?	Buy / validate how?

Pass SudAzur Explore covers 3, 7 or 14 days on participating train, tram and bus networks in the Alpes-Maritimes and Monaco. Check the official page for current prices and exclusions. Don't add outings just to get your money's worth.

How a regional (TER) ticket works: an ordinary TER ticket is valid once for the selected route on your travel day, including on another TER departure that day. Seats aren't reserved, and it isn't an unlimited day pass. Ordinary TER/ZOU! tickets no longer need stamping, but passes and local bus or tram tickets may have their own rules. If unsure, show your ticket to staff before boarding.

Lessons from our visits: allow extra time for your first ticket-machine purchase; it gets easier. And check which network your ticket covers: the bus we took to Monaco needed a separate fare from our Nice transport ticket.

My decision: single tickets or which pass, and why

☐ **Before moving on:** I know which tickets or pass I'll use and how to buy and validate them.

STEP 8

Check the total budget

Research prices for your own dates. Use one currency, round up, and enter Cost x Qty = Amount. Qty is travelers, nights or days, depending on the row.

Item	How to count	Cost	Qty	Amount	Notes, deposits
Airfare	Return fare per person x travelers				
Baggage and flight extras					
Accommodation	Nightly cost for all rooms x nights				
Tourist tax	Count once				
Airport transfer, arrival	Group total, Qty 1				
Airport transfer, departure	Group total, Qty 1				
Train tickets or pass	Per person x travelers				
Local transport	Daily allowance x days				
Car rental (optional)	Track fuel, tolls and parking separately				
Fuel, tolls, parking	About $25 per driving day to start				
Food	1 person's day + 20%, x travelers x days				
Activities and museums	Price x attendees				
Beach club / special events	e.g. sunbeds, Carnival seats				
Shopping	Allowance per person x travelers				
Travel insurance	Trip-wide quote, Qty 1				
Phone / eSIM					
Misc	One shared allowance for small surprises				

A. My target budget	
B. Full trip cost (total of Amount column)	
Difference (A minus B). Negative means over budget.	

> **My tip:** local transport around $15 per person per day is a reasonable starting allowance. Don't add a percentage to the whole trip; use Misc instead. If you're over budget, adjust accommodation, transport or the mix of meals and activities. If you're under, check for missing costs before treating it as spending money. You can save by staying back from the seafront and mixing restaurant meals with bakeries and groceries.

STEP 9

Secure the essentials, then stay flexible

Make the main arrangements fit together before filling the days with bookings. Flexible still means prepared.

Arrange before you leave

- [ ] Flights
- [ ] Accommodation for every night
- [ ] Route to my first accommodation
- [ ] Travel documents
- [ ] Access or assistance needs

Book ahead when it matters

- [ ] Long-distance trains
- [ ] Carnival seats or festival tickets
- [ ] A specific beach club day
- [ ] Special meals or concerts
- [ ] Rental car, if needed

Usually keep flexible

- [ ] Regional train day trips (after checking ticket rules)
- [ ] Cafés and casual meals
- [ ] Ordinary sightseeing
- [ ] Weather-dependent plans
- [ ] Open time

My booking record

Booking	Status	Pay / cancel deadline	Still to pay	Confirmation / contact

- [ ] Dates, accommodation nights and transport between places all agree before I pay
- [ ] Cancellation deadlines are on my calendar
- [ ] Confirmations and usable tickets saved offline, in one place my companions can reach

> **My tip:** our Nice Carnival grandstand seats were worth booking ahead. I watched for tickets to go on sale and booked promptly. I regret missing Menton's Lemon Festival on that trip. On our warmer visit, we booked beach-club daybeds through MySunbed after arriving. If you want a particular club on a particular day, check ahead. I keep everything organized in TripIt.

- [ ] **Before moving on:** I know what's booked, what's outstanding and what can stay open.

STEP 10

Travel-day readiness and your research library

You don't need to memorize the railway. Know how to check the journey, access your ticket and find your way back.

At the station

- [ ] Find **Départs** (departures) and match my train number and time, not only the destination shown
- [ ] Check the stops: the board may show a final destination beyond my stop
- [ ] Follow signs to the **voie** (track) and watch for changes
- [ ] Ticket ready, ID with me, phone charged. If anything is unclear, I'll show my ticket to staff
- [ ] Rechecked services with SNCF Connect or the TER Sud website shortly before travel, and any onward bus separately

Guides behind this workbook

- **Plan Your French Riviera Trip**
  The step-by-step regional planning page this workbook follows.
  francewithoutthetour.com/french-riviera
- **French Riviera by Train**
  Stations, tickets, passes and building a day you'll enjoy.
  francewithoutthetour.com/travel-blog/how-to-travel-the-french-riviera-by-train
- **Where to Stay in Nice**
  Neighborhood comparison, property checks and parking.
  francewithoutthetour.com/travel-blog/where-to-stay-in-nice-without-a-car
- **5 Easy Day Trips From Nice by Train**
  Station guidance and what to check for each town.
  francewithoutthetour.com/travel-blog/5-easy-day-trips-from-nice-by-train
- **7 Days on the French Riviera**
  My relaxed Nice-based week and personal tips.
  francewithoutthetour.com/travel-blog/7-days-french-riviera-itinerary
- **How to Budget for a Trip to France**
  The full budget worksheet method.
  francewithoutthetour.com/travel-blog/how-to-budget-for-a-trip-to-france
- **What to Book Before Traveling to France**
  What to book now, what can wait, and your first arrival.
  francewithoutthetour.com/travel-blog/what-to-book-before-traveling-to-france

Questions still open and where I'll check them

General planning information, reviewed October 2026. Routes, fares, pass terms, opening times and policies change: confirm current details with official providers for your dates.