



I'M A CELEBRITY, GET ME OUTTA HERE!

IF YOU LIKE TO STAY WHERE THE RICH AND FAMOUS PLAY, DON'T MISS THESE HOT SPOTS WHERE EVEN THE GLITTERATI GO TO GET AWAY FROM IT ALL. **BY DAN ALLEN**

AS THE PERSONAL ASSISTANT TO A CERTAIN member of the Hollywood Brat Pack for several years, I witnessed firsthand a dazzling world of ultra-exclusive vacation destinations. It wasn't always as glamorous for me as it was for my employer: I usually flew coach while he rocked first class, and my entire hotel room could often fit into his suite's closet.

However, I did see the special symbiosis that exists between high-end destinations and their most famous guests. Stars receive utter indulgence, while hotels, restaurants and nightclubs are recognized for their ability to literally serve up the "star treatment" — bragging rights often worth their weight in gold.

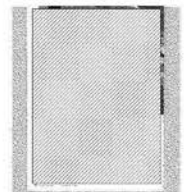
But everybody wins in the world of elite retreats. Even if you don't personally get a kick out of staying where someone like Jake Gyllenhaal did, you can appreciate what his previous presence means: Not only are the places guaranteed to be gorgeous, but they have been bestowed a kind of celebrity seal of approval. They know how to treat every guest as the rich and famous expect to be treated.

THE FRENCH RIVIERA

Of all the world's celebrity hotspots, few can match the stellar renown of that hundred-mile stretch of Mediterranean coastline known as the French Riviera — *La Côte d'Azur* to the

locals. British and Russian nobles have been flocking to the stunning, sun-kissed region since the 18th century, but it took the rise of a special little town to transform it into a bona fide celebrity super-destination.

Saint-Tropez was a quaint fishing village for eons until the end of World War II, when it began attracting artists and musicians. Then, virtually overnight, French sex kitten Brigitte Bardot scorched it onto the international map with the 1956 release of *And God Created Woman*. "Set in the pagan paradise of the French Riviera," the film's U.S. trailer screamed, "swirls the fast-moving, fascinating story of a demon-driven temptress, who thought the



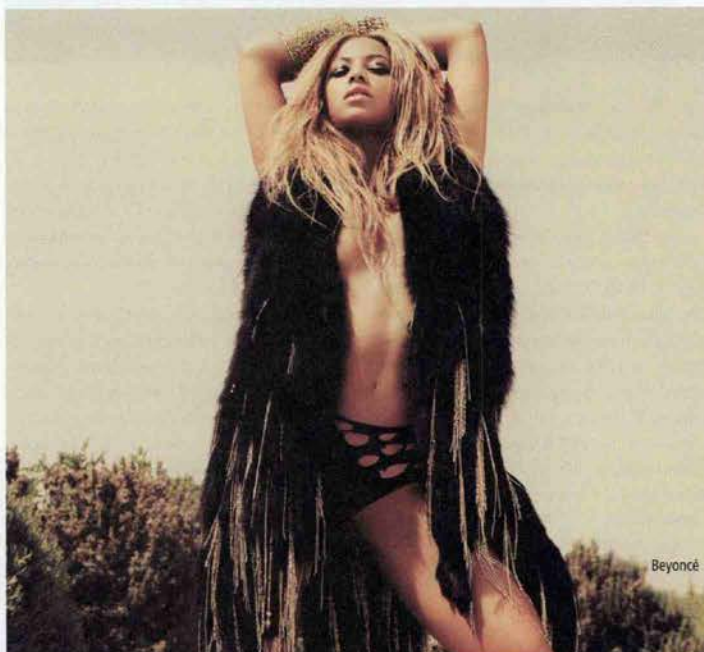


Hotel Byblos

future was invented only to spoil the present."

Demons aside, that's exactly the kind of place modern Saint-Tropez has become: an over-the-top homage to in-the-moment hedonism, set against the bewitching backdrop of the gorgeous coastline. Its natural beauty aside, this is a place where clothing is often optional and conspicuousness is king, where the world's richest and most famous individuals can mingle with each other, and (perhaps even more important) be seen doing so by everyone else.

More discreet stars — such as Catherine Deneuve and Jack Nicholson — sometimes opt for the family-run **Hôtel la Ponche**, where each room is lovingly named after a famous guest. But the apex of Saint-Tropez's glitter has long been the Provençal village-styled **Hôtel Byblos** (pictured, above), launched in 1967 by none other than Bardot herself. Celebs like Beyoncé, Cher, Kylie Minogue, Keanu Reeves, Mary J. Blige and Penelope Cruz prefer the

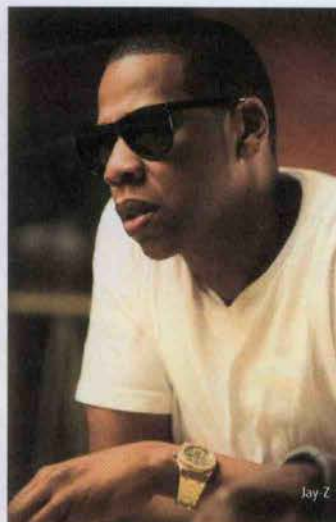


Beyoncé

TOP PHOTO COURTESY HOTEL BYBLOS. BOTTOM COURTESY COLUMBIA



Hôtel Byblos



Jay Z



Rosewood Mayakoba



Kate Hudson

iconic 91-room Byblos, promoted to "Palace" status in 2012 by Atout France, the country's tourism authority. It's one of few properties in the entire nation to achieve this five-star-plus distinction.

The Byblos also boasts the town's top A-list-only nightclub, **Les Caves du Roy**. Sean "P. Diddy" Combs, Jay-Z (pictured, left), Kate Moss and Geri Halliwell are but a fraction of the heavy hitters who've been spotted partying at Les Caves, which once famously refused admission to Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes. At the time, the then-couple headed across town to **VIP Room**, which Rihanna, Madonna, Sting, Johnny Depp and Karl Lagerfeld and have helped live up to its not-so-subtle moniker.

With the 2011 shutdown of Saint-Tropez's famed beach club La Voile Rouge (where Paris

Hilton once reportedly dropped \$400,000 in an afternoon on top-shelf champagne for 100 of her closest friends), the daytime hotspot du jour is now **Club 55**, where Jude Law, Zac Efron, Hugh Jackman and Queen Latifah are just some of the recent patrons, and where the preferred arrival method is by sea — preferably aboard a luxury yacht.

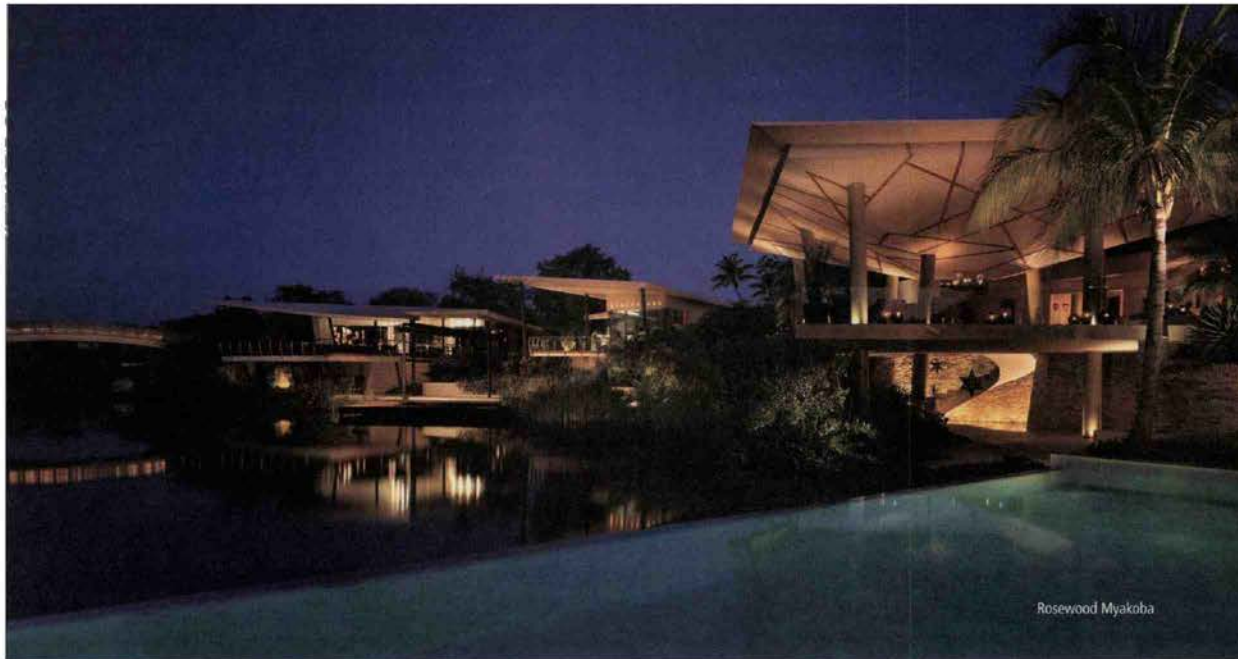
Shopping is a major Saint-Tropez pastime, with the town's charming French storefronts serving up as much Dior and Cartier as croissants and *jambon*. But even stars must take a break to eat, and one of their most beloved local picks for doing so (with the likes of George Clooney, Kevin Spacey and Bruce Willis) is the scene-y **Villa Romana**. Like many of the town's establishments, it's a seasonal affair, open from spring to fall only.

East of Saint-Tropez lie the French Riviera's



Alexander Skarsgård

TOP LEFT PHOTO: COURTESY-HOTEL BYBLOS; JAY-Z: COURTESY-VANTY; CENTER LEFT: COURTESY-ROSEWOOD MAYAKOBA; KATE HUDSON BY AME WARELL; COURTESY-FOX; ALEXANDER SKARSGÅRD BY JOHN F. JOHNSON



Rosewood Mayakoba

two other celeb-irresistible golden cities: Cannes and Nice. The former is most star-saturated during its famed film festival in May, when the accommodation of choice is the glittering **Hôtel du Cap-Eden-Roc**, whose recent guest list includes Justin Timberlake, Kirsten Dunst, Gwen Stefani and Gavin Rossdale.

As for the bigger and more royal-pedigreed Nice, many mega-celebs (e.g., Tina Turner and Bono) so love its vivacious beauty that they've purchased homes nearby. Most visible is that of Elton John, whose villa atop Mont Boron overlooks the entire city. Farther west, you'll find the Côte d'Azur compounds of the Beckhams and Brangelina — at Bargemon and Brignoles respectively. Those on shorter Nice visits, like the U.K.'s Queen Elizabeth II and Clint Eastwood, opt for stays at the incredible **Hôtel Negresco**, the city's artsy grande dame which just last year celebrated her 100th birthday.

RIVIERA MAYA

A world away (in terms of both geography and moral flagrancy) is Riviera Maya, a hundred-or-so-mile stretch of Caribbean coastline just south of Cancún on Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula. The area's fast-burgeoning main city, Playa del Carmen, has a liveliness of its own, but the draw here for most celebs is simple beachfront chilling. Plus, those with a taste for adventure can opt for local day trips, like a visit to the impressive Mayan ruins of Chichen Itza just 150 miles inland.

Most of the region's top resorts are just

north of Playa del Carmen proper, such as the lavish **Viceroy Riviera Maya**. Known as "the Tides" until a complete renovation last year, the lush 41-room property is set between a tropical forest and the Caribbean, lending it a remoteness that's appreciated by camera-weary stars like Leonardo DiCaprio, Rashida Jones and Mary-Kate Olsen. Plus, each of their thatch-roofed villas comes with its own personal plunge pool and outdoor rain shower.

About three miles up the coast is the 1,600-acre **Rosewood Mayakoba** (pictured above and on the previous page), the luxury enclave that in 2012 hosted the star-studded 60th birthday party of Topshop CEO Philip Green, attended by the likes of Stevie Wonder, Kate Hudson and Naomi Campbell. Other guests at this secluded celeb magnet (which boasts its own mile-long arc of white sands) have included U2, Arnold Schwarzenegger and '90s retro couple Meg Ryan and John Mellencamp.

Even farther up the coast is the rustically luxurious **Maroma Resort and Spa**, the 25-acre beachfront portion of a working coconut plantation that pulls in the high-octane company of Sean Penn, Sharon Stone, Robert Redford, Celine Dion, Cameron Diaz and England's Prince Charles — all of whom reserve the same oceanfront room, Number 23. In their happier days, TomKat and Suri reportedly came to Maroma so often that the resort built them a special suite.

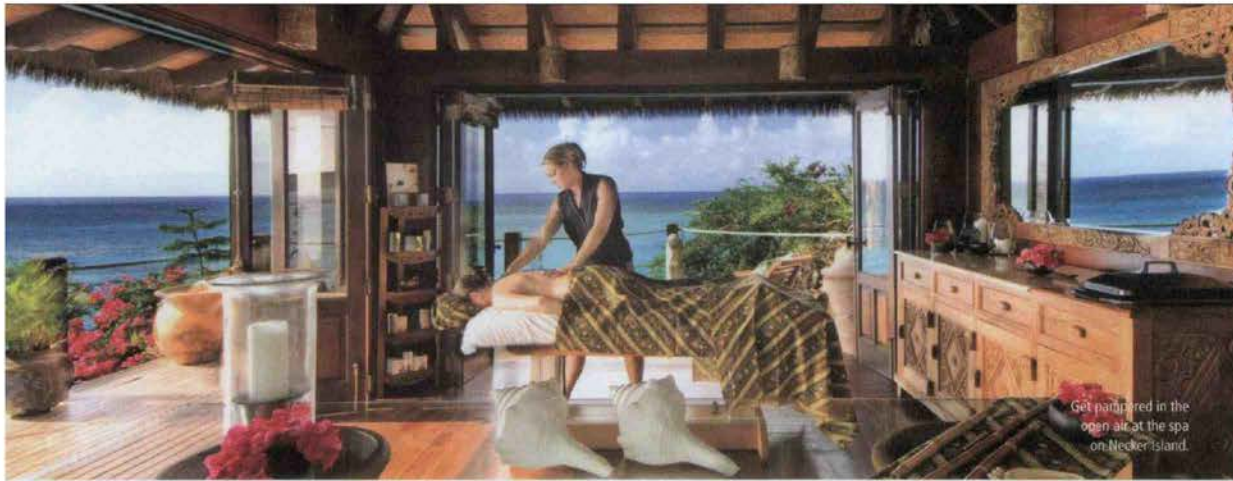
Heading the other way from Playa del Carmen, about 15 miles south, is **Esencia**, a

50-acre beachside "hotel estate" that began life as the vacation villa of the Italian Duchess of Ferrari. Seventeen of its 29 rooms are suites, including that of the duchess herself — Rosa's Suite — now the preferred pick of celebs like Gwyneth Paltrow and Uma Thurman. Further southward is the hip town of Tulum, renowned for the lure of its simultaneously affluent (hip) and earth-loving (hippie) atmosphere. The celeb haunt of choice here is the small and sexy **Coqui Coqui**, a bucolic seven-room spa resort that draws names like Alexander Skarsgård (pictured, below left), Renée Zellweger and Ryan Phillippe.

THE CARIBBEAN

The Riviera Maya may hug the Caribbean, but for supreme tranquility and seclusion, there is nothing quite like being completely surrounded by its turquoise waters on a sumptuous private island. For stars needing a break far removed from the spotlight, it is a luxury well worth the (in some cases) eye-popping price tags.

The Caribbean offers a multitude of other exclusive celeb-attended getaways, including a number of islands where star homes are discreetly on the market for the right lodgers. One of the region's most privileged private isles is the 1,400-acre Mustique, located just west of Barbados and north of Grenada. Here, the likes of Hugh Grant, Jennifer Lopez, Jennifer Aniston and British royals galore are known to settle in for a spell, and Mick Jagger's



Get pampered in the open air at the spa on Necker Island.

Japanese-inspired six-bedroom beachfront villa **Stargroves** is among the hottest rental options (Paul McCartney picked it for his honeymoon with third wife Nancy Shevell in 2011). Featuring its own beachside sundeck, games pavilion, gazebo and freshwater pool, all surrounded by lush and very private tropical vegetation, Stargroves can be yours for a cool \$16,000 a night during the off-season (add \$6,000 otherwise).

Another famed celeb-luring Caribbean private isle is the 1,000-acre Parrot Cay in the Turks and Caicos, vacation spot of entertainment goddesses like Barbra Streisand, Julia Roberts and Janet Jackson. Here, just \$4,500 a night (off season) will nab you either Keith Richards's **Rocky Point** villa or Christie Brinkley's **Lucky House**; each comes equipped with three beachfront bedrooms and infinity pools. For a bit more space (and a cost that

starts at just under \$16,000 nightly), opt for Bruce Willis's six-acre oceanfront estate **The Residence**, with a five-bedroom main house, plus two more three-bedroom guest villas.

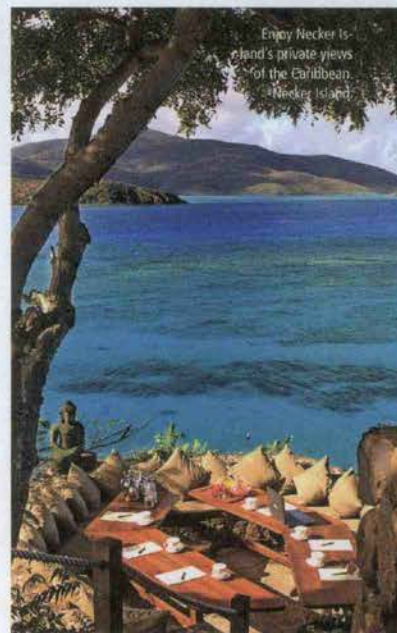
Still not enough? Try Donna Karan's spectacular **The Sanctuary**, where \$30,000 a night will get you a three-bedroom main house, in addition to two four-bedroom guest houses, each coming with a second-floor master suite lending 360-degree views of the incomparable Caribbean.

But perhaps the most elite of the Caribbean's celeb retreats is **Necker Island**, the jewel of Virgin tycoon Richard Branson's Virgin Limited Edition Collection of international luxury properties. Appropriately located in the British Virgin Islands, Necker covers 74 acres of lush and entirely private tropical forest, and offers ultra-cool and unique-in-the-world perks like the Necker Nymph, a three-person aero submarine for nearby underwater exploring.

A steady stream of A-list names have flocked to Necker since its 1984 opening, including Oprah Winfrey, Robert De Niro, Princess Diana, George Michael, Mariah Carey, Steven Spielberg and Jimmy Fallon. Many celebs have even hosted weddings here, like Nick Lachey and Vanessa Minnillo in July 2011.

Just a month later, Necker also served as the site of one of the year's most harrowing real-life celebrity dramas, when lightning from Hurricane Irene struck the island's Great House and set it ablaze. Not only did Kate Winslet, her two children and her then-boyfriend narrowly escape the massive fire, but Winslet herself famously carried Branson's 90-year-old mother to safety. To reward her heroism, Branson invited her back to Necker as his personal guest that Christmas.

Accommodations on Necker currently consist of six one-bedroom Bali houses and



Branson's own eight-bedroom Temple House. Adding to the capacity while the Great House is being rebuilt, the 105-foot luxury yacht **Necker Belle** is moored in the harbor, offering four cabins and giving the island a total overnight occupancy capacity of 28. Rental of the entire island, even in the off-season, comes at a whopping \$42,500 per night – plus a 2.5 percent service charge (and there's a five-night minimum). But rest easy — gourmet meals, beverages and an attentive staff of 60 are all part of the glorious package.

Which of these celeb-worthy getaways is calling your name? Share your Champagne wishes by commenting on this article at metrosourc.com.

NECKER IMAGES COURTESY VIRGIN. CAREY COURTESY ISLAND RECORDS



Mariah Carey