



The Vegas of **THE MED**

As a regular visitor to the area, **Maria Pierides** offers some pearls of wisdom on how to make the most of Northern Cyprus's culture, cuisine and casinos

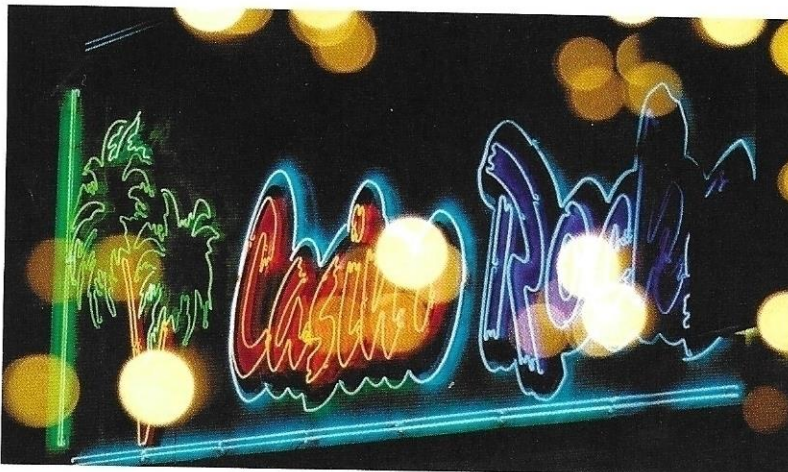
Hoshgeldiniz! – welcome to North Cyprus. And you certainly will feel welcome. From the moment you step off the plane and the Mediterranean air hits your face, you can rest assured that you'll be in safe and inviting hands for the whole of your stay.

While the more obvious time of year to go to the place so aptly named the Island of Love is during the scorching summer months, Northern Cyprus can be enjoyed all year round, with an endless supply of activities and culture to absorb. And if you want to avoid making the trip a family-oriented one, 'accidentally' planning your trip during term time is advised. Because

the less ruby red fellow Brits to share the spotlight with, the better, as Cypriot hospitality should be taken full advantage of.

Even if you're tempted to follow in the footsteps of poker superstars like Phil Laak and travel the world for gambling purposes (the shades are not compulsory), you wouldn't be disappointed if the island's casino scene was all you had pencilled into your schedule. With a choice of casinos to rival Las Vegas, and certainly put anything this country has to offer to shame, you'll be spoiled for choice.

There are a few essential spots that seem to have exceeded even the highest of expectations. The Oscar Resort Hotel plays host to the Galaxy Casino, which boasts 160 gaming machines, and eight different games to try your luck at on the tables, including age-old favourites American Roulette, poker and blackjack. Both the Dome and Rocks casinos also allow you to indulge in the usual classic casino games, as well as French Roulette and Las Vegas craps.





Strolling into any one of these casinos and getting lost in the ambience is enough to prompt the urge to demand a martini 'shaken not stirred', with that same suave, Bond-like swagger we all secretly associate with such atmospheres.

No article about Cyprus would be complete without mentioning the cuisine. Although there are restaurants and bars to cater to all tastes, it has to be said that to get the best culinary experience, you'll almost definitely need to lap up some of the culture. Whether you're eating out simply to refuel or want to make an evening of it, the choices are endless. One spot that

is as wallet-friendly as it is entertaining is the Ali Pasha Taverna in Kyrenia, near the Celebrity Hotel. Overlooking the sea, it offers traditional Cypriot and Turkish cuisine, as well as some English favourites for those less brave, who prefer to stick with the British pint as opposed to the Ouzo. If you want to take advantage of the all-you-can-eat special, and catch a glimpse of the must-see belly dancing action, make sure you visit on a Wednesday or Sunday night.

To continue living the life of a celebrity, the Sez'i & Yelken Restaurant serves the finest and freshest seafood all year round, and is a real celeb hotspot,

BONUS

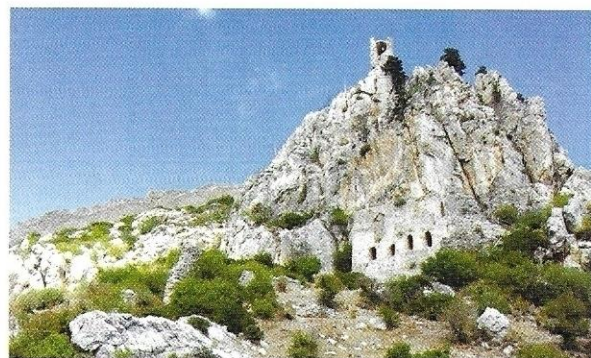
Kyrenia's Celebrity Hotel also houses a dedicated betting office, offering a fully comprehensive betting service for those who don't want to miss getting their bets on

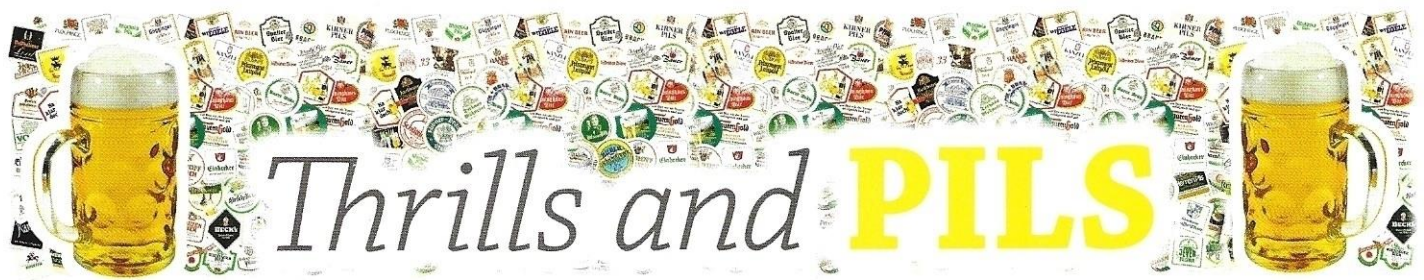
so make sure you book in advance (and don't forget your camera).

When you're taking a break from revelling in the nightlife, find time to check out the turtles on Alagadi Beach, which are always an understated but never-forgotten tradition of a visit here. While to unleash the wild-man in you, going paragliding or caving should be a treat – there is rumoured to be a golden jar hidden inside the Execution Cave, near Kaleburnu.

Although one of the most history-rich islands in the world, and with a plethora of archaeological landmarks to prove it, Northern Cyprus still manages to remain timelessly unscathed.

Whether you're looking for an adrenaline-fuelled adventure, a relaxing stroll to take in some of Mother Nature's finest creations, a historical journey through time, or a change (and significant upgrade) of scenery from your usual gambling haunts, Northern Cyprus is the place to be. **G**





Thrills and PILS

Beer. Football. Girls. A man's three favourite words, are they not? Germany is guy-heaven, with its endless supply of beer, cheap football tickets and relaxed attitude to sex.

Maria Pierides does the groundwork for you, to leave you more time to enjoy your holiday. After all, those frothing steins of pilsner won't drink themselves...

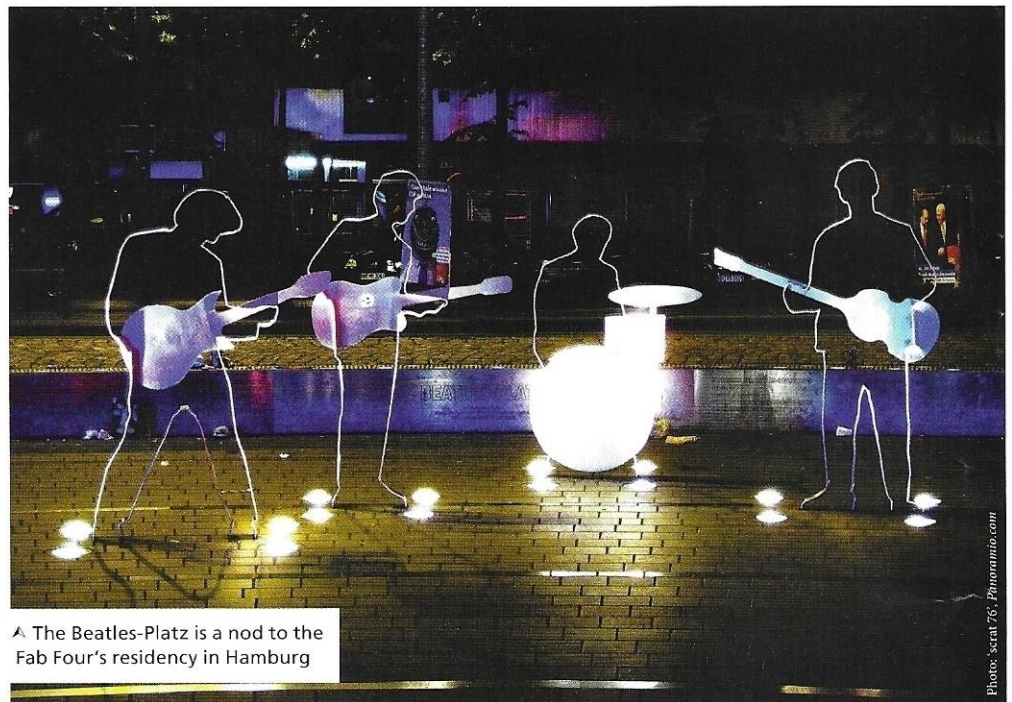
Avid beer drinkers should already know that September to early October is the prime moment to visit Germany as it's the time of Oktoberfest in Munich – the biggest beer-drinking festival imaginable; the very thought of which forms an even bigger foam around men's mouths than the one that sits atop the beer.

But don't panic if you're not planning to go during the festivities; aside from this gargantuan celebration of the foamy stuff Munich has other things to offer too, although beer is never too far away.

St Peter's Church offers a great view of the Alps and Olympic Tower, and the inner geek in you may enjoy the Deutsches Museum – one of the world's largest science museums. If you just want to hang with the locals, check out Hofgarten where you may even catch a glimpse of the cello-playing street musician Barjo Ajkic. Beer is also available mere inches away, and in plentiful supply throughout the entire country, so missing out on the beer festival isn't going to leave your mouth dry.

Germany also has its fair share of nudist beaches; however, if you're hoping to run into any Playboy beauties frolicking in the sand or see a buxom blonde replicating that famous Baywatch run minus the bikini, you'll be bitterly disappointed. But if you want to tan evenly and try some skinny-dipping away from the nudist families, the Lido of Berlin is a good option.

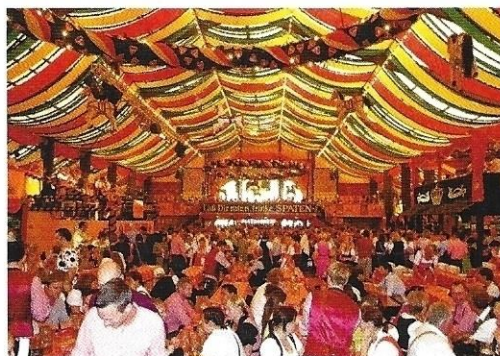
Now if you boys must see naked women – and if you've come to Hamburg, you may as well – you should do it right. Instead of traipsing around from street to street, your best bet is to find all the strip clubs you can handle in one convenient place – the Reeperbahn. You'll find it in Hamburg's St Pauli district, so if you also want to catch some local football in the daytime, you can kill two birds with one stone. If you want some Dutch courage first, or



▲ The Beatles-Platz is a nod to the Fab Four's residency in Hamburg

just want to pretend you've 'accidentally stumbled upon all the strip clubs', then your plan will be relatively convincing, as in among the sex shops, brothels and sex museum are restaurants, bars, clubs and discotheques.

The Reeperbahn may not be the same thriving place it was in the 1960s and 1970s, where the Beatles even performed in its famous Star Club (which sadly isn't open any more), but it still makes for a memorable experience. John Lennon



▲ Buxom maidens wearing corsets and drinking amazing beer. Oktoberfest is so tedious...

famously said "I was born in Liverpool, but grew up in Hamburg", and there are many tales of what the band got up to – including George Harrison playing a set with a toilet seat around his neck. The Beatles obviously made quite an impression on the Reeperbahn, as a Beatles-Platz is dedicated to them in the district, which is definitely one to put on the sightseeing list.

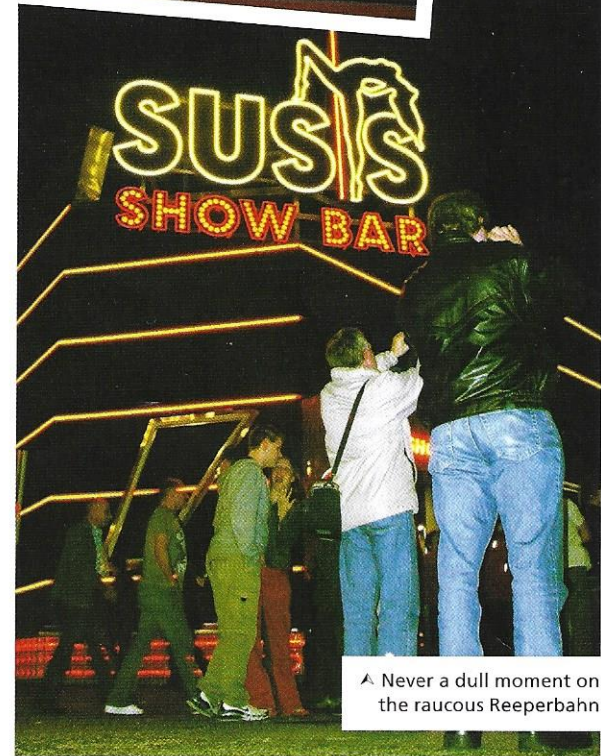
There are also many cultural elements to Germany, which can be enjoyed alongside the aforementioned less cerebral pleasures. If you want some sober tales to relay on your return home, why not walk along the remains of the Berlin Wall and check out the Reichstag and Unter den Linden, which has a lot of history in one place, including the Brandenburg Gate. If vertigo doesn't affect you, admiring the impressive skyline from above will leave you with great memories – visit the Panoramapunkt in Potsdamer Platz, where you'll be whizzed to the top in Europe's fastest lift and be presented with an awe-inspiring view.

For those wanting a holiday reminiscent of a Las Vegas one, there isn't a shortage of casinos here. But, be warned, there's a very strict dress code; a tie is essential for some places such

as the Spielbank Aachen and Spielbank Baden-Baden, so stumbling in wearing a t-shirt with a ketchup stain from your earlier bratwurst is a definite no-no. Poker is popular in this country, and the Berlin leg of the European Poker Tour is held in early April with a buy-in of €5,000 and a total prizepool of over €3 million. Texas Hold'em and Seven-Card Stud are the two most popular variations, and you'll be sure to find at least one table for each in the casinos.

The word 'shopping' may have previously been met with a shudder and a flashback of seemingly never-ending sprees with female counterparts, but there isn't a designer stiletto in sight here. If you manage to get to Berlin and want to relive some of your alcohol-fuelled nights back home, try Das Blaue Wunder, which sells the finest organic German wine, and the self-explanatory Absinthe Depot – both owners are partial to offering potential buyers free tasting samples.

Germany as a whole is guaranteed to provide the good times for a lads' holiday. So forget Malia in the scorching summer sun, it's all about chilling out with some cool German beer, watching local football and anticipating your wild night out. **G**



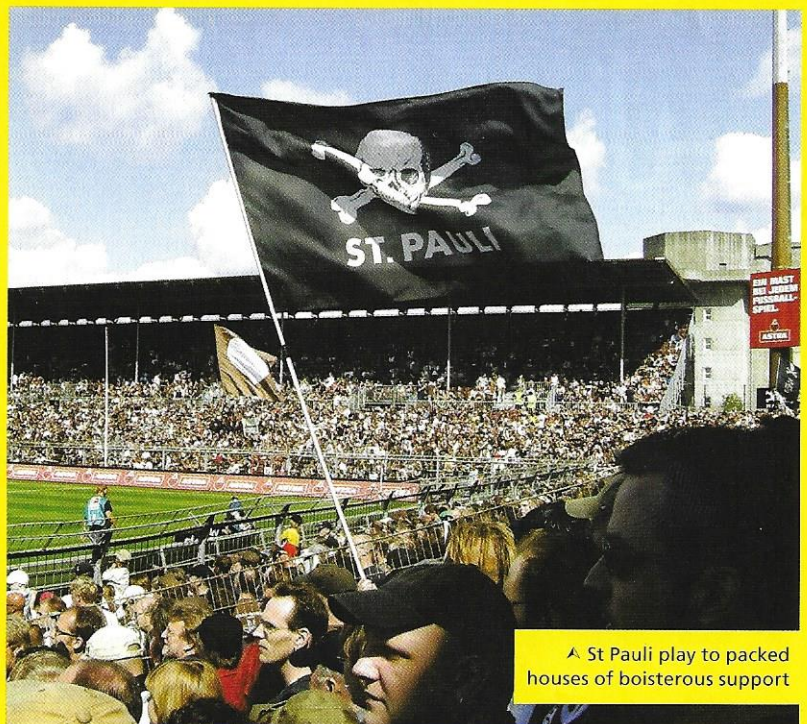
▲ Never a dull moment on the raucous Reeperbahn

FOOTY FUN

Germany is synonymous with football, and it's no surprise that many Brits flock here for some footy action. And why wouldn't they when the combined price of travel and stadium tickets can work out cheaper than a singular outing at one of England's Premier League grounds. St Pauli is one of Hamburg's finest teams, and has become a tourist attraction in its own right, in part due to its implementation of a hotdog train – it does exactly what it says on the tin; once considered to be a myth, the sausage train delivers hotdogs to VIP spectators in a bid to outdo themselves on their 'give everyone a free beer pump' promise. They are very much the 'cult' club of German football, with an anti-right wing political agenda and an emphasis on a free-spirited, party atmosphere at games – very much mirroring the crazy nature of the district itself.

St Pauli may be the most notorious, but Borussia Dortmund are another noteworthy club, not only for the team's success or because their stadium is Germany's largest, but because of the Südtribüne, which is Europe's biggest football standing terrace, boasting a capacity of 25,000. It is a sight to behold when packed to the rafters on match days.

Germany is also hosting the FIFA Women's World Cup this year between 26 June and 17 July; if you're around and want to catch the Opening Ceremony, it will be held in Berlin's Olympic Stadium.



▲ St Pauli play to packed houses of boisterous support



LAP UP *the luxury*

The Monaco Grand Prix is one of the most prestigious events in Formula One. The principality is famous for its glitz and glamour, and **Maria Pierides** discovers that all visitors have the chance to live like racing superstars



Monte Carlo is definitely one of the must-see locations of the world, and not just for gamblers and motor racing enthusiasts. Monaco is of course the location for one of the biggest F1 races of the year, so coming here to witness the action live for one day will leave the rest of your journey planner empty, ready to be filled in the streets of Monte Carlo. Monaco has some beautiful other districts such as Fontvieille, Monaco Ville and Moneghetti, but Monte Carlo is of course the most renowned, and is certainly the go-to place for thrills, gambling and an overall wild time. It's one of Las Vegas's biggest rivals in terms of bright lights and luxury casinos, so coming here could be a 2-for-1 deal; witnessing the Grand Prix live and going to some of the world's best casino resorts, all in one holiday – not too shabby.

The 69th Grand Prix of Monaco is fast approaching, and watching it live in the heart of the action couldn't be a better way to experience the year's most prestigious racing event. Monaco is an excellent holiday destination at the best of times, but die-hard F1 fans will know how sacred it is during the time of the Grand Prix.

The race route is one of the most scenic and exciting in the calendar, starting from the illustrious port and concluding above the Piscine swimming pool. The casino Spelugues, the Fairmont Hotel, the notorious chicane, the Rock and the Rascasse restaurant are all part of the scenery the F1 drivers speed by, and viewers of the race will no doubt enjoy them too. The chicane is an important feature of the race, as it is one of the only places where overtaking can be attempted; however, the sharp turns have been the cause of many accidents in the past, involving the likes of Karl Wendlinger in 1994, and more recently, Jenson Button in 2003.

▼ The Hermitage Hotel has stunning views overlooking the harbour



"During Grand Prix week everything is at your beck and call, with residents more than happy to make your stay more enjoyable"

▣ best views for the race, but as they are increasingly popular many of their offers are unavailable or very limited so soon before the event.

Getting there yourself however is very simple, and there are many travel options available. Flying is naturally the most time effective, with Nice airport serving as the best as it's the shortest distance from Monte Carlo. Driving there should desperately be avoided; as much as you'll want to go behind the wheel to step in the drivers' shoes, it won't get you very far, and won't get you there very fast either, meaning you won't get to channel Jenson Button in the slightest. EasyJet have lots of cheap and frequent flights out there, and you may even run into company founder Sir Stelios Haji-Ioannou himself, as he has a plush pad in the area.

Regarding where to stay yourself during your time here, luxury is the only way. The Monte Carlo Bay Resort and Hotel is a perfect option if you want a lazy holiday with minimal movement, as it appears to have everything laid on. Minutes away from the casino square the resort also has a casino on site, as well as its very own indoor and outdoor pools,

BONUS

The Monaco Grand Prix is widely considered to be one of the most important and prestigious automobile races in the world alongside the Indianapolis 500 and 24 Hours of Le Mans. These three are considered to form a Triple Crown. Graham Hill is the only driver to have completed the Triple Crown, by winning all three



▲ The most glamorous place in the world to watch motorsport

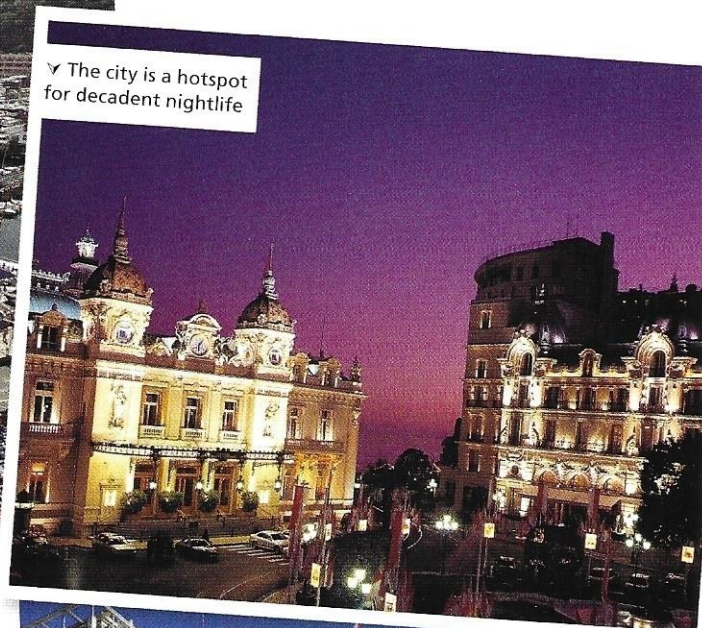
spa, Turkish baths and concert halls. The Hermitage is another can't-go-wrong hotel, with stunning views overlooking the harbour and the Prince's Palace.

Whether you go purely for the Grand Prix, miss it altogether, or try

and incorporate as much in your trip as possible, Monaco will not disappoint. It's an underrated party venue where anything goes and all inhibitions are lost, and Grand Prix season only heightens that. 📺



▲ The famous Monte Carlo harbour, seen here during Grand Prix weekend



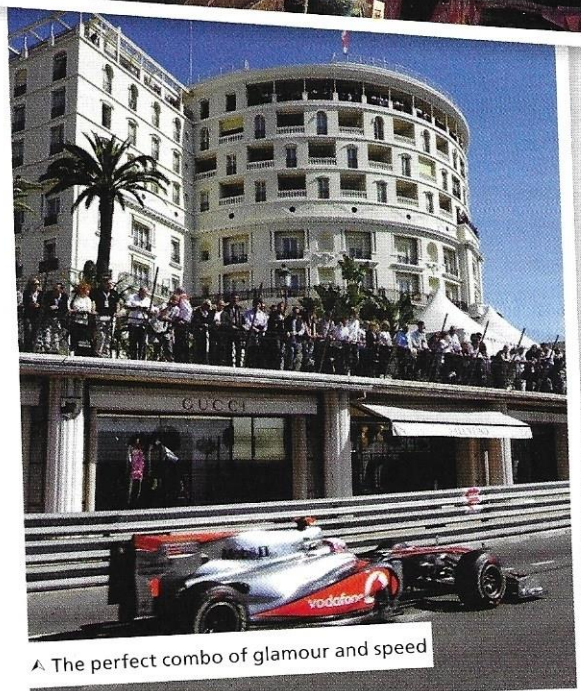
▼ The city is a hotspot for decadent nightlife

The life of a Formula One driver can be tense, with intense pressure mounting before and during the race, as some of the greatest drivers in the world compete against each other for the coveted place at the top of the podium. But off the track it's an entirely different story, where the drivers bask in the glory that Monte Carlo has to offer. There is no casino too luxurious or a party too glamorous for them, and it isn't wrong to compare their lives to those of playboy stags during their stay. An alcohol-drenched party on a yacht is nothing out of the ordinary for them, but visitors can also get in on the action too. During Grand Prix week everything is at your beck and call, with residents more than happy to make your stay more enjoyable by joining in with the celebrations and generally being helpful and friendly faces.

If you too want to party like the famous drivers and live like a celebrity,

there are a few hotspots that can almost guarantee a replica for their lifestyle, along with a good chance that you may run into them (or like-minded celebrities). Jimmyz is one of the celebrity hotspots, but only visit if you have a bottomless pocketful of very disposable income, as bottles of champagne are several hundred euros a pop. Spice Girl Melanie C, comedian Steve Coogan and actor Nick Moran have all been spotted in the gargantuan queue to get into one of Monaco's most prominent nightspots.

As you would expect, there are an army of package deals available to cater to each individual's tastes and needs. As most visitors will only have racing on the brain for one day however, the rest of the holiday offers the opportunity to be more spontaneous. Fugare in particular have created a name for themselves for providing excellent Grand Prix packages. They provide some of the



▲ The perfect combo of glamour and speed

CELEBRITY SCANDAL

The only thing better than knowing that celebrities run riot in Monte Carlo is seeing it with your very own eyes. Seeing it reported in the tabloids however is the next best thing. The list of celebrities making a splash in Monte Carlo is virtually endless, with some regular culprits more surprising than others. It's not just racing drivers that like to let their hair down in Monaco's most popular district. Back in Katie Price's heyday, it was reported in *The Observer* that the glamour model was seen "snogging ER doctor Eric la Salle", continually moaning about her then on/off boyfriend Dwight Yorke, and even offering a '3am Girl' from *The Mirror* a threesome.

And the gossip isn't just restricted to Monaco. The 1976 Formula One champ James Hunt allegedly slept with over 5,000 women, from young Japanese fans to British Airways airhostesses to all else in between; it won't be surprising to learn that he isn't the only F1 driver to have such a promiscuous lifestyle. After the race, the drivers supposedly have a no-holds-barred 48 hours, where anything and everything is possible.



WHERE'S THE ACTION?

Monte Carlo is bursting with luxury casino resorts that could very easily rival those of Las Vegas. The casinos cater to visitors on all budgets, but those wanting to take advantage of the luxury in some of the bigger casinos should be prepared to part with more euros. Casino de Monte Carlo only has a €10 entry fee, which is more than reasonable considering the gorgeous décor and luxurious setting, as well as an extensive range of table games available, which is why it boasts that it's one of the most 'prestigious and complete' casinos in Europe. However, there is a strict dress code, where no religious or military uniforms are allowed, and a jacket must be worn to play in the private room. Fans of more modern American games will love the Sun Casino, where you'll find games such as American roulette, stud poker, blackjack, craps, one-deck blackjack, Big Wheel and three-card poker.

▼ Monte Carlo's casinos are as lavish as you've always imagined them to be

