

The sophisticated coastline of the Côte d'Azur offers countless coves and beaches to explore

Irresistible summer cruising

Whether you are looking for the ultimate family holiday in the East Mediterranean, the glitz of the Côte d'Azur or the sheer tranquility of the Amalfi Coast and Sicily, we've gathered the recommendations of a handful of expert charter brokers to help you find the best cruising grounds for a summer charter.

The Côte d'Azur



Gaye Joyeau-Bourgeois, Burgess

I fell immediately under the Côte d'Azur's spell some 25 years ago upon my arrival from Australia. Not only for the obvious – its beautiful and sophisticated coastline, where

all of one's whims can seemingly be fulfilled – but also because of the equally enchanting and nearby pastoral pleasures of Provence. Where else may one enjoy a stroll directly from one's yacht in Monaco's Port Hercules, down the mythical streets of Monte Carlo, with its luxury boutiques of haute couture, precious jewels and fine art, followed by a magical evening in one of the town's legendary night clubs, perhaps Jimmy's or Moods, just minutes from the port?

The beauty of this location is that every day can bring a total change of pace and scene. Enjoy a leisurely lunch in Provence on the sun-soaked terrace of the Bastide de Moustiers (one Michelin star). Then, the same helicopter that flew you directly to this gastronomic country inn will whisk you away again to the buzz of Saint-Tropez, where your yacht will be waiting for you.

So, will it be a day lazing on one of Pampelonne's famous beaches and a late lunch at Club 55 or a short cruise to the unspoiled Porquerolle islands to snorkel the Marine Park's crystalline waters, followed by dining at the Mas du Langoustier? Choices, choices; that is really the secret of the Côte d'Azur's perennial popularity.

Don't miss: If a total pampering session sounds tempting, then the Château de la Messardiere in Saint-Tropez, with its La Prairie line, requires no introduction, unless one wishes to try the fresh option in neighboring Ramatuelle at La Réserve – an exceptionally spacious spa, in a chic, contemporary setting.

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Harborside life at Saint-Tropez

Ionian Islands and the Cyclades



Annemarie Gathercole, International Yacht Register

Greece has a very rich history and culture, which, when

combined with aqua blue seas, spectacular bays and hundreds of unique islands, makes for an ideal cruising location. Its islands abound with archaeological sites, architecture, sculptures and fascinating local traditions. The food is incredible whether you eat in the traditional Greek tavernas (try the feta in honey and the cheese pastry) or in the many divine restaurants, alfresco style.

The Ionian Islands, located off the west coast of Greece, are composed of Corfu, Kefalonia, Zakynthos, Lefkada, Ithaca, Paxos and Kythira. Every Ionian island, just like every Greek island, has its own distinct character and between them they offer a unique experience which will, of course, include swimming, scuba diving, snorkeling, water skiing, sailing and windsurfing.

The wild and rocky Cyclades are located in the Aegean Sea. Mykonos, Naxos and Santorini are best known for their beautiful landscapes and white houses with blue windows, as well as their shopping and nightlife. Santorini's dramatic black volcanic rock is a must-see and Little Venice in Mykonos is where you will probably experience the most amazing sunset you have ever seen. Later in the evening I recommend stepping ashore at La Maison de Catherine for fantastic chateaubriand.

July and August are normally the windiest months here, so for cruising it is preferable to visit in June or September.

Don't miss: The small island of Delos is an outstanding archaeological site that I always recommend to my clients.

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Santorini boasts breathtaking views

Sicily and the Aeolian Islands



Nicolas Benazeth, Yachting Partners International

Sicily and the Aeolian archipelago are perhaps two of the most overlooked

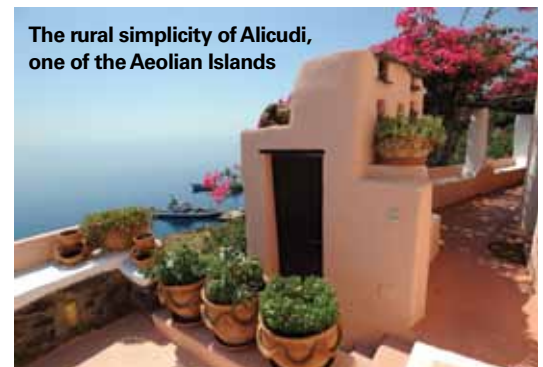
charter destinations in the Mediterranean. They are easily accessible by air and sea and offer unspoiled natural beauty as well as vibrant culture and a rich heritage. Add just the right amount of fine dining and jet-set lifestyle on Panarea and you have the perfect recipe for a great charter.

Vulcano is just 15 miles from the north coast of Sicily and with the other islands all within two hours' cruising of each other, you can see everything while still stopping off along the way for watersports or to take in the stunning views. Explore the crystal clear waters around Filicudi and the striking "Canna" – a pillar of rock rising 70 metres straight out of the sea. The more adventurous will scuba dive around the base of the Stromboli volcano and cook their breakfast eggs on its volcanic vents. Fortunately, there is plenty of time to recover in the nearby hot springs with a glass of the famous Malvasia wine from neighboring Salina.

After a few days of island-hopping, it is well worth crossing the mythical straits of Messina to explore the east coast of Sicily. From Taormina, a short excursion will take you through the picturesque hill villages of Savoca and Forza d'Agro, which were made famous by The Godfather movies. For those with a little more time, Sicily combines well with a cruise on the Amalfi coast – an easy overnight passage to the north.

Don't miss: For natural wonders, it's hard to beat watching the erupting Stromboli volcano light up the night sky while dining on the aft deck of your yacht.

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The rural simplicity of Alicudi, one of the Aeolian Islands