



---

# Cannes can

Ten days of glitz, glamour and pure movie love comprise the agenda for the world's most prestigious film festival on France's sparkling Côte d'Azur, writes **Maeve Hosea**

---

**C**haracterised by leading lights walking the red carpet, to zeitgeist screenings; intense film industry hobnobbing on the terraces of Belle Époque hotels; paparazzi spoilt for choice on the star-

studded Croisette promenade, and the A-list hopping exclusive parties in the surrounding hills; this is Cannes. The ambitious, artistic, extravagant Cannes Film Festival is now into its 72nd edition. First conceived

as a democratic counter to what was then a fascist-enabled cinema gala in Venice, the new festival of Cannes set out to be the place to make bold cinematic discoveries. It has been a launchpad for cinematic big hitters ever since.

The invitation-only event is where the great and the greatest of international film come each year in search of the coveted Palme d'Or trophy. Collected across the years by notables such as Orson Welles for *The Third Man*; Federico Fellini's for the then controversial *La Dolce Vita* and Martin Scorsese for his neo-

noir *Taxi Driver*, around 20 feature films compete each year for the prize.

Among the stars that have shone in Cannes over the past seven decades are Sophia Loren, Elizabeth Taylor, Grace Kelly, Gérard Depardieu and Joaquin Phoenix. The jury at Cannes is traditionally interested in originality, in films that take bold risks, and those that push the medium of cinema forward. Seminal directors who have made their names here include ➤

---

**Above: Grace Kelly at the Cannes Film Festival in 1955**

---





Francois Truffaut, Alfred Hitchcock, Steven Soderbergh, Jane Campion, Quentin Tarantino, and Spike Lee, who screened his debut feature *She's Gotta Have It* here in 1986.

Off screen, the French Riviera location is the place to see and be seen. From the event's inception the publicity savvy realised Mediterranean sea and sunshine provide the perfect photo opportunity. In the early decades stars sojourned for two weeks in full view of the news cameras. Gorgeous black and white photography reveals Kirk Douglas casually braiding Brigitte Bardot's hair on the beach; perfect ice-cold blonde Grace Kelly epitomising French Riviera chic on the Croisette before giving Hollywood up to become Princess Grace of Monaco; loved-up Serge Gainsbourg and Jane Birkin tête-à-tête in local restaurants. With the concept of celebrity now fully-fledged, many stars these days choose to stay in exclusive hotels up the coast, dropping into town only for choice film premieres and red carpet photo calls.

Mixing a heady cocktail of beauty, fame and starchy



Mediterranean nights, the festival has always been as much a celebration of fashion as film, and a key pulse point of global style trends on and off the red carpet. Think 18-year-old Brigitte Bardot scandalising in a – then – daring bikini in 1953; Paul Newman sauntering along the seafront in a white polo neck 1973; Madonna in a Jean-Paul Gaultier conical bra for her 1991 *In Bed With Madonna* documentary. Let's not forget Angelina Jolie in 2011 – one half of Hollywood's then hottest power couple – wowing red carpet crowds in a split-to-the-hip chocolate silk Versace gown for husband Brad Pitt's *Tree of Life* premiere.

In and around the celebrated Palais des Festivals venue, actors and film-makers seek to wow the critics and woo the public. Off the iconic red carpet, the film festival in Cannes likes to keep things shamelessly elitist with slews of lavish and exclusive parties seeking to outdo each other in terms of pomp and glamour. With the bright lights of media attention not always welcome, today's soirees often convene after dark at a luxury villa in the hills or on board the ship of a suitably rich and vogueish figure. Super yachts boast anti-paparazzi shields and a level of service rarely found on dry land.

While the seaside resort in May is synonymous with

a glossy lifestyle and the perfect backdrop for pretty people to make a splash – think cinema siren Claudia Cardinale of Palme d'Or winner *The Leopard* and co-star Burt Lancaster taking a real leopard for a stroll on the Croisette in 1963 – there are inelegant moments too: Lars Von Trier announcing to the press that he 'understands Hitler'; the tension between Universal Soldier co-stars Jean Claude Van Damme and Dolph Lundgren translating into a very public, staged brawl on the steps of the Palais des Festivals venue; or the cast of Michael Winterbottom's *24 Hour Party People* evicted from a private beach for pelting diners at an upscale restaurant with faux dead pigeons.

As much as the depth, scope and stylish production of the cinematic medium, the festival celebrates real-world emotions and the possibility of bringing dreams to life. ■

**Top:** Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie at *The Tree of Life* screening in 2011 **Above:** Roberto Cavalli, Sharon Stone and Eva Cavalli at Cannes in 2014