

Chapter 22 - An English Invasion of the Riviera

Chapter 22 – An English Invasion of the Riviera begins with a chance deviation that changed the destiny of the French coast. When Lord Brougham unexpectedly stopped in Cannes due to travel restrictions, he discovered a place overlooked by the traditional Grand Tour. The charm of the Riviera's sunshine, sea, and gentle climate convinced him to settle, leading to the construction of a villa that would serve as the first English outpost in the region. His presence quickly attracted fellow aristocrats who followed his lead, seeking warmth and refinement outside England's gray winters. This early migration sparked the transformation of the Riviera from a quiet coastline to a prestigious destination, one lined with opulent estates stretching between Marseilles and Genoa. Cannes, in particular, evolved into a seasonal playground for the English upper class, blending British restraint with Mediterranean luxury.

What set the English apart was not only their presence but their refusal to assimilate fully. Instead of adapting to French life, they recreated their own version of England along the Riviera's edge. Their customs arrived with them—afternoon tea, Anglican chapels, and English-style gardens appeared like footprints of a quiet conquest. Locals adjusted their services to meet British expectations, giving rise to an economy that catered almost exclusively to their visitors. The English didn't just bring money; they brought a system, culture, and way of living that reshaped the identity of these towns. Their influence was so dominant that, for a time, Cannes functioned more like an English resort than a French port. Despite being guests, they subtly dictated the tone of the place.

Chapter 22 – An English Invasion of the Riviera explores this cultural transplantation with a tone that is both amused and critical. The British, known for their nationalism,

were equally known for their inability to leave it behind, even when abroad. Their insistence on English cuisine, rituals, and language often created friction with locals and invited caricature. Yet it also demonstrated a curious contradiction: while famously private and conservative at home, abroad they became bold in reshaping foreign spaces to reflect their own identity. Even their women, criticized for masculine dress and less refined demeanor, held firm to their way of being, rejecting the French ideal of elegance. At evening events, the visual contrast was unmistakable—British women, in darker fabrics and simpler silhouettes, stood in stark opposition to the Parisian flair around them. It was a difference of worldview as much as style.

The British exportation of their culture was more than fashion and tea—it was embedded in their buildings, routines, and daily habits. Villas were constructed not in the light, open-air style of Mediterranean homes but in imitation of English estates, complete with fireplaces unsuited for the Riviera climate. English clubs and private reading rooms emerged, allowing expats to socialize in familiar fashion, avoiding the challenge of immersion. While other travelers adapted, the British chose to plant roots that preserved their distance. This created enclaves where English customs thrived, even if disconnected from the place that hosted them. And though often viewed as cold or condescending by locals, their economic contribution could not be ignored. Their seasonal arrivals meant employment and income for French merchants, hoteliers, and domestic workers.

Chapter 22 – An English Invasion of the Riviera also contrasts the larger cultural personalities of England and France. Using the metaphor of Rome and Greece, the author suggests that England, like Rome, commands through dominance, structure, and power, while France, like Greece, excels in grace, intellect, and artistic refinement. This analogy frames the English expansion as both a cultural assertion and a loss of sensitivity to local brilliance. While they brought stability and influence, they often overlooked the more nuanced contributions of French culture. The British admired the beauty of the Riviera, but seemed less inclined to participate in its existing rhythm. This created a quiet tension, where mutual curiosity was often overshadowed by

mutual misunderstanding.

Modern tourism still reflects the patterns established by this early English presence. The Riviera remains a magnet for travelers seeking elegance, sunshine, and luxury—but the blueprint was drafted by 19th-century English settlers who redefined what foreign leisure could look like. Their legacy continues in place names, architecture, and local traditions that persist today, woven into the fabric of a region once untouched by foreign luxury. Though their colonization was not military, it was cultural—subtle, sustained, and far-reaching. Chapter 22 captures this invasion not as conquest but as transformation, revealing how even leisure can carry the weight of national identity. In observing this, the text invites reflection on how travel, when driven by status and comfort, becomes less about discovering the world and more about rearranging it to feel like home.