



Dinner event at a Michelin chef's private dining room © D.R.

# Native Spaces

## The innovative booking site for events

By NICOLE RUSKELL

The Côte d'Azur offers the best of so many things. We have excellent weather, excellent food, gorgeous properties with gorgeous views and the region consistently ranks in the top lists of preferred destinations. It's no wonder that so many international festivals and trade shows choose the French Riviera for their annual events. Add to the list that we are now also a hotbed for tech innovation and entrepreneurs, and it makes quite the package.

If we put all of the above traits into one company, we would get *Native Spaces*, a local start-up providing event 'spaces' throughout this beautiful region for visiting companies and locals alike.

At a small café in Cannes, *Riviera Insider* met with Tanya Bencheva-Vigier, founder and CEO (chief everything officer). Originally from Bulgaria, Tanya had a successful career in London, working in the world of corporate

technology, specialising in digital transformation for telecom and media companies. When her fiancé moved to the Côte d'Azur, she began travelling back and forth, each time noting the number of beautiful homes and villas sitting shut during the off-season. The idea for *Native Spaces* was planted during a 'secret dinner' in a small florist shop in Nice. This intimate event was not only lovely, but it was also bringing extra revenue to a small business that would have otherwise been closed. Tanya mapped this across to the empty villas that could also be earning revenue instead of staying shut.

"The region hosts so many events in the winter. The companies who attend look for high and mid-level venues but due to a lack of local availability or contacts, they often resort to renting hotel rooms for their gatherings," she explains.

So Tanya found herself contemplating two clear needs – extra revenue for shut properties and creative venues for private events. Her corporate experience had given her enough examples of "boring" conference rooms – creative spaces could be a game changer. "I thought, may-be there is a way for people to book such places." To her surprise, there wasn't. Her idea then "evolved" into a full-service event booking site that would be easy to navigate, show transparent prices, be multi-lingual and searchable by several different filters.

### Software development

She brought on a coding and AI expert from London, James Buckland, and together they created their own booking site, exclusively for events, that allows anyone to search their spaces by several different criteria (capacity, budget, location, sea view, dance floor, boat access, pool, etc.). The program James developed is intuitive and it learns from user searches, increasing their keyword search ability each time.

*Native Spaces* launched in 2018, with about 30 properties. Today, they have over 200, ranging from stunning private villas to intimate spaces, including a 5-person boat with an expanding dancefloor. Each space is visited and verified by Tanya before making their list. They don't charge a fee to be included on their site – only a booking commission – they are fully insured and have an expert cleaning crew to ensure properties are immaculate. In addition to venues, they have a growing list of verified services from caterers, entertainers, artisans, DJs and more. Their current list of caterers that range significantly by specialty and budget, from casual group plates to Michelin-starred chefs.

Tanya's long-term vision for her site is to be able to offer a 'Business class service' to accompany clients through all their event planning needs.



A beautiful sea-view villa in Èze © D.R.

### Helping locals

"There are so many local artisans but they struggle to be visible to international clients," she says. It is clear that beyond her business sense, Tanya is driven by a more altruistic

sense of helping locals – whether small businesses, municipalities, museums or property owners – reach a broad international market, while also answering the needs of clientele to find their perfect event space.

Despite the success of the site barely two years in, Tanya is still in growth mode, keeping busy meeting with investors and city officials. Her ultimate goal is to make *Native Spaces* the go-to

site for all event needs in many of the top world destinations.

For now, she is very happy with their custom-made website. It is clear, intuitive, transparent on price and offers flexible choices, no matter if someone is planning a corporate product launch, a destination wedding or a friend's birthday party.

[www.native-spaces.com](http://www.native-spaces.com). ▀



Founder, Tanya Bencheva-Vigier © D.R.