

## Barcelona is in the mix for DJ Reagan

### Radio host enjoys Spain's food and culture – but mostly the food

By Stephanie Citron, Special to The Baltimore Sun

Many Baltimoreans declare that their morning commute only becomes bearable when tuned into the crazy antics of WWMX-FM morning radio host Reagan Warfield. He regularly interviews world-famous celebrities and rock stars and banters with a widespread listening audience, but his most popular calling card is being the largely undefeatable star of the show's pop-culture trivia game "Smarter Than Reagan."

While many DJs enjoy the faceless public anonymity of radio, Warfield is known for participating in a number of regional charity events while also finding time to teach at his alma mater, Loyola University Maryland. Because the 32-year-old radio host is so widely recognized around town, we decided to ask him where he goes when he needs an escape. And since that is Warfield's forte, he was only too happy to tell us all about it.

**When you've needed a getaway, where have you ventured?**



Of the big trips, I've been to Iceland, Spain and also to Dominican Republic on my honeymoon.

**Do you have a favorite?**

Barcelona, Spain.

**What made you choose to visit Barcelona?**

I was looking for someplace a little off the beaten path to visit, and my wife had a business trip in Barcelona, so I decided to tag along — and we turned it into a full-blown vacation.

**What does your wife do?**

[She is] director of public relations for [Baltimore's office of tourism] Visit Baltimore.

## What time of year did you visit?

We went in November, right after Thanksgiving. It was beautiful. If you look at the globe, we are similar latitude-wise to Barcelona, so it wasn't very different than it is here that time of year — except that it still had the beautiful Mediterranean sun.

## Where did you stay?

We stayed right in the city. Las Ramblas is the big touristy boulevard through the town, and we stayed in a hotel right off of there — Hotel 1898. It's an absolutely beautiful boutique hotel that was an old headquarters for a tobacco company. It reminds me a lot of Hotel Monaco here because it's a retrofitted hotel with a lot of cool architecture. Even though I loved the hotel, if I went back, now that I've seen the major sites, I might stay a little north of the city, because it does seem a little less touristy there. [Although the formal name for the central boulevard through the main tourist district of Barcelona is officially called La Rambla, the street contains a number of prominent arteries, each bearing a different name, and collectively is referred to as Las Ramblas.]

## For how long were you there?

About a week.

## What did you do?

We did a lot of the touristy stuff: La [Sagrada] Familia, a big beautiful church designed by [Spanish architect Antoni] Gaudi. We did all of the main Gaudi sites; in the northern part of the city there are a bunch of apartment buildings he designed that are just so different than anything else you've seen because there's so much curvature. We wandered around Las Ramblas, of course. We did all of the Olympic stuff — Olympic Park. A lot of eating, as well. I'm a foodie, so I do a lot of research about food when I travel.



## What did you find for foodies?

A lot of authentic Catalan cuisine; delicious tapas and a lot of the flavors that really blend together for that distinctive cuisine that makes it different than Spanish cuisine — it has Mediterranean influences, a little bit of French as well. We found a place that [TV host and chef] Anthony Bourdain went to on [Food Network show] "No Reservations." Quimet & Quimet. It was this dinky, hole-in-the-wall tapas place; no seats or anything. It just had maybe a 10-foot bar. I walked up and said "make me whatever you can," which was a lot of fun.

It turned out to be a lot of pickled seafood, and some pickled other things, but it was absolutely delicious. You know, the touristy places will have [their menu written in] Catalan, Spanish and English, but the less touristy places will only have Catalan and English. So I knew I hit a home run when I found the just Catalan menu here. I still don't know all that I ate — it was pretty brave of me, even as a foodie — but it was all delicious. I'm just craving going back there sometime. Another restaurant, called

MariscCo, featured a [fresh] seafood case as soon as you walked in. You pointed to what you wanted and they grilled it up right away. So delicious. Another classic restaurant we went to was Els Quatre Gats, which has a rich history, including its distinction as being the site of Picasso's first public show.

### **Memorable libations?**

Lots of sangria, and red wine was usually cheaper than anything else, even water, so we enjoyed a lot of wine with lunch and dinner.

### **How was the euro?**

Not great. I don't have a history of having good luck with the European exchange rate. I had the pleasure of being in Iceland when the euro was at its all-time high, and a meal at a sub shop was the equivalent of 30 U.S. dollars. So it wasn't that terrible in comparison.

### **Where else did you go?**

[We went to] Parc Guell, an urban park environment composed of vibrant floral gardens and animated sculptures by Gaudi. It's like something out of a fairy tale. All the mosaic tiles — stunning architecture and mosaic on top of it all. It's a vibrant place — the musicians, street vendors. And it's got a beautiful view of the city, as well.

We went to the Picasso Museum. And [to] Montserrat, a multi-peaked mountain near Barcelona within the Catalan Pre-Coastal Range. There's a big beautiful basilica and there are carnival rides. [Laughs.] But also there are a bunch of beautiful peaks from where you can look out onto the city because you are so high up.

### **Did you bring any souvenirs back with you?**

Well this is kind of odd, but we were there just before Christmastime and so a lot of markets were popping up around town. The most bizarre little piece of their culture that I stumbled upon – and brought back and shared with people — was this thing called a Caganer. It is a traditional Catalan figure that is...uh, pooping. And they often place this figure near their nativity scenes. When you go to the markets you can buy it in [the form of] any political figure from around the world and pretty much any major sports figure — they have David Beckham and the pope and Obama. We were in one of the malls and there was a 30-foot Santa ... in the crouch. That shows you how commonplace this is there. People today don't even know where this [iconic concept] came from.

### **That is indeed one of the strangest customs I've ever heard of! So do you have any other funny memories?**

When we got to the airport to come home, we discovered that there was an air traffic controller strike, so we couldn't get back. It was crazy — people were taking buses to Paris and other places. We decided to stick it out and ended up staying for another two days. But after seven days of having eaten so adventurously, we just wanted good old American food ... so we ended up at a McDonald's. Now I can



understand a little better when I see American tourists heading for McDonald's.

### **When you are traveling, do you ever pick up trivia stuff for "Smarter Than Reagan"?**

I'm a sponge for really useless information. I remember [the name of the restaurant] Quimet & Quimet faster than ... like, I don't know my wife's phone number.

### **Before you go to a new destination, do you research the top radio hosts and the local music scene?**

I didn't listen to a lot of radio when I was there because I wouldn't understand it. But the year that we went, the Train song "Hey, Soul Sister" was everywhere. It was one of those songs we played once an hour on MIX-106 in Baltimore and I was eager to get away from it. Well, the very first restaurant we walked into in Barcelona off Las Ramblas, "Hey, Soul Sister" was playing! So I'm always intrigued how quickly music transfers over. If there is someplace that there happens to have local music playing, we might check it out, but really for me its about the food and museums and stuff.

### **Do you have a current book you are recommending?**

I'm a huge "Wicked" fan, so I'm finally reading the book. Also, a bit fitting considering the "Smarter than Reagan" thing, is "Are You Smart Enough To Work At Google?" I'm halfway through the book, and the jury's still out as to whether I am or not.

### **What is the one item you cannot travel without?**

[The travel website] TripAdvisor has been so helpful for me. A lot of the restaurants we've gone to we've found on there. You're able to find out what of the touristy stuff really stands out. Another thing is my Gorillapod flexible tripod. A lot of the pictures the two of us take are with a timer on the camera and a Gorillapod. It's often easier than trying to ask a stranger.



### **What's next on your travel bucket list?**

You know, we didn't do a real vacation last year, and we want to do it up this year. Italy is on the top of [my wife's] list, but I've got more exotic places like Thailand. I really want to do Costa Rica and Chile, and I think both of us want to do Australia, but that's really a commitment. It's tough for me to get off work two weeks at a time. So that might have to be retirement.

If you go

Barcelona, in Spain's northeastern region, is the country's second-largest city and the capital of the region called Catalonia. The city encompasses a harmonious fusion of well-preserved ancient architecture while fostering a hip cultural scene with its international college students who come to study at its prominent university. Info: [barcelonaturisme.com](http://barcelonaturisme.com).

Note: When calling the numbers below, first dial 011, then dial Spain's country code, 34, before dialing the

nine-digit phone number.

## Getting there

Reagan Warfield and his wife, Sara, flew to Barcelona on British Airways, which offer flights to Barcelona's El Prat Airport from BWI-Marshall Airport through London's Heathrow Airport, beginning at about \$975 round-trip.

## Lodging

**H1898**, La Rambla 109, 935-529-552, [hotel1898.com](http://hotel1898.com). Great hotel options are plentiful in Barcelona. Warfield stayed center city at the four-star Hotel 1898, ranked no.8 by TripAdvisor. Built in 1891, the building still bears the insignia of The Philippines Tobacco Company, once headquartered there. From about \$268 per night.

**Hotel Montecarlo Barcelona**, La Rambla 124, 934-120-404, [montecarlobcn.com/en](http://montecarlobcn.com/en). Another highly ranked, centrally-located choice. Rates start at about \$290.

## Dining

**Quimet & Quimet**, Carrer del Poeta Cabanyes 25, +34 93 442 3142. It's standing room only at the city's most popular tapas bar.

**Els Quatre Gats**, Carrer de Montsió 3, 93-302-41-40, [4gats.com](http://4gats.com). A circa-1897 cafe/pub/speakeasy for members of the moderniste movement, with famed patrons like Pablo Picasso. Today it retains stunning turn-of-the-century decor, traditional Spanish cuisine and live, local music.

## Don't Miss

**Seeing the Gaudi architecture.** The Spanish architect's famous "dripping" facades are all over the city. He spent most of his career building La Sagrada Familia. Go to [sagradafamilia.cat](http://sagradafamilia.cat). More buildings can be explored at [gauidesigner.com](http://gauidesigner.com)

**The Gothic Quarter.** This labyrinthine neighborhood contains the original city settled by the Romans, ancient cathedrals, and El Call, the medieval Jewish quarter.

**The Picasso Museum**, Carrer Montcada 15-23, 93-256-30-00, [museupicasso@bcn.cat](mailto:museupicasso@bcn.cat). Houses over 4,000 original works by Pablo Picasso, much of it depicting his love affair with the city of Barcelona. After the museum, wander the winding cobblestoned streets of the tiny village-within-a-city, El Born. This once-medieval district is now a hip and happening neighborhood with historic attractions, craft artisans like violin-makers and glass blowers, artsy boutiques and ancient tapas bars.

—*Stephanie Citron*

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