

Cruising the Mediterranean with Ravens' Chris Carr

Ravens cornerback recharges in Monte Carlo, Italy, Greece and Turkey

By Stephanie Citron, Special to The Baltimore Sun



Ravens cornerback Chris Carr is everywhere, all at once.

He had played in 97 straight games before being injured in this year's season opener, where he was part of a defense that forced a franchise-record seven turnovers in a 35-7 victory over the Pittsburgh Steelers.

On the field, Carr is praised for his initiative, versatility and camaraderie with his teammates. Off the field, he's spent time interning at a law firm, a profession he plans to pursue after football. Last winter, the engaging political science major from Boise State was presented with the media's Good Guy Award for his accessibility and candor.

Carr recently spoke with us about how he prefers to recharge his good energy in the off-season: traveling to foreign shores. His favorite destination? Just about all of them.

What is your favorite travel destination?

It's kind of hard to choose one; I've been to a lot of wonderful places. It's like choosing my favorite Radiohead song — so hard! But two years ago, my wife Sarah and I went on a Mediterranean cruise, where I was able to spend time in several places that have become favorites: Nice, France, Rome and Capri, Italy, and some other ports in the Mediterranean, including some in Greece and Turkey.

How long did you spend in each spot?

We spent two nights in each of those and one night in the others. We'd be there all day and then just get back on the ship to sleep.

What kinds of things can you do in that time frame?

I actually drove in Nice; that was an experience in itself. We went to Monte Carlo — it's really close, maybe about 12 miles away. There is this castle, the Prince's Palace, that is magnificent. There are also designer shops all around. You can't actually go inside the Monte Carlo Hotel or Grand Casino unless you are staying at the hotel, but you see the valet taking all of the incredible cars, like Bentleys and Rolls'.

What time of year were you there?

Summertime. It was about 80 degrees, and definitely beach weather.



How are the beaches?

Just beautiful. The bluest water I've ever seen: baby blue! There were thousands of people hanging out. On U.S. beaches, there are people playing volleyball or throwing Frisbees, but [in Nice] it was quiet. People seemed to be there just to relax and maybe sip on some wine by the beautiful water.

Wine on the beach?

They sell it nearby. If you walked 20 feet from the beachfront there was a plaza (Place Massena) with shops and cafes overlooking everything. People brought food and wine from the markets down to the beach, or they just sat outside at the cafes. We went to a cafe [le Grand Cafe de Lyon,] and I had a delicious quiche.

Where else did you visit?

Santorini and Athens, Greece, and Ephesus, Turkey. In Ephesus, there are a lot of biblical sites. Many of Jesus' followers were there, so we took a tour of that; it was cool to see it all. In Italy we did day trips to Florence and Pisa. In Florence we saw the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore [aka the Duomo] and the Torre dei Barbadori tower. In Pisa we saw the Piazza del Duomo [Cathedral Square] and the Leaning Tower.

Any memorable meals?

Oh, man. So many. In Capri we ate in an incredible restaurant at this hotel way up on the mountain called the Grand Hotel Quisisana. This had to be a five-star hotel; it was one of the nicest I've ever seen.

Which cruise line was this?

This was Royal Caribbean. I went on a Princess cruise before this trip. This was a bigger boat, and it was nice because you didn't feel any rocking.

Were there fun activities on the ship?

This cruise had more activities than the Princess cruise: rock-climbing, a basketball court, racquetball, a nice workout area and a lot of shows. At night they had karaoke and a really great club to dance. There was a magician that was pretty good. He actually took three different people's wedding rings and then he joined them. I saw the people outside the cruise and asked, "Was that really your ring," and they said yes. I know a little bit about magic because I've done some myself, but I have no idea how he did that trick.

Are there any destinations from this cruise that you'd like to visit again?

I'd like to see more of Rome and Capri. I definitely want to go back to Nice — maybe to stay there for a while.

How often do you travel?

I travel a lot with the Ravens, so I try to take one big vacation a year. Before this cruise, I went to London for 10 days, and the other cruise was a Tahitian cruise. I've also been to Maui.

What is the one item you will not travel without?

I always have to have some books. I like a variety ... Mark Twain, David McCullough.

What's on your nightstand right now?

I just got finished reading Ron Paul's "Liberty Defined," and now I'm reading "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks."

What is next on your travel wish list?

Now I'm having a love affair with Europe, so I want to go back there. I'm hearing great things about Germany. I really want to see Berlin and Munich.

If you go

Cruising the Mediterranean: Royal Caribbean offers numerous Mediterranean cruises embarking from Barcelona, Spain. Many have itineraries similar to the one Chris Carr followed during his cruise. The port calls vary, depending on the ship and the time span of the cruise, ranging from six to 12 nights. Rates also vary, ranging from about \$699 to \$2,200 per person. (Prices are based on the current euro

conversion rate.) Go to royalcaribbean.com.

Tours

Carr arranged a few guided land excursions online through Royal Caribbean's website. Other times, he and his wife "winged it" and rented cars for exploring on their own. Royal Caribbean's excursions are offered at \$60-\$250 per person.

Dining

All-inclusive meals can be found around the clock on most cruises. On shore, the dining options are plentiful.

Travelers do best when they research the ports and destinations in advance to find the cuisine, setting and price range that best suits them. Here are a few recommendations, including Carr's favorite spots:

Nice, France: Le Grand Cafe de Lyon, 33 Avenue Jean Médecin. (0)4.93.88.13.17; entrees range from \$4-\$50. Go to cafedelyon.fr/

Monte Carlo: La Chaumiere is a lovely cafe famous for its breathtaking panoramic views of Monaco.

Capri, Italy: Hotel Quisisana has two award-winning restaurants. Rendez-Vous is the street-side cafe, offering salads, pizzas and entrees (\$33-\$64). Qvisi is the formal dining spot, known for its romantic, stunning views (\$99-\$150). Via Camerelle, 2 Capri 39 081 8370788. Go to quisisana.com/en/restaurant

Don't miss

Barcelona: Before boarding the ship, take in some of Barcelona's captivating architectural and art sites. Home to the works of masters Picasso and Miro, Barcelona gracefully balances its modernist vibe within a picturesque, ancient cityscape and well-maintained historic districts.

Italy: Take an excursion from the port of Naples to the ancient ruins of Pompeii and Herculaneum, the towns destroyed in A.D. 79 by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius — and subsequently preserved by its volcanic ash.

Turkey: Organize a day trip in Ephesus, Turkey. The still-intact original marble streets of the 11th-century B.C. city have retained the grooves produced by chariot wheels. Also check out such treasures as the House of the Virgin, Temple of Artemis, the three-story Library of Celsius, the Temple of Hadrian, the Fountain of Trajan and much more.

