



**Your on the  
Water Reporter**



**Uyless Black**

**Cruising the Northern Mediterranean  
Monaco-Monte Carlo**

## Cruising the Northern Med Report Five: Monaco and Monte Carlo

**August 8, 2023**

I arose early today. I wanted to take in the dawn, as well as our ship's sailing into Monaco. The dawn showed itself along with Monaco's shoreline, as seen in the left photo in Figure 5-1. Monaco's harbor is shown in the middle photo, as is one of the city's harbor buildings in the right picture. (Several of the photos in this report, sites where I was not allowed or could not take pictures, are courtesy of Bing.)

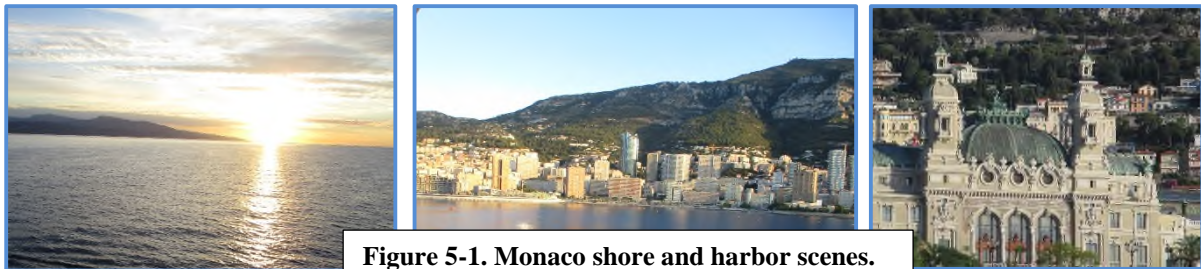


Figure 5-1. Monaco shore and harbor scenes.



Figure 5-2. One of the wealthiest harbors in the world.

Figure 5-2 is a view of the Monaco harbor. Our ship was docked in the same position as the vessel noted with a red arrow. Many of the boats in this harbor are more accurately called ships. Of course, from this picture, it is obvious none of them are close to the size of the Viking Sky passenger ship. But some are huge, as well as luxurious.

The city is home to 38,682 people and is known as one of the most expensive and affluent places in the world. Over 30 percent of the residents are millionaires. It is tiny. With an area of 0.78 sq mi (2.02 km), only Vatican City is a smaller sovereign state.

As our ship was pulling into this harbor, a yacht passed by us, heading for a berth near the downtown pier. I was standing on our balcony, and did not have time to take a picture of the entire ship. Figure 5-3 show two images of this yacht.

At a 2022 boat show in Florida, a secondhand yacht was offered for sale for ninety million dollars. The boat was 203 feet in length, and was accompanied by several other boats. The yacht was furnished with a Steinway piano, art frescoes, and protected with elaborate security systems.

Yet, this so-called superyacht is a modest boat in comparison to other superyachts. Some are, "...more than five hundred feet, on a scale with naval destroyers, and cost six or seven times more than [the two hundred feet craft]."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Evan Osnos, "The Floating World," *The New Yorker*, 25 July 2022, 33.



Figure 5-3. Showboat.

We were told that many of these superyachts sail in and out of the Monaco harbor. Many? How many people in this world can afford such an extravagance? One might think the market place for superyachts is limited, a few dozen sold a year, for example. Not quite.

In 2021, the industry sold a record eight hundred and eighty-seven superyachts worldwide, nearly twice the previous year's total. With more than a thousand new superyachts on order, shipyards are so backed up that clients unaccustomed to being told no have been shunted to waiting lists.<sup>2</sup>

It does not appear there is a lot to do in this small space in Monaco. The streets and most buildings are common-place constructions. Grace Kelly, the talented and beautiful American movie-star, who made Monaco known to otherwise unmindful US citizens when she married Prince Rainier III of Monaco on April 18, 1956---has long since passed from the scene. It was doubtful, as a princess to this city-state, she would have been seen tramping the streets anyway.

One of our taxi drivers joked that the mega yacht owners use Monaco as a stage for showing-off how rich they are. A tour guide informed us these super rich boat owners often suffer the humiliation of having to wait off-shore for a few days for a dock in the Monaco harbor.

"I own a billion-dollar boat. I demand a pier immediately!" So do a lot of other "boat" owners. Even among the top (probably, at least) 0.000009 percent of the wealthiest people on earth, there somehow exists: a pecking order. Must be downright humiliating for these ingrates to wait for a berthing place for their floating castle.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.





So, what to do in this fanciful place if you have no access to one of these out-of-this world yachts? Take in the world-famous Monte Carlo Casino.

I snapped the photo on the left of the front of the building as we were preparing to enter it. The large metal disk on the left of the picture is a large curved mirror. The manner in which it was prominently displayed at the front of the casino led me to believe it was a work of art, disguised as a mirror to let people laugh at their funny looking countenances.

### Monte Carlo Casino: An Extravagant Gambling Hall

“No passport, no admittance,” the three guardians of the gate declared to this aspiring gambler. Behind them were the gambling rooms of the Monte Carlo Casino. I could not gain entrance into this gambling hall unless I showed a passport. This was the reverse of conventional practice. Admittance into a gambling place is usually effortless, so-designed by their owners. Getting out of the place is another matter. Once there, gambling hall owners want you to stay there. What was going on?



The guards were no help. They remained an impenetrable barrier of silent frowns at anyone passing by with an intention of actually gambling in a gambling house. Later, I learned the reason for this seeming self-defeating policy:

The citizens of Monaco are forbidden to enter the gaming rooms of the casino. The rule banning all [native citizens] from gambling or working at the casino was an initiative of Princess Caroline, the *de facto* regent of Monaco, who amended the rules on moral grounds.<sup>3</sup>

Morality was imposed on the local citizens, but not for others: Selective moral judgment in action. Monaco went from a near-bankrupt state to one of immense wealth, thanks in large part to immoral foreigners betting in the casino. A previously insolvent government, but no longer.

It is our practice to carry our passport with us when we leave a ship, even for a tour under the care of the ship itself. As time marches on, so does my memory. I forgot to bring my passport with me, a tourist’s sin. I would not be admitted into the famous gambling parlors of the Monte Carlo Casino. And Holly does not gamble, so I could not vicariously share in her losing money.

She took things in hand: “Go find a place to eat or drink. I’ll go to the ship to get your passport. ...No, you are not mobile enough to go back and forth. Settle down in a local café. I’ll be right back. ...Save a Sauvignon Blanc for me.” Bless her, off she went as I left the casino to find a delightful restaurant across the street, highlighted shortly. Guardian Angels, Travel Angels...one and the same.

<sup>3</sup> Anne Edwards, *The Grimaldis of Monaco: The Centuries of Scandal: The Years of Grace*, 1992.

She returned, and we were admitted into the gambling parlors of the casino, lavishly decorated with old-fashioned, elegant furniture, paintings, and wall coverings. Some images from Bing of the rooms are shown in Figure 5-4, as I was not allowed, passport or not, to snap pictures of these rooms.

Which is standard practice in any gambling establishment. However, the gaming tables had not yet opened. After reading the sign shown in Figure 5-5, I enquired about the games' setup. A casino employee informed me of the tables' operating hours. Wanting to play a few hands, I asked,

“What are the beginning minimum blinds (initial bets) for Texas Hold’um?”

“Ten Euros.”



Figure 5-4. Casino Parlors.

Figure 5-5. Games offered.

A bet of \$10 for a beginner or novice of Texas Hold’um might not seem like much. But with five more cards to play, and the betting often a pot limit amount with raises, one hand can easily entail a player to commit well over \$100.

And a \$10 blind is small potatoes. I’ve seen Las Vegas games where the blind is in the hundreds of dollars. ...Games in which I do not participate.

I am an above average poker player when I play against below average opponents. I play low stakes tables in Vegas and other places, as I know the limits of my ability. I occasionally play six-dollar blinds, and on occasion, actually leave the table a winner. I emphasize *on occasion*.

Those higher blind games attract better players than I. So, I am happy being a big fish in a little pond, and I was likely lucky the tables at this casino had not yet opened.

The restaurant I found was next door to the casino, as shown in the white building (Figure 5-6). It is worthy of your business, for reasons described below.

First, and with self-interest at heart, the maître d’ saw me and my cane queued in a line of 15 people, and immediately seated both of us, even giving my cane its separate seat. Second, I warned my waiter I was waiting on another diner who had been delayed by a trip back to the pier, and that I might be sitting at his table for a while.

“Do not be concerned, Monsieur. Stay as long as you like. Would you like something to drink while waiting?”



Figure 5-6. Restaurant next to casino.

Contributing to the possibility of a reduced tip, “Just some sparkling water, please.”

“Certainly, it comes with the meal.”

I sat at the table without ordering anything but bubbling water for around 45 minutes. Not once did my waiter come over, except to pour me more water. I was costing him tips, but he treated me as if I had ordered a seven-course meal.

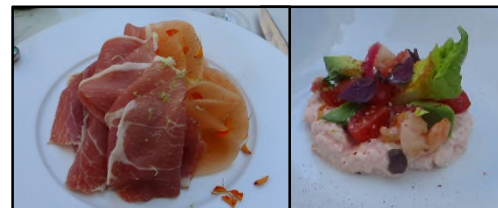
In the meantime, I enjoyed this view of the casino.



While I watched a pup eat, the pup watched others watching him. Can you imagine a dog having his own dish in an American restaurant?



After Holly returned, we dined on exquisite fresh prosciutto ham, shrimp, and fresh fruit,



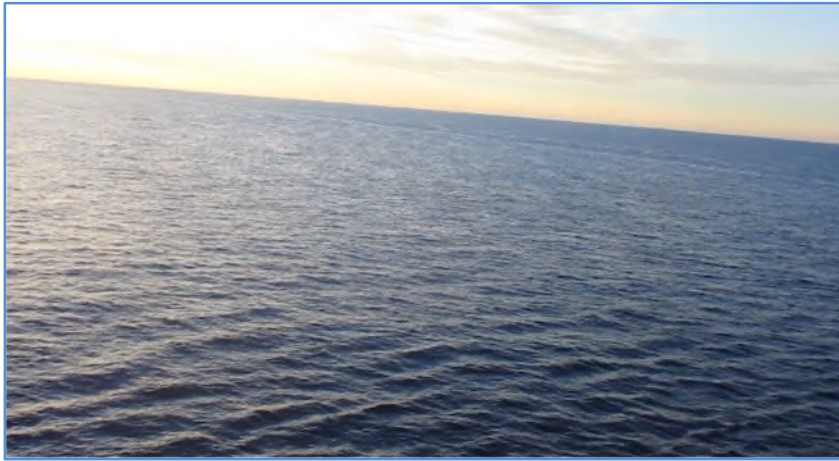
while enjoying the elegant, understated Café De Paris of Monte Carlo and its extraordinary waiter.



After the meal, we used our passports to gain entry into the gambling rooms of the casino. Impressed with the elaborate décor, with this writer wishing he had had a chance, if only for a few hands, at the Texas Hold’um table. Who knows? James Bond carried it off in another fancy casino in the *Casino Royal* movie.



Enough of this opulence. On to semi-opulence aboard the Viking Sky, and once again an unobstructed view of the Mediterranean Sea.



Time to cast-off for Florence and Pisa.