

IHOLA BARCELONA!

By Dr Tan Yia Swam, Deputy Editor

Sagrada Familia

I find it hard to write a good travel article, after all, there is so much information on the Internet and elsewhere nowadays. Wikipedia, of course, and the Lonely Planet series provided most of my “research”. Still, let me share what I can of my travels with you.

Barcelona – a city teeming with history and culture. Although I am neither a historian nor an artist, I must admit feeling a sense of wonder as I walked through its streets, soaking in the atmosphere. There are modern buildings interspersed with historical ones; beautiful details in the carvings and grills that adorn each building – so different from Singapore! Another observation is the ubiquitous presence of graffiti – locals must think me mad for taking photos but yes, I did.

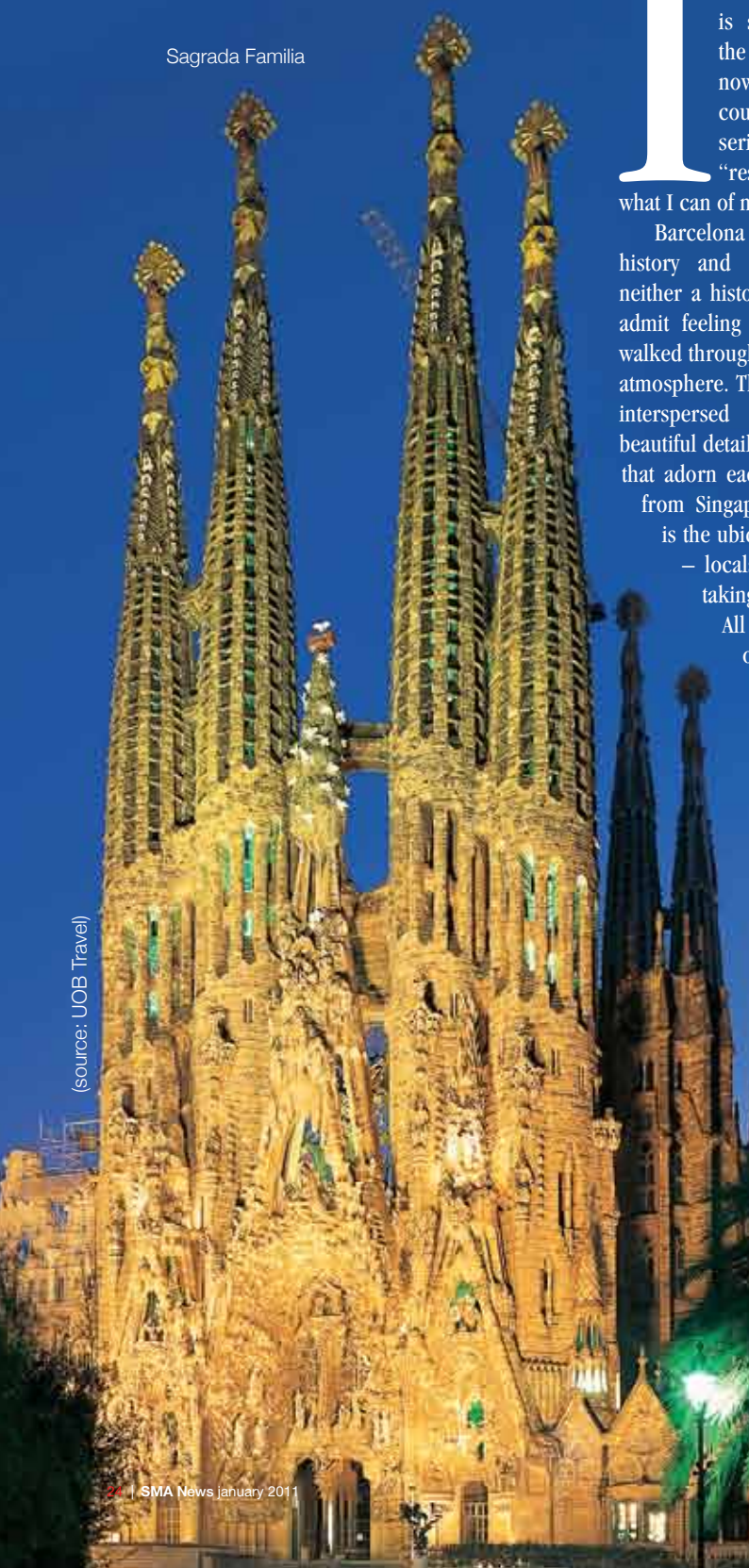
All have been lovingly posted onto my Facebook page

because they are so distinctly funny, but unfortunately, some will not pass editorial censorship, so they are not reproduced here.

According to National Geographic, Barcelona is apparently the best beach city in the world. Alas, I’m no beach babe, and will have to let someone else comment on this. Let me stick to what I like best – the sights and food! And maybe just a bit of culture...

One cannot talk about Barcelona without mentioning Antoni Gaudi. Born in 1852, he was a Spanish architect who has literally left his mark on the city. Although he died in 1926, his buildings and designs can still be seen everywhere. I took part in a Gaudi city tour, which took us on a route that covered his works in the city. Casa Batllo, with its skull-shaped balconies, is creepily beautiful. The Sagrada Familia church began construction in 1882, but is still being built today. Gaudi allegedly said, “My client is not in a hurry.” The church

(source: UOB Travel)



Bottoms up with a glass of red wine sangria



Tapas



The crabmeat tapas (right) were very sweet and delicious



Seafood paella



Grilled prawns

was consecrated recently in November 2010, though it is not expected to be completed for another 15 years or so. Meanwhile Park Guell was meant to be an *atas* private housing estate, but unfortunately had no buyers! It is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and visitors come to see how Gaudi merged form, beauty and function.

La Rambla is a main street in Barcelona lined with malls and restaurants, from which many other smaller streets branch off, each filled with interesting little shops and eateries. Zara is found at every turn, almost like the 7-11 stores in Singapore. Street performers ply their trade down the entire length. The various stalls, selling pets, flowers, knick knacks and the like, fill the place with colour. La Rambla connects Placa Catalunya, the city centre, to Port Vell, the waterfront harbour. A statue of Christopher Columbus stands there, marking the site where he returned to Spain after his voyage to America.

Enough about culture and history; on to the food! There were tapas galore – the variety defeated one's imagination. Tapas are great to eat while hanging out, as each bite-size portion means that everyone gets to eat and still talk a lot. I tried Patatas Bravas prepared four different ways, but found that they were all essentially bite-size potato cubes, roasted and served with a wonderful spicy/sweet/savoury sauce. I also had Calamares (*sotong* rings), Chorizo (cured pork sausage), and Gambas al Ajillo (prawns with garlic). I tried Pimientos de Padron, which are small green

peppers fried in olive oil. I thought these would be bad, but surprisingly, I loved them! I had lots more food, but alas I don't know their Spanish names – steamed bamboo clams, some kind of roasted root, creamy and sweet crab meat, tangy tomatoes, chickpeas, baby squid, tuna sashimi, Iberico ham... Strange how I miss local food when travelling, and now that I'm back home, I miss foreign food!

We enjoyed tapas so much that we had them for most meals. The only main dishes we tried were seafood or chicken paella, which is an *atas* version of *mui fun*. It was really filling, so it would be great for a bunch of friends to share.

Of course, what is good food without good drinks? We had red wine sangria, white wine sangria and cava sangria. They are nice light alcohols with fruity flavours. I now make my own sangria at home. It's a girly drink perhaps, but there's a lower chance of developing alcoholic pancreatitis, or so I hope.

Anyhow, don't take my word for it, go see Barcelona for yourself! Cheers! **SMA**



Miss Tan is happily settled into her current job. She still meets her fill of rude and nasty people (not all of them patients or their relatives), but somehow, she manages to handle it with a bit more equanimity. Life is too short and precious to waste being upset with people who have unhappy lives and taking it out on everyone around them. She tries to bring a bit more cheer to friends and colleagues, by helping them see the humour (or tragic comedy) in kind of work we do. She welcomes comments at tys@sma.org.sg



Statue of Christopher Columbus at Port Vell



Flamenco performance



Multicoloured mosaic dragon fountain at Park Guell



Censorship-friendly graffiti