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USTMAAA CRUISE OF A LIFETIME XI

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The promise of an enjoyable time at the USTMAAA Cruise of A lifetime XI did not disappoint us. It was a well-planned land and river tour vastly enjoyed by 103 adventurous souls. Although minor unavoidable glitches occurred, this could easily be the best cruise we ever had. We were all thrilled by the different Portuguese and Spanish cuisines presented to us, not to mention the different wines which seem to be more abundant than water in the countries we visited. The different unique sights in Spain and Portugal were awesome. We were inundated with castles and churches together with the Saints and bits of histories associated with them. Thanks to our learned tour guide, Sandra, who knew all these facts by heart.



We were spiritually moved with our experiences at Santiago de Compostela, Lourdes and Fatima. These were the pilgrimage segments of our trip. Trekking through one of the Caminos,



albeit a very short segment, was reminiscent of the pilgrims who walked thousands of kilometers ending at Santiago de Compostela in Spain, the burial site and shrine of one of the Apostles, St. James. This custom originated in the 9th century and enduring up to this date. We were privileged to have our hotel Parador right in front of the square and adjacent to the Santiago Shrine, the final destination of all the pilgrims.

Being at the sights of the apparitions of the Immaculate Conception in Lourdes and of our Lady of Fatima was such a moving experience. The prayers at the Grotto and a plunge in the miraculous baths at Lourdes together with the visits in the homes of the three children at Fatima completed the spiritual experience. Seven days were spent on the Douro River aboard the boat MS Gil Eanes chartered exclusively for us. It was amazing to see our boat go in and out of the river locks where the boat was either raised or lowered to the water level depending on whether it was going upstream or downstream. The vineyards that lined the river banks were a sight to see. The wineries were also visited and the Porto wines were sampled with gusto.



I am sure these experiences will be chronicled more in detail by other writers. I would like to focus more on my personal observation and the effects of the 17 day tour on people. There were 18 of us from Class '68 including our spouses coming from different states. We knew each other from medical school some more closely than others. Most



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of the attendees were UST graduates with a few from other medical schools and some non-physician guests. After 17 days traveling, eating, drinking, partying, etc. together we have become more acquainted and closer even more. Bonding was an underestimation of the process that occurred. We got to know each other better and saw the good in everyone. Kelly Concepcion was a standout and the most chivalrous of the group. He made sure that everyone got in and out of the buses safely and stayed behind the group during the tours to make sure no one got lost or left behind. He also was watching out for potential thieves when the group was in a crowd.

New acquaintances have easily developed to become true friends. The names are so many so that I am afraid I will miss



some if I try to name them. Caring people who expressed genuine concerns about Zita's and my physical difficulties during the tour was well appreciated. Several people have even helped Zita up and down the streets and stairs when I couldn't. Raffy



Claveria was so kind enough to give up his knee brace for me to use during the entire tour. The cardiologists in the group were ever ready to help out when one of our tourists had a vasovagal syncopal spell. Medications were shared

without hesitation with others as needs arose for diarrhea, infections, allergies, pains, etc. Generosity was not at all wanting. When an appeal was made to aid the victims of the last typhoon and the poor people in the Philippines, more than \$10,000 was immediately raised just from the cruisers.

Truly, this event was a resounding success not just for the quality of the tours but also because of the camaraderie that developed and the good deeds that occurred.

Want to join the next cruise? Stay tuned for the announcements.

Braga The Rome of Portugal

Day 10 of the USTMAAA Cruise of Lifetime XI, the second day of our actual "cruise", already brought us on board our river ship, the *MS Gil Eanes*, but we still have to float up (or is it down? I am disoriented.) the Rio Douro. Today is no exception as we are going to be bussed to our next excursion site while the boat is going to relocate upstream through the lower locks of the river where we will re-board it in Leverinho for lunch before continuing our voyage farther upstream amidst more interesting landscape.

Braga is our next destination. It is the third largest metropolitan area in Portugal, next to Lisbon and Porto. The Bracaraense population consists of approximately 48 % male and 52 % female individuals, with 35% of the population less than 25 years of age, while seniors conform to 11% of the population; the working

population of the municipality occupies 54% of this structure. It was designated the *European Youth Capital* in 2012. No wonder we did not feel that we exactly belonged to the region although we kinda felt young being around such robust people. We might have temporarily doubled the senior population during our brief visit (Joke only.) It was once the center of the Roman Province of *Gallaeciae* when it was called *Braccara Augustus* in honor of *Emperor Caesar Augustus*. It still celebrates Roman traditions including an annual *Braccara Augusta* Roman historical reenactment festival which transforms the city's historical center and its citizens to their ancient selves. We were fortunate to witness one such parade of children and young men and women clad in Roman attire pulling and riding some chariots while displaying pink bands and scarves in support of breast cancer prevention.

A walk through the center of town after being dropped off at the *Praça da Republica* with a long median planted with colorful flowers and a fountain in front of the remaining vestige of the Roman fortified castle that was torn down to make way for progress, the *Torre de Menagem*. A short block away was



the *Irmandade de Santa Cruz* (Church of Sta. Cruz) in front of another smaller plaza. Around another corner was the small





church of São João de Souto alongside the Manueline Chapel of the Coimbra, where a few of us were able to celebrate portions of the Sunday mass.

The Antigo Paço Arquiepiscopal de Braga (Archiepiscopal Palace of Braga) that was once the residence of the Bishop is now a municipal office, public library and archive. The well tended garden had relatively young plants. Across the street was a non-working fountain (for the season probably) with a dragon fiercely watching over the spread. The Câmara Municipal



(Municipal Hall) had a large square with a monument at the center and was now filled with children in white garments with red sashes or scarves and with some sporting Roman costumes and ornaments and either riding or pulling makeshift chariots. They later on participated in a parade in the streets with people wearing pink pants, shirts or bandannas in support of breast cancer prevention.



A visit to the Sé Catedral de Braga was next. While it was not as elaborate as the other cathedrals that we have seen, it is of monumental importance being the seat of the Archdiocese of Braga, one of the oldest in the Iberian Peninsula, that has played a significant role in the christianization of the region. The most important figure was São Bishop Martin de Braga, who succeeded in converting the invading Germanic Suebi tribes in the late 5th century. There are still remnants of Roman ruins in the courtyard. A stroll down the street lead us to the Arco



da Porta Nova where we were supposed to meet and board the buses to get to our boat in Leverinho where it was waiting to serve us lunch.



The afternoon was going to be leisurely as we enjoy the cruise upstream and marvel at the Carapatelo lock, the highest in Europe, and experience the majesty of the Douro valley with its scenic vineyards and gardens. There was a lot of making up to do. We had to catch up with CMEs and get started with our Zumba and line dance lessons under the watchful eyes and patient tutelage of one bundle of energy, Ched Gonzales.

Bom Jesus da Monte

Zenaida M. Contreras, MD'72 Clerks

(Note from the publisher: This was a place that was NOT included in our excursion as it has significant similarities to the Santuario da Nossa Senhora dos Remedios in Lamego that would be visited

towards the end of the cruise. Drs. Ramon and Zenaida Contreras took it upon themselves to take a cab and make a quick visit of Bom da Monte.)

Braga, the third largest city of Portugal came as a surprise to most of us. It is of utmost beauty. It was cool and sunny, a perfect day to explore the city bursting with flowers and history.

About 5 km away or 10 minutes by taxi is a place popular to both the tourists and pilgrims. Bom Jesus da Monte or Good Jesus of the Mount is situated up on the forested hills of Braga. It is known for its 600 zigzag Baroque white granite steps, the Escadaria do Bom Jesus.

The pilgrims come to visit it as a Sanctuary dedicated to the Passion of Christ. There are different chapels of the Station of the Cross on the way up to the Neoclassical Basilica. It is not as



ornate as the other churches we have seen, but the main altar is quite different since it was the culmination of the Station of the Cross. It was like a colorful lighted stage with the crucifixion of Jesus between the two thieves. Roman soldiers were scattered all over and with Mary, Magdalene and John quietly standing beneath the cross. It was framed by four high pillars. Reminds me of our Cenaculo during Lent.

Tourists, on the other hand, were just overwhelmed by the



magnificence of the place. The city view from the top of the hill cascading down through white steps onto the orange rooftops and the mountain is breathtaking. Well manicured gardens surround the Basilica. Classical statues, symbolisms and fountains abound the tiered staircases. There were also lovely hotels and restaurants hidden in the woods. #