



Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia & Singapore

20 - 29 September 2024

Greta & Mike Fitchett



Days 1: Wednesday 18 to Thursday 19 September 2024

'I've never done this before' I explained to Ismail, BA staff member at Heathrow Terminal 5. The last time we had checked any baggage "through" was long before the days of automated bag-drop. Ismail was very patient with us, and more so with the haranguing passenger behind us. Moments later, tags bearing a reassuring "KL" in large letters were attached to our cases.

A smooth transfer at Singapore Changi airport was not to be. Seeking Transfer Desk E, we got lost in the huge terminal complex. We had checked in to our connecting flight and printed our boarding passes. We found out the gate number, and an information desk, from where we were told it was only a short distance. It wasn't. We had to get on a "skytrain" to another terminal. From there it was a 15 minute walk, and the only transfer desk we could find was F, where they sent us the 15 minute walk back the way we had come. Apparently, only Transfer E could re-issue our boarding passes, and why they had to be re-issued at all remains a mystery.

Did our cases arrive in Kuala Lumpur? They did. We found them, one on and one off the by then virtually empty carousel once we were through immigration. There, the friendly official had carefully explained, UK passport holders could skip the queue and use the automatic desks. It was a great time to learn that for the first time.

It was good to have a driver waiting for us for the final leg of our journey. With only street lights and a fuzzy moon for illumination, our driver Zool (that's how he pronounced his name) showed us as best he could what we would have seen from the motorway in daylight. It was a one hour drive, with four toll booths, and presently we were among the twinkling lights of the city and the glittering twin towers of the Petronas building sliding into sight.



Still the world's tallest "twins" at a total height of 451 metres: the the 88-storey Petonas Towers are the headquarters of Petronals, the national petroleum company of Malaysia. Designed by Argentine-born American architect Cesar Pelli, and completed in 1998.

Day 2: Friday 20 September

First call in Kuala Lumpur was the Textile Museum. We headed for Dang Wangi metro station where nearby was a window display of University Students work including textiles and fashion design. In this faculty there is a BA Hons. architecture and design course in partnership with Birmingham University.

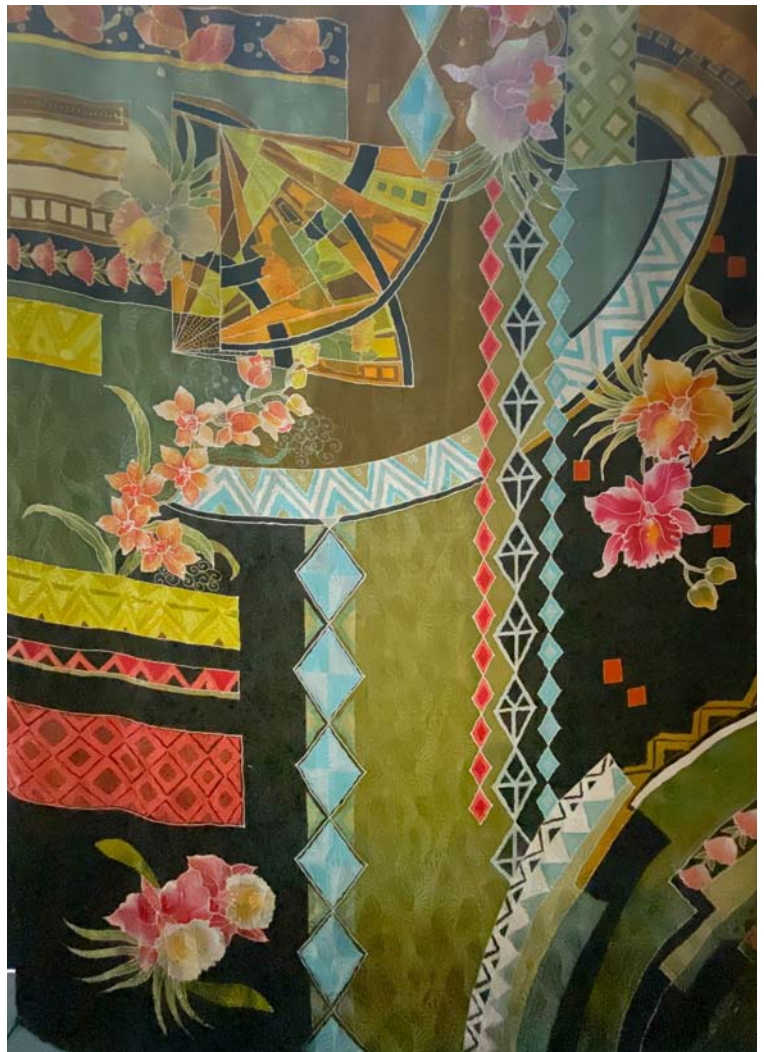
We took the metro one stop to Masjid Jamek and emerged onto a street almost impossible to cross for traffic. We had yet to learn how to navigate the subways and bridges that are vital here. We reached Merdeka Square and the Sultan Abdul Samad Building - a legacy of the British Colonial era. The “replica” Royal Selangor Club on the opposite side of the square, in resplendent Home Counties Tudoresque, dates from the same period. So too does the former Railway offices which house the textile museum. The contents of this building include much older heritage – local weaving, batik work, dyeing, and printing with excellent displays that explain the processes.



Above right: former colonial administration office, the Sultan Abdul Samad Building now houses Ministries of Culture, Communications and Tourism.

Right: hand-drawn batik design with orchid and abstract motifs in the Textile Museum.

Below: restored former railway premises which now house the National Textile Museum of Malaysia.





After lunch we headed for the Taoist Sin Sze Si Ya Temple. Two deities within are believed to have been instrumental in the defence of Kuala Lumpur in a civil war, 1870-73. From this sanctuary we headed for another – the air conditioning of a metro train.

Above: interior of Sin Sze Si Ya Temple; left: fronting the Klang River, a decorated building forms a background for a tourist photo; below: Jalan Lang Kastui, a covered street adjacent to the indoor Central Market.



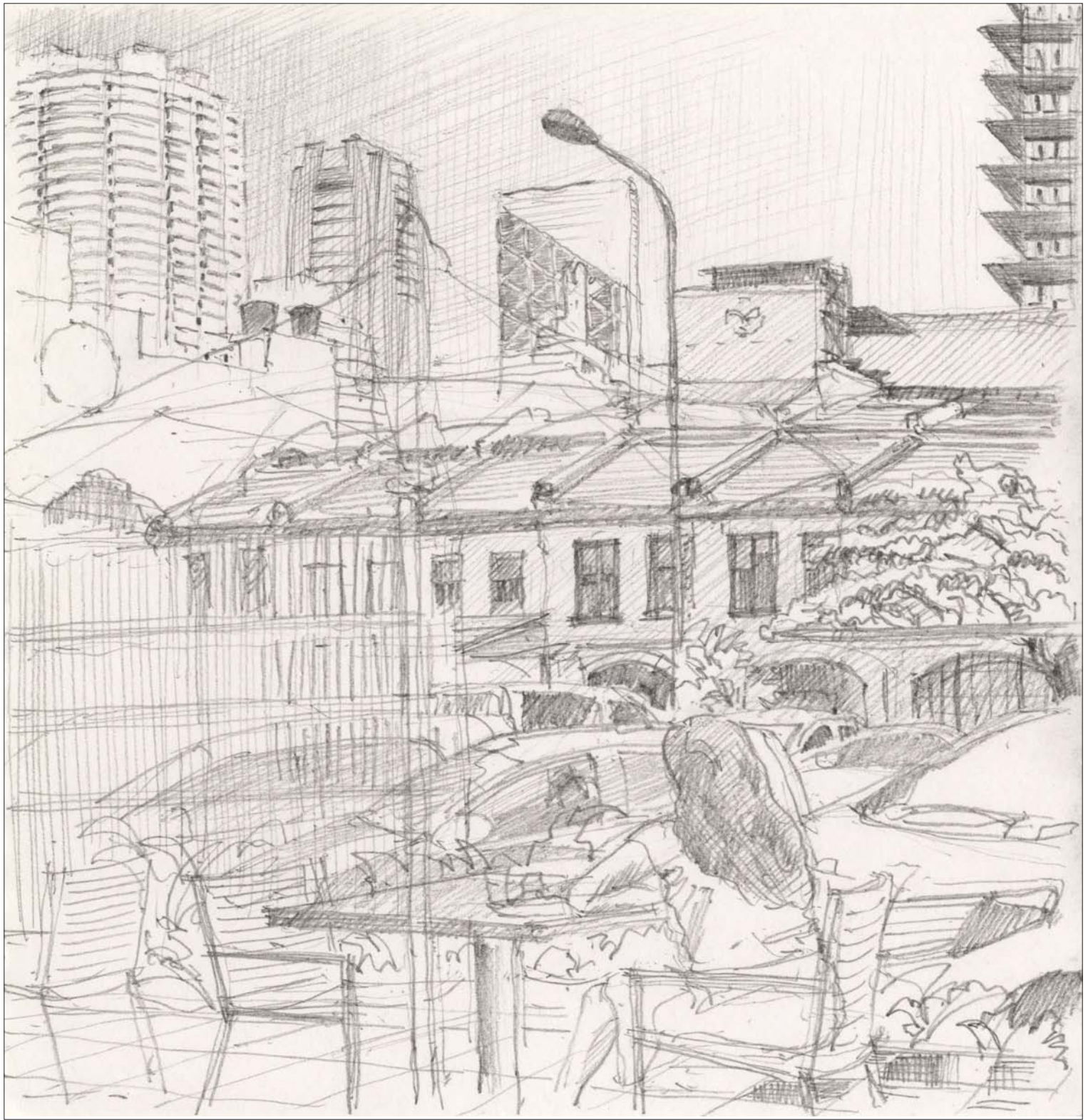


The view from a train window might not yield many facts about a place, but does give a good visual impression of a country or city. So we rode, on a metro line very conveniently built on a concrete viaduct some 28km to the terminus of Putra Heights. It is a relatively new route and the trains automatic, enabling us to get a drivers eye view from the front. There were 23 stops, all serving large suburban developments of tower blocks and commercial offices, reminding us that Kuala Lumpur is home to almost 9 million people. We changed trains and the endless urbanisation continued as we returned to the city via another line. It seemed almost possible to date the apartment towers, not only by their architectural style but on how many satellite dishes and aircon cabinets clung to the concrete exteriors. If there were less, or none, then those facilities were obviously built into the building from the outset. In contrast, areas of poor quality and high density gave little to no space between lower-rise buildings, reminding us of pre-1666 London with houses almost touching. A large area of low rise apartments was roofed in corrugated iron, weatherbeaten and

sunbaked to resemble flaky pastry – one having workmen on the roof hammering down repair panels. Wide dual carriageways streamed with Friday afternoon traffic.

Above: from the train window: Jalan Raja Chulan and Menara KL Tower; below: elevated metro line approach to Masjid Jamek station.





Day 3: Saturday 21 September

Rain. With a convenient covered arcade at the front of our hotel, it was time to sketch. A lone woman bravely breakfasted under a patio umbrella, only to seek proper shelter indoors before she was finished.

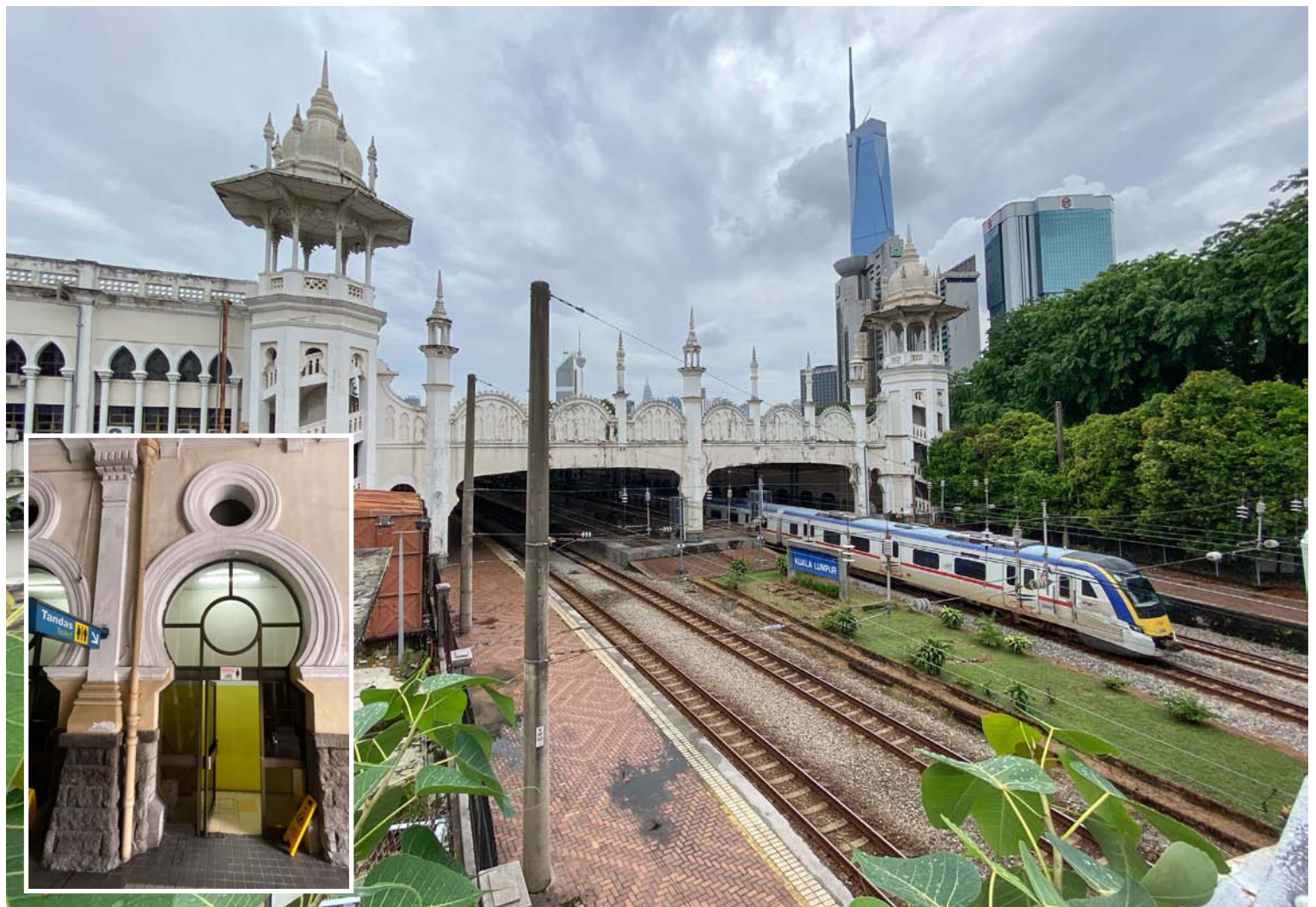
Observing the older terrace of shophouses opposite, I noticed that one must have adjoined the later building at one end. There was a gap, now a small car park, but the imprint had left a ghost of a house, with a sky effect formed by the now incomplete rendered finish.



Rain eased, and we went for a look at the old KL station. Without a ticket to travel, it was a devilishly difficult place to get to. Built with grandeur to complement other colonial buildings in the 19th century, it stands almost desolate and cut off by a busy main road. It is mirrored by the railway offices on the opposite side of this road but the linking subway was padlocked. When we finally got inside via the cavernous carriage drive, brooding and dark, the place had an abandoned, ghostly atmosphere. No staff were to be seen, though there were a few glimmering ticket machines and surprisingly, passengers on the platform under the great train shed roof. Passenger trains still call there. Sad at the sidelining of a once great station we headed one stop on the metro to the replacement: KL Sentral.

Opposite page: Jalan Kamuting from Stripes Hotel, carbon pencil on paper; below left: telltale wall.

This page right: historic signal in the grounds of KTMB railway offices with KL station in the background; below: KTM Komuter train departing from the old KL station, and inset view of doorway detail within the old carriage entrance.





KL Sentral is like an airport. It is also the airport express terminus with a baggage check-in. And it was easy to enter - the metro stops right inside on high level platforms. We explored to find where we would depart when moving on to Singapore then headed for the Monorail platform.

Excellent views were possible from the monorail, built over the streets and providing a useful link to key central locations, including, conveniently, our hotel just a few minutes walk from the Medan Tuanku stop. The short train was crowded, and it was obvious which station served the biggest shopping mall by the number who exited and entered there.

Later, we walked back to Medan Tuanku and retraced our monorail journey to Jalan Alor which at sunset becomes Food Street – even Google Maps so names it. We were early enough to find many empty tables set out in the street in front of restaurants and food stalls. Rather than yield to the vocal proprietors, we took our time to look at the whole street. The choice, unfamiliarity, noise and the insistent stallholders left our senses reeling. As popularity was a likely recommendation, and

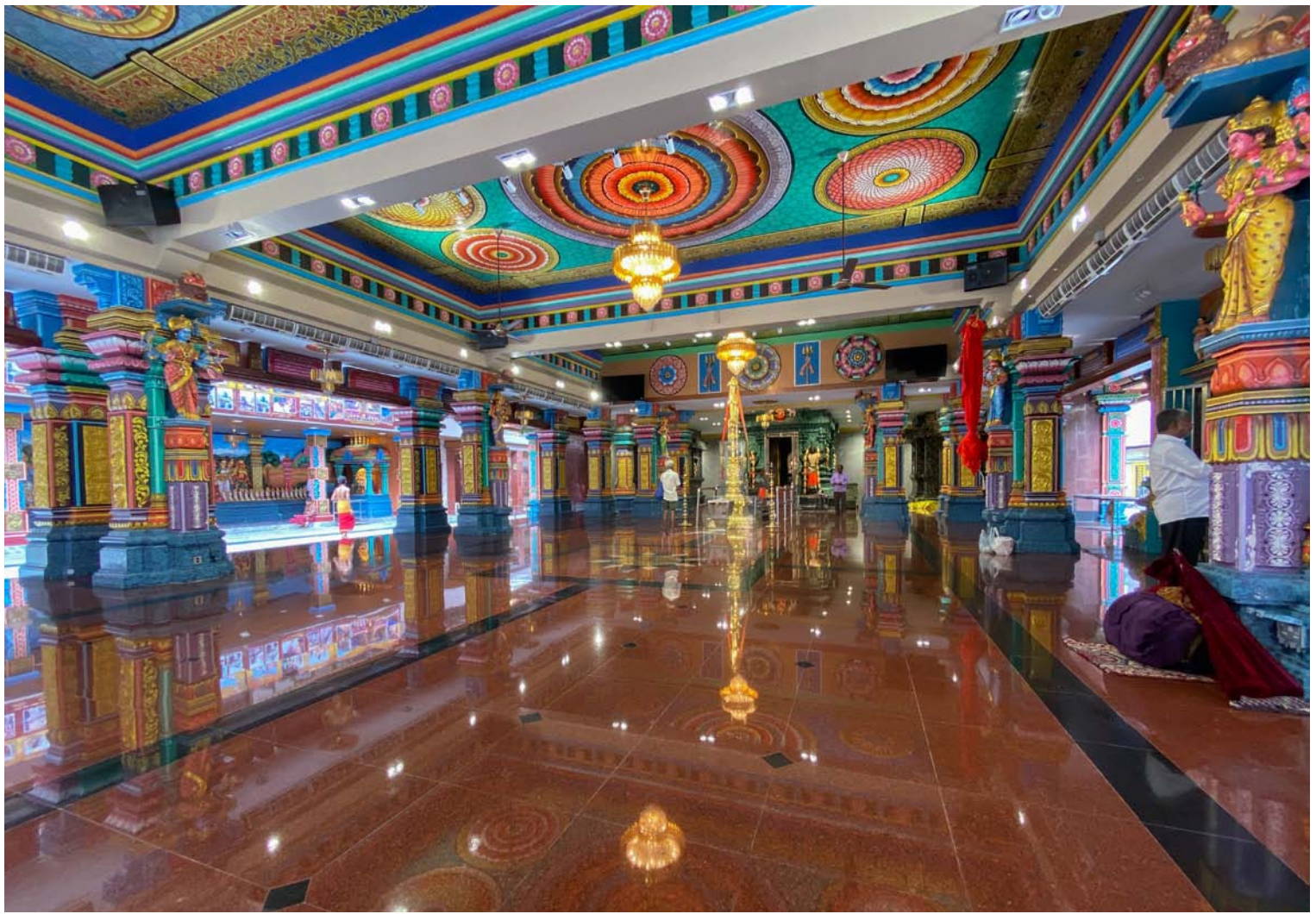
preferring Chinese, we found a good place. Wary of the threatening sky we located a sheltered table away from the searing heat of an oven. We were expected to order immediately, from a huge menu in a very well worn plastic folder book. But with Chinese cuisine we were on somewhat familiar territory and our very acceptable meal included pork with a superb sauce containing Marmite!

Darkness came, bringing neon and lantern lighting to the fore. Satisfied, we staggered back to the monorail, fully appreciating the meaning of Vibrant. Tables everywhere were full. Crowds jammed what bit of street remained. We were still pestered for custom. An impromptu pop concert on the street corner by the station already loud on our arrival had attracted a crowd which blocked the pavement. We pushed through to the escalator and the relative calm of the chatter and rattle of the train.

Opposite page, above: KTL monorail train approaching KL Sentral; below: Methodist College, Brickfields, KL from the monorail.

Below: Jalan Alor (Food Street) after dark.





Day 4: Sunday 22 September

Our Christian Sabbath, so an appropriate moment to visit a place of worship. We chose the Hindu Sri Mariamman Temple. Mariamman is believed to be protective of the faithful who migrate to foreign places, reminding us of Malaysia having a population from diverse ethnic regions. Mother, protector, bringer of rain and therefore plenty, Mariamman is the focus of worship in this holy place, rebuilt in the 1960s in the South Indian style, and wedged into a corner site on a narrow street at the edge of what has otherwise become Chinatown.

Our shoes taken care of near the entrance, we explored the precincts and the temple, and saw that only the priests enter the centre room where the deity is personified in a spotlight image. In that space the priest chants an intercession on behalf of an individual or family. The myriad of figures and symbolism throughout the temple was too much for us to begin to understand, but we felt privileged to be able to freely enter, wander, and wonder.

Then it was a visit to a temple of mammon which



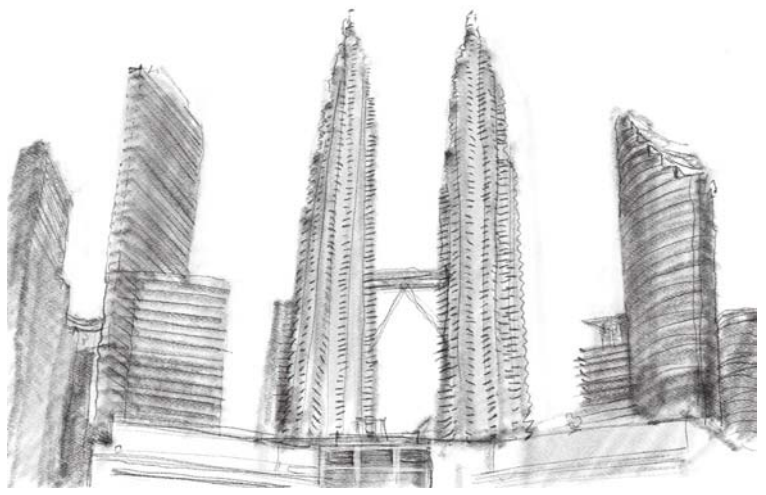
today is what Sunday is all about to many people. Prior to entering we had time to sit and stare at the two great towers of the Petronas building, skilfully sited centre stage in an amphitheatre of a park, glittering in the sunlight and with dancing fountains in the foreground.

‘No time for table manners’ proclaimed the window display of The Burger and Lobster bar/restaurant. It was the first sign we saw - even before we entered, and what maybe embodies what Sundays are about for some: consumption. That seems to be the premise upon which cities such as this exist – in our human pursuit for a manifestation of life’s purpose in what we can, or might wish, to afford.

Back in time for Dinner - we went to the Old China

Opposite page: Sri Mariamman Temple interior and one of the many dieties in the precinct.

This page, from top: iPad sketch of the Petronas Towers; reflection; timed fountain display.





Cafe, on the fringe of Chinatown, which looked as if – except for a re-concreted floor and ceiling aircon units replacing lazily whirring fans – it had changed little in 100 years. Obviously popular with Chinese customers, it was a gem of a find, helped in no small part by our DK guidebook. After dinner we wandered past the Old Post Office, then through the Chinatown night market - a long street jammed with stalls selling every kind of designer label goods - as genuine as you might wish to believe. Turning towards Pasar Sani metro station for our return journey we came once more to the Sri Mariamman Temple. With the elaborately carved entrance floodlit, it made a more spectacular sight even than in sunlight.



This page, top, top right and right: at Old China Cafe, Jalan Balai Polis; bottom right: The Old Post Office (1911), Jalan Panggong.

Opposite page: Sri Mariamman Temple at night from Jalan Tun H S Lee.





This page, top: 12.15 ETS electric (07.50 ex-Butterworth) enters KL Sentral approximately 15 minutes late; above: lineside palm tree view near Bangi.

Opposite page, top: community with school and houses near Kempang Masjid on the approach to Seremban; bottom: the proud 2-man footplate crew of KTM diesel locomotive 25112 prior to departure at 15.20 from Gemas to Johor Bahru.

Electrification of the entire route is under way with double track throughout and all towns having impressive rebuilt stations. Track is 1 metre gauge, overhead electrification equipment similar to UK railways.

Day 5: Monday 23 September

Palm trees. We have never ever seen so many. Tin roofs too - but the acreage of corrugated iron cladding on so many houses was hardly a match for the vast palm tree covered landscape.

We took the train to get a feel for the country beyond the big cities. Which we did of course, but had not reckoned on such a monotony of palm trees. Malaysia is the second largest producer of palm oil and we think we saw evidence of clearance for their cultivation. Hoping for more variety in scenery there was a little – here and there a few different species of palm trees, and metal roofs were evident on little schools, workshops, farm buildings and shops. We saw no livestock farming, save for one small bovine herd which we glimpsed in – a plantation of palm trees. There was virtually no other arable farming. We saw just one dog, loafing and scratching contentedly in a station yard where we had stopped.

We were on a carefully planned train journey. The idea was simple: fly to KL from Singapore, stay four days and take the train back, thereby seeing a sample of rural Malaysia. Online research then showed there was just one departure from KL daytime and one at night. Nor was it a through train. So, bookings done and seats reserved, the route was fixed: metro to KL Sentral, 12.15 electric train to Gemas, diesel “express” to Johor Bahru arrive 19.45, shuttle over the causeway JB to Woodlands Checkpoint, bus to Woodlands MRT, metro to Stevens change for Rochor, finally 5 minute walk to hotel. What could possibly go wrong?

Nothing did. There were a few tense moments, such as the 15 minutes late departure from KL Sentral, the diesel train beyond Gemas held at signals from time to time (the line is being completely re-engineered and electrified), the huge unmoving queue for emigration at JB Sentral 10 minutes before departure of the shuttle, and taking the wrong metro line at Woodlands. But we made every connection, and arrived, or more accurately staggered, into the Village Hotel, Albert Street, Singapore soon after 10 pm. A mostly comfortable and certainly educational journey. After all, how else could we have seen, in one day, so many acres of corrugated iron, and so many square miles of palm trees?.





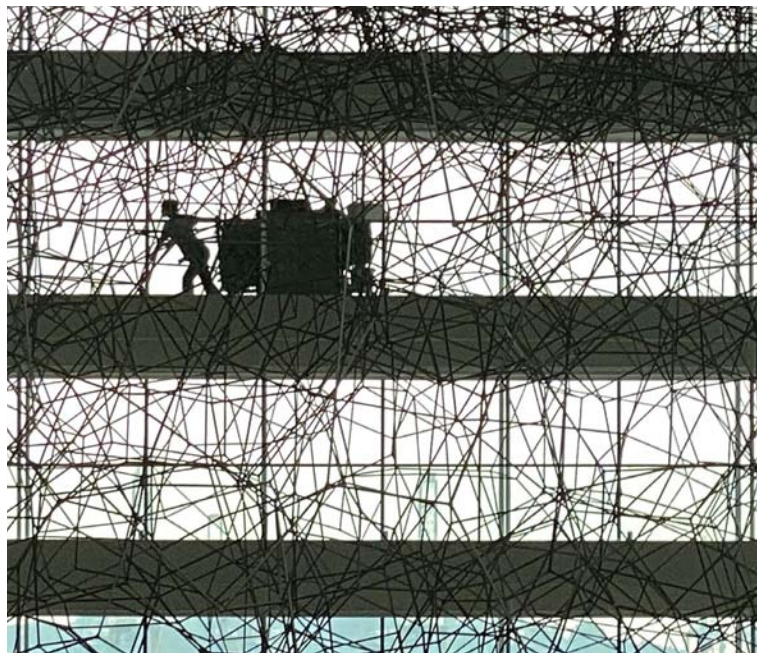
Day 6: Tuesday 24 September

We had not got far into our first day in Singapore when the weather reminded us that we are in the tropics with a ferocious deluge. We had just begun to explore Gardens by the Bay.

A large area of reclaimed land near the old harbour has become a park and nature reserve. Giant domes enclose some of the space, and a pedestrian skywalk links tall tree-like towers. There are lakes and garden areas themed on countries where Singaporeans can trace their ancestry. It was fortunate for us that the Malay garden had somewhere under cover. Black cloud had formed a threatening backdrop to our view of the triple towers of the Marina Bay Sands Hotel, so we had been warned. Even so, the thunderstorm started quite suddenly, and rain pelted down for around an hour. Our shelter was in the form of a traditional round house with open sides and pointed roof. We and other visitors edged as close to the middle as possible as spray blew in and the surrounding floor became flooded.

At length the rain eased and it became safe to venture outside, the efficient drains having swallowed most of the puddle we were marooned in. We explored some more, taking in the Indian and Chinese gardens then headed towards the Marina Bay Sands towers. An elevated walkway pierces the vast hotel atrium, giving a spectacular view of the public space. Within one third of this is suspended an installation by Antony Gormley entitled Drift. It is a network of interconnecting rods which the artist describes as “referencing the emergence of form from chaos that is both a cosmological and a biological principle” and “the moving body of the viewer reviews its own relationship with space at large”. From our viewpoint the relationship of the work to human bodies provided a reflection of the disparity between our own day to day agenda and that of the wider natural world – a concept perfectly captured in Greta’s chance sighting of a hotel worker on one of the elevated balconies at the far end of the atrium.

Opposite page top: Marina Bay Sands and approaching storm; bottom: Gardens by the Bay. This page top to bottom: view from the Chinese Garden; Marina Bay Sands atrium; “Drift” detail with hotel worker beyond.





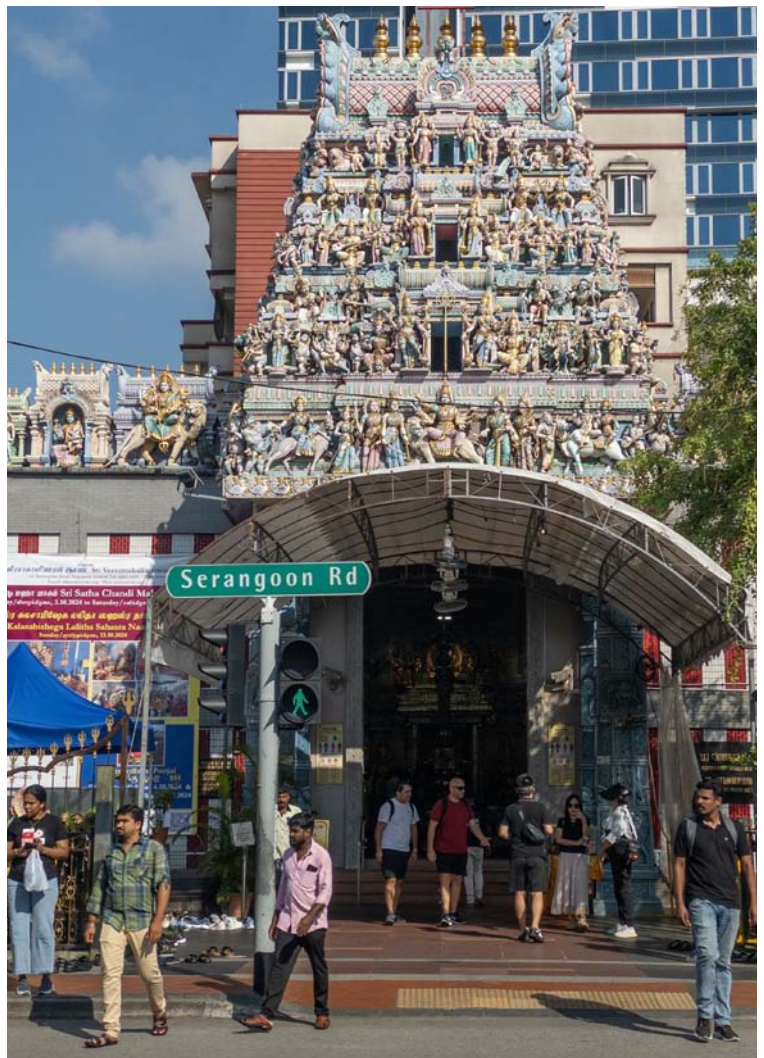
A remarkable survivor among the corporate glass towers that cluster the harbour is the old municipal market building. The structure is cast iron, founded in Glasgow in 1894, and now housing a large number of hawker food stalls. The elegant lacework castings echo to a similar kind of din as they would originally. Here you choose from vendor stalls such as Thai, Turkish, Mexican, Cantonese, Korean, Malayan – the selection seems endless. We didn't see British! Then claim a table and stool in a crowded aisle and wait for the “meal ready” device the stall holder has lent you to flash and tremble so you can go and collect. Or you can “carry out”. You could live here without needing a kitchen, we reckoned.

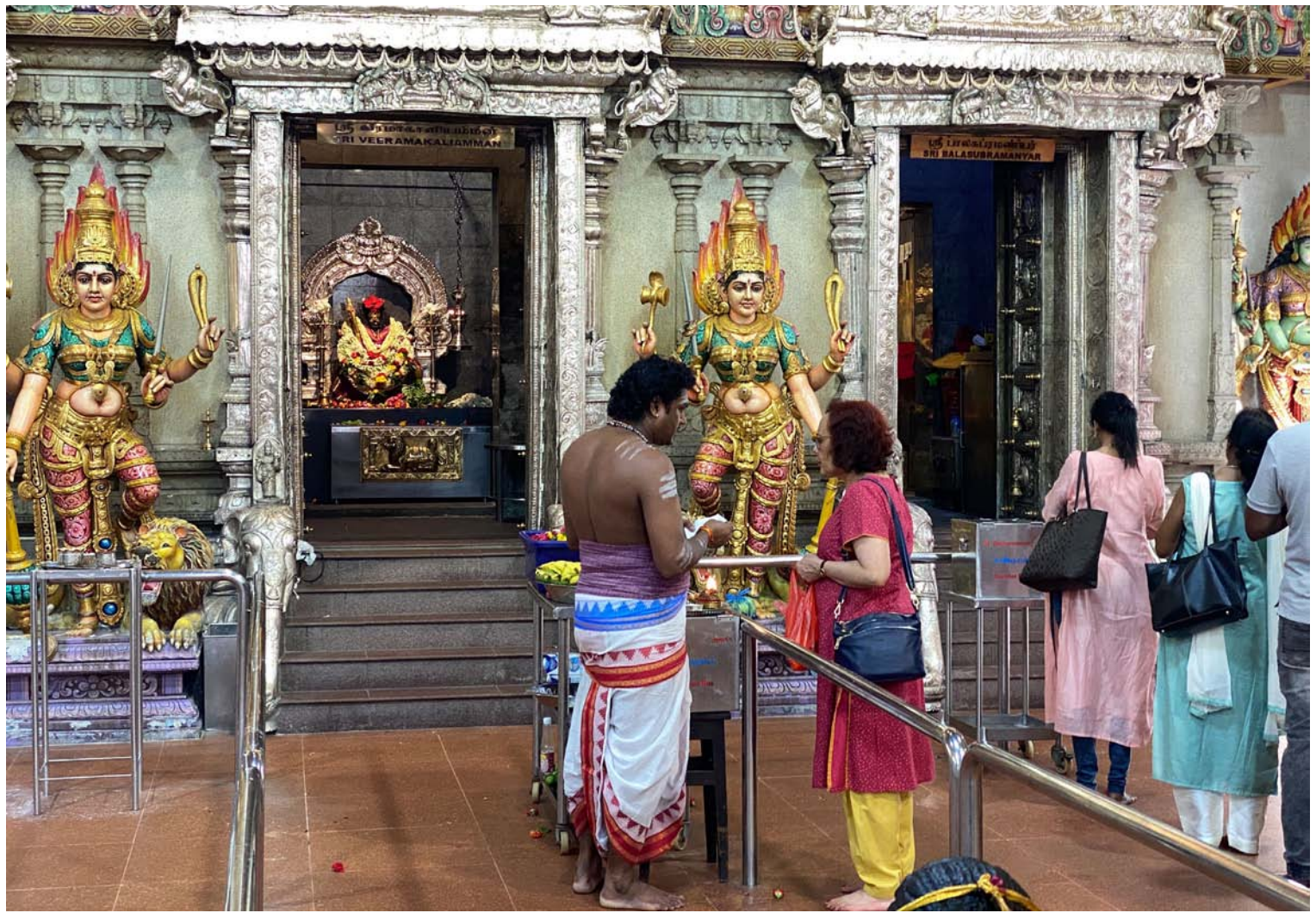
Above and left: Hong Lim Market and Food Centre on Upper Hokien Street. Opposite page top: Sri Veeramakaliamman; below: shophouses on Serangoon Road.

Day 7: Wednesday 25 September

“On a Little Street in Singapore”. I never imagined when I bought that song by Manhattan Transfer all those years ago that I’d ever end up on one.

Yet we did exactly that today. Our aim was to seek out some of the older smaller buildings that are still standing today. We are staying close to the Little India, so we started on Serangoon Road. Originally built as a road link to the eponymous port, Serangoon Road had become a centre for cattle farming and brick making by the 1820s, work mostly undertaken by incomers from South India. Many of the terraces of shophouses built from the 1840s onwards are still standing, and many still house individual businesses. We visited two Hindu temples. The chief deity of the Sri Veeramakaliamman is a powerful goddess, and believe to have been protective of her devotees - reassuring for migrants settling here in the 19th Century. The more famous temple, the Sri Srinivasa Perumal is reputedly more famous and is dedicated to Perumal, or Vishnu, who is at the centre of the Hindu trinity made up of Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer. Here





a local man explained to us that the main deity had a male and a female persona, represented by individual images. Devotees pray to the “mother” first.

Whilst we had to admit to no understanding of Hindu beliefs, we explained how privileged we felt to be made welcome in this holy place. We were impressed too, to learn that on Saturday around 20,000 people were expected to come to a special celebration meal at the temple, and whilst we would be unable to enter as visitors we would be most welcome to come and witness the event from the street!

We headed via metro from Farrer Park to Bugis, where we emerged to find Park Kew Square, an iconic bronze coloured Art Deco style skyscraper dating from 2002 and home to several embassies, an arts centre and, reputedly, a bar in the lobby housing over a thousand gins. As hot sunshine had

Above: devotees request intercession from a priest in the Sri Veeramakaliamman Temple; right: Park Kew Square skyscraper, Bugis.



given way to rain, we headed for the rather more modest surroundings of Cafe Margaret, housed in an old shophouse on Bali Lane, and furnished with an eclectic mix of upcycled mid 20th century kitchen tables, chairs and stools, including former church or mission hall chairs still with their prayer book boxes on the back. We then headed past the Sultan Mosque (dating from 1824) and down Haji Lane - our “little street”.

The name derives from pilgrims on the Hajj - journey to Mecca. Here they might stay and work to earn sufficient funds to continue their journey, the little shophouses being their lodgings. By the 1960s the area had declined, but is now transformed into a destination offering vintage and craft shops, cafes, photo studios and a meditation centre. The parallel Arab Street bears evidence of a slightly grander past, and where carpet sellers still trade, amongst a plethora of restaurants including Malay, Singaporean, Indonesian, Italian, Indian, Mediterranean and Middle-Eastern.

Below: outside the Masjid Sultan Mosque, Muscat Street.



Top to bottom: old shophouse with ventilating clerestory superseded by bolt-on aircon – Cafe Margaret, Bali Lane; rain (and sun) sheltered colonnade on Haji Lane; ornately decorated shophouses on Arab Street.



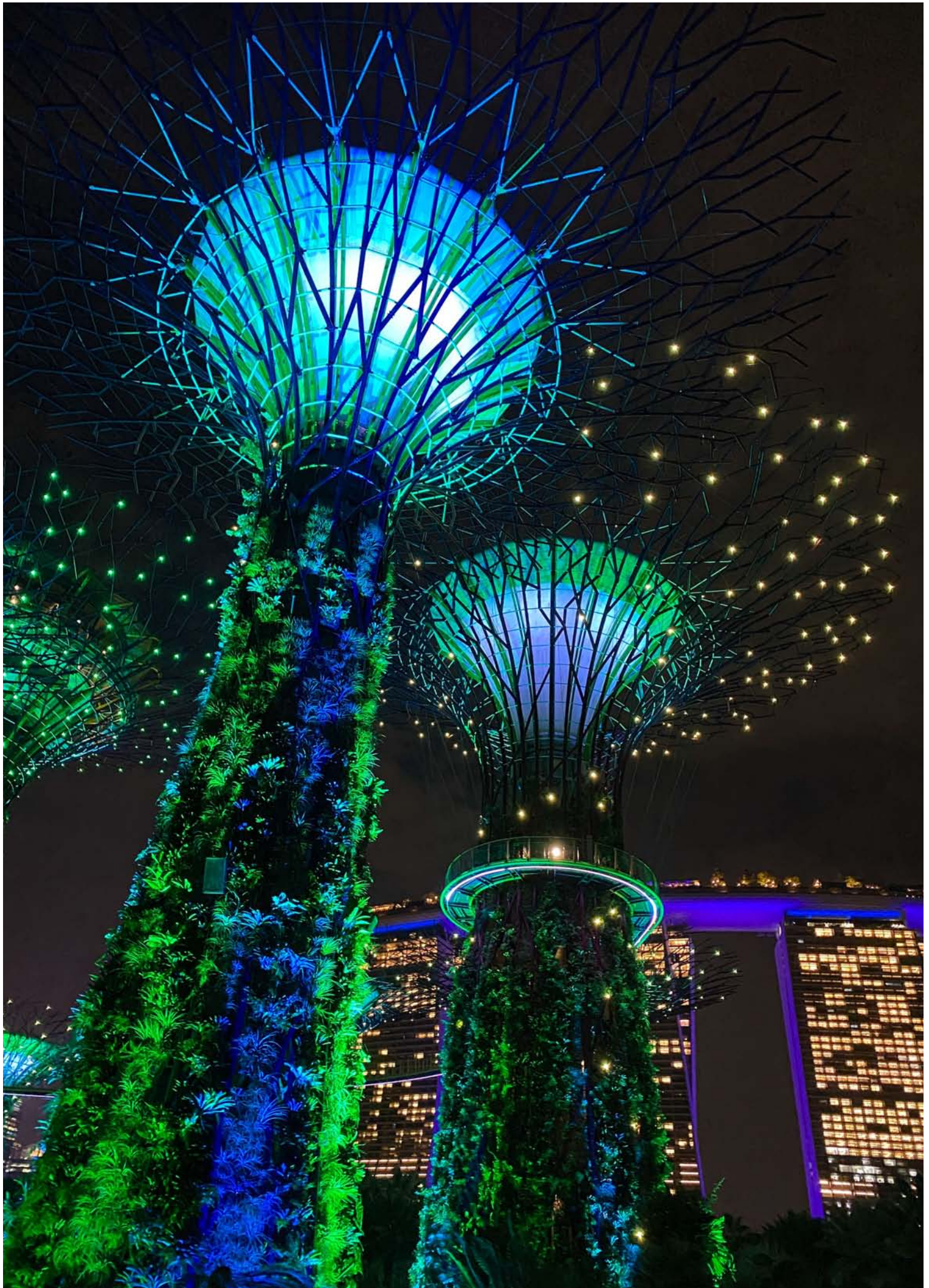
Emerald Hill was our third destination. Leading off Orchard Road, now best known for glitzy shops and close to two of its biggest malls, Emerald Hill was originally an enclave of the Peranakan Chinese – early settlers from China in the Malay Peninsula. The Chinese style is immediately apparent in the architecture and decor of the former shophouses, all but those nearest the junction with Orchard Road now being private dwellings. Though overlooked by tower blocks of apartments, this is obviously a very desirable residential area.

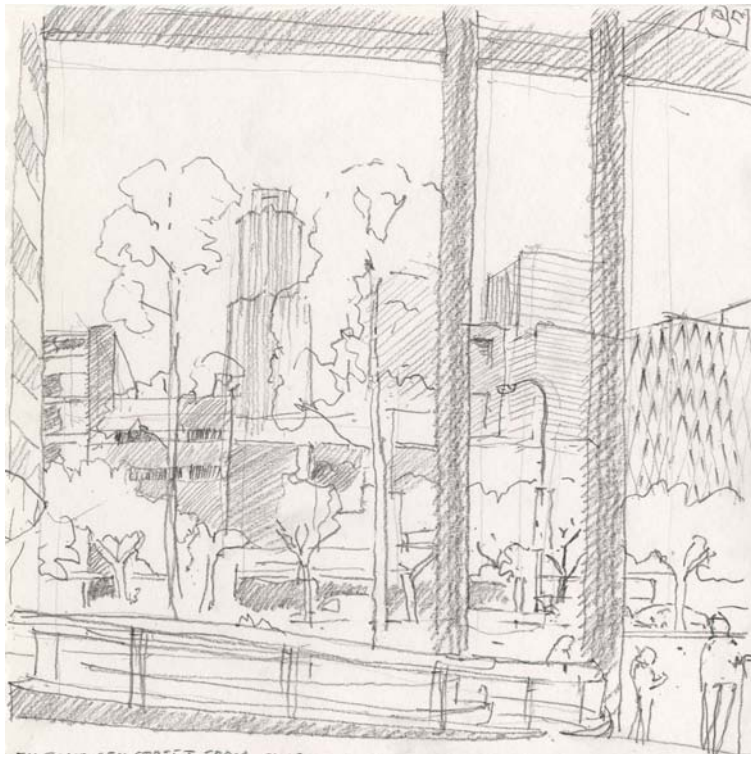
We dined in Old Chinatown, then as darkness suddenly fell we headed by Metro for the Gardens by the Bay just in time for the Light Show Spectacular, when the Supertrees are animated with dancing lights accompanied by a musical sound track, which this September is on the theme of Tales of the Moon including the songs Paper Moon, How High the Moon, Fly Me to the Moon and Blue Moon.

This page: beautifully restored residences on Emerald Hill Road.

Opposite: illuminated Supertrees, Gardens by the Bay.







Day 8: Thursday 26 September

It was raining this morning so we decided to explore further afield on the Metro. But first we went to Clarke Quay, one time port and now a shopping and commercial centre, sited by the Singapore River. It is named after Sir Andrew Clarke, Singapore's second Governor from 1873 to 1875. Our aim was to find a sheltered viewpoint overlooking a good sketching view. We had to settle for a street scene from under the main entrance canopy, where there were convenient seats in the shape of large smooth pebbles.

Assuming that the Metro lines would most likely become above ground away from the city centre, we took the North East line to the terminus at Punggol. It was underground all the way, but an elevated feeder line loops around the residential areas, so we took a ride on the little single coach train. The views were entirely of clusters of modern apartment blocks. Singapore's population is approaching 6 million, but many have access to what is a clean, comprehensive and very efficient transport system. As well as the Metro (MTL) there are frequent buses, of which many are double deck, and a network of very busy motorway style major roads.

Back in the old city we went to Chinatown. It had stopped raining. This district was intended from the outset to house a community of incomers from China, and the architecture of the old shophouses,

of which many survive is indicative of prosperous times. The same is true today, with restaurants, gift shops and a thriving market housed in a modern 3-storey building. A stone's throw from the market is the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple.

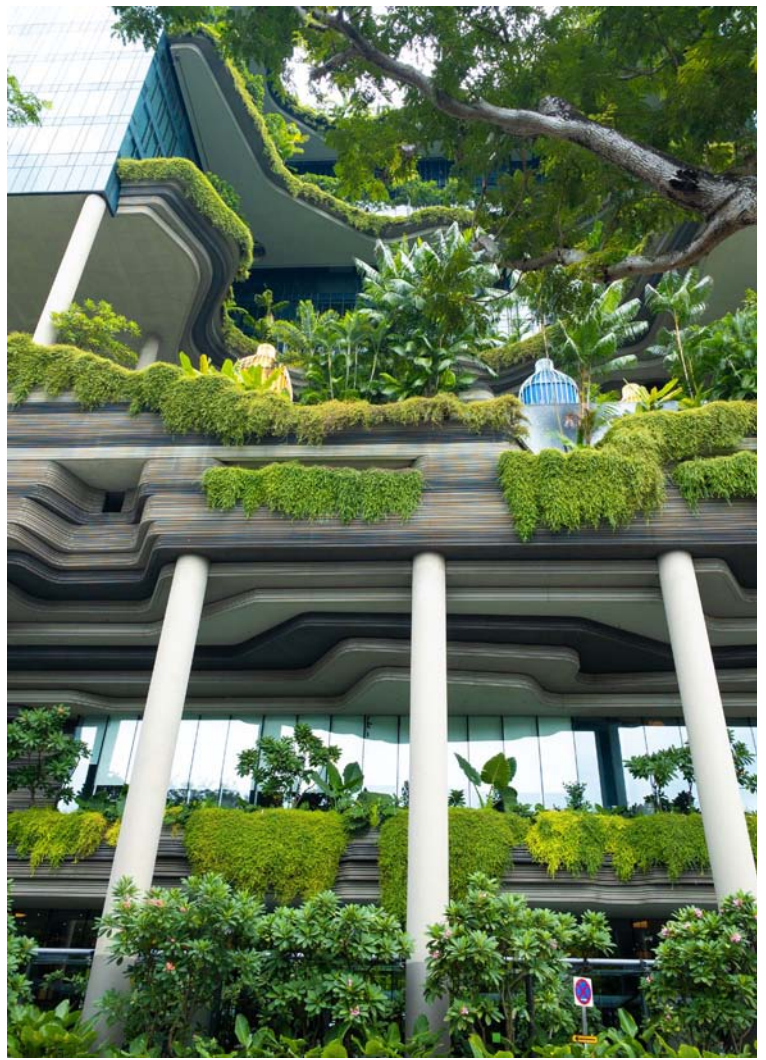
Assuming that the relic itself was unlikely to be on view, we didn't seek it out. Instead we witnessed a large number of people, seated in the main hall, repeatedly chanting mantras in unison. When the chanting was finished they stood and sang a few lines, accompanied by bells. There was a lift, and we found out only later that this most likely enabled visitors to view the tooth relic on an upper floor.

We walked towards Boat Quay, and on South Bridge Road, the call to prayer was sounding from the Masjid Jamae. Greta noticed that the competing music from the pub, just a few yards away on the opposite corner of Mosque Street was "Die in Your Arms Tonight!"

Top left: sketch from Clarke Quay Mall entrance; top right: PTC line train departing Punggol.

Opposite page: four views of the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple, which has its own underground car park.



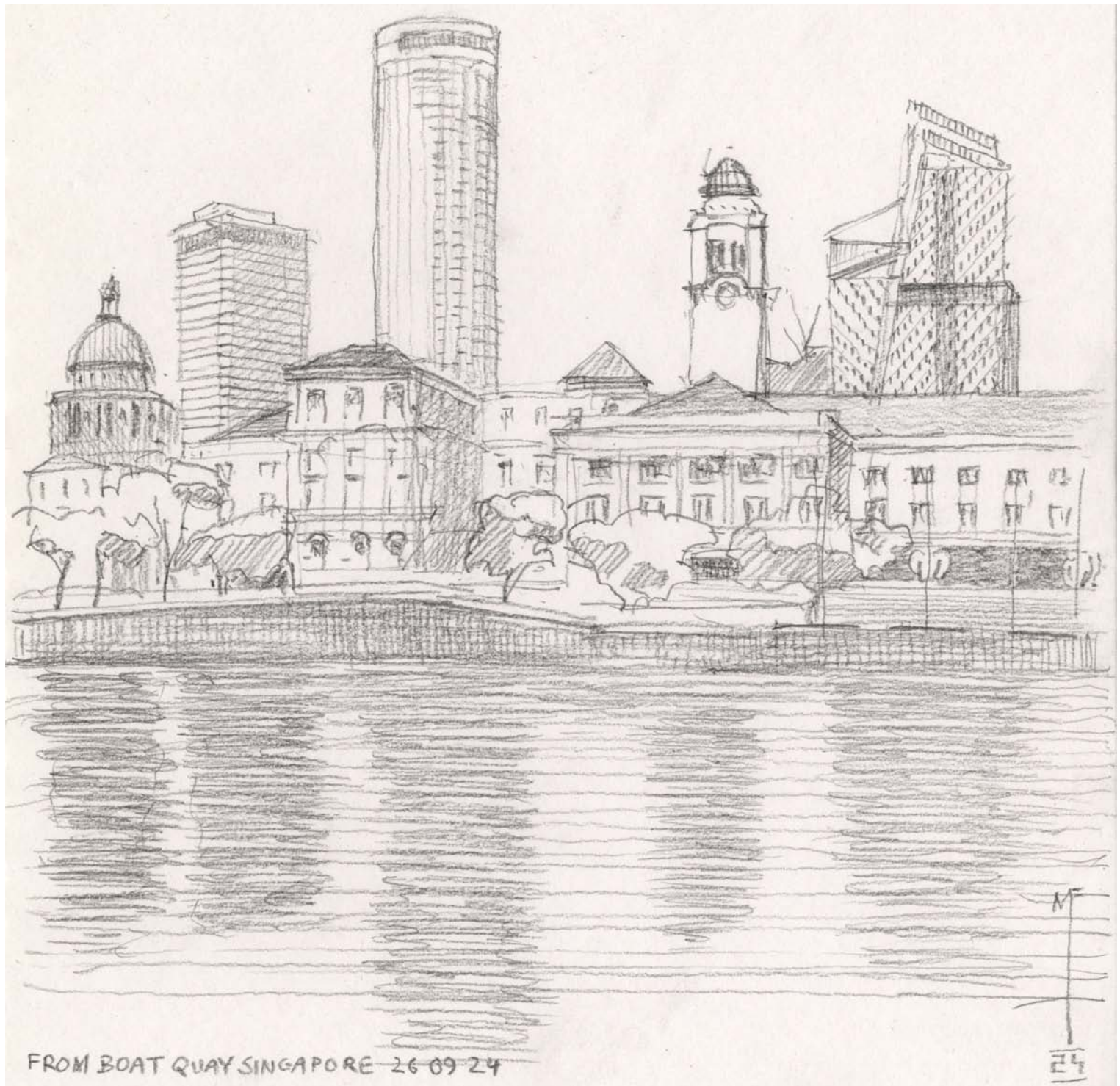




One of the delights of Singapore is stumbling across great art, out in the public domain, and our best discovery was perhaps a monumental bronze by Henry Moore. We chanced on it when walking along South Canal Road, and only because we had not yet found a safe place to cross. Simply titled “Large Reclining Figure” it dates from 1984 and is based on a small maquette of 1938. It is one of his largest works, yet to us speaks of the fragile nature of humanity which contrasts with a skyscraper setting. It reminded us of our life drawing times, and gave a moment of literal reflection in the pool, where stepping stones enabled a more intimate dialogue.

Opposite page top left: Chinese lanterns adorning South Bridge Road; top right: green urban luxury at Parkroyal, Pickering Street; bottom: Raffles Place, Boat Quay.

This page above: Chinese Checkers being played close to the market in Chinatown; left: Large Reclining Nude bronze by Henry Moore.

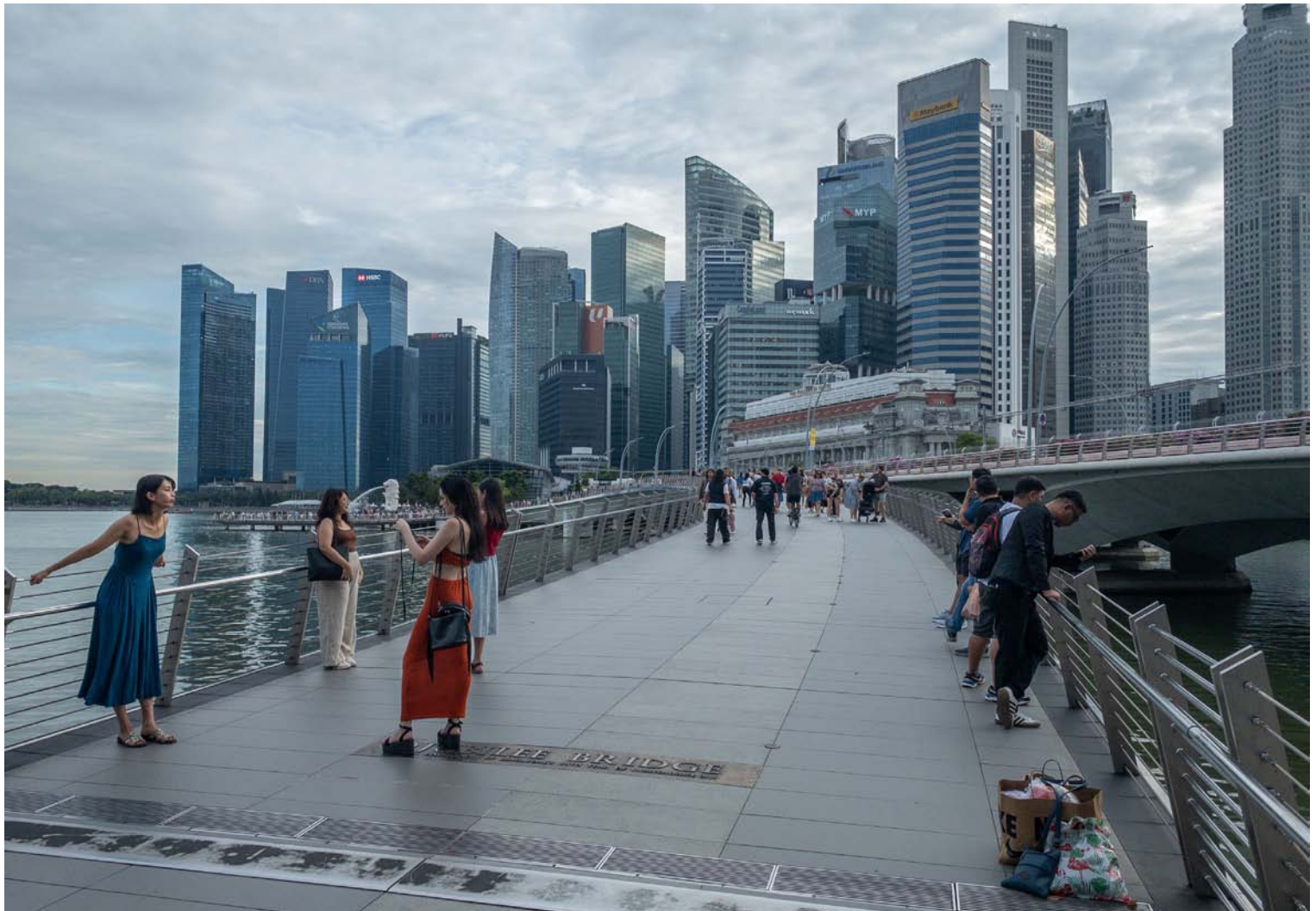


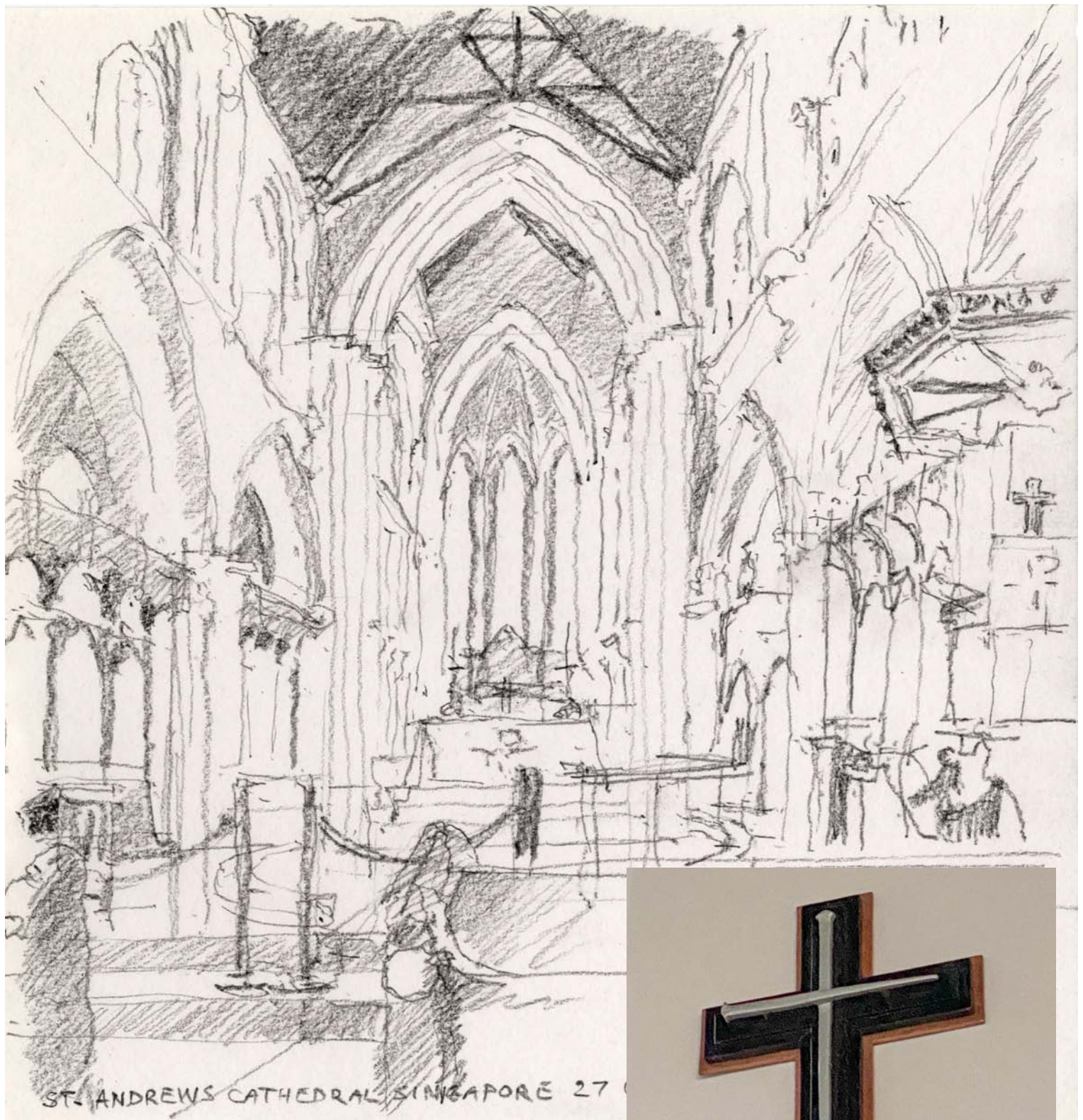
Boat Quay provided a great drawing opportunity with a vista across the river, including two old bridges, the dome of the former Supreme Court and the old Victoria Theatre clocktower. And there was more sculpture to be found: life size bronze figures by local artist Aw Tee Hong depicting a Scottish businessman, a Chinese trader and a Malay chief.

Above: sketch including dome of the former Supreme Court, Swissôtel Stamford, Asian Civilisation Museum and South Beach Tower; right: "The River Merchants".

Opposite page, top: evening promenading and posing on Jubilee Bridge; bottom: restoring lawns at the Victoria Theatre after an event.







Day 9: Friday 27 September

Gothic splendour in bridal white: Saint Andrews Cathedral stands in a block of its own between the former City Hall and the towering Raffles City Shopping Centre. The present building was completed in 1861, and as was the case with many others in the city, was built using convict labour. It has stood well, and survived World War II. Though not so highly decorated as some, the proportions are elegant and there was too much to draw in a quick sketch.

We were made very welcome by Jessica Wong, one of the church team, who was interested by my drawing. Jessica

This page: sketch of cathedral interior; inset: The Coventry Cross. Opposite page clockwise from top: orchids grafted onto a churchyard tree; St. Andrews steeple, Swissôtel Stamford beyond; Raffles Hotel, Beach Road.

explained how in WW II the cathedral was used as an emergency hospital whilst services continued and that though damaged, it survived the Japanese occupation. It has a link with Coventry Cathedral, in a small cross made of nails salvaged from the wartime ruins. We discussed how the church is so much more than a building, beautiful as such, but a sanctuary, a holy place, and a sanctuary for all.

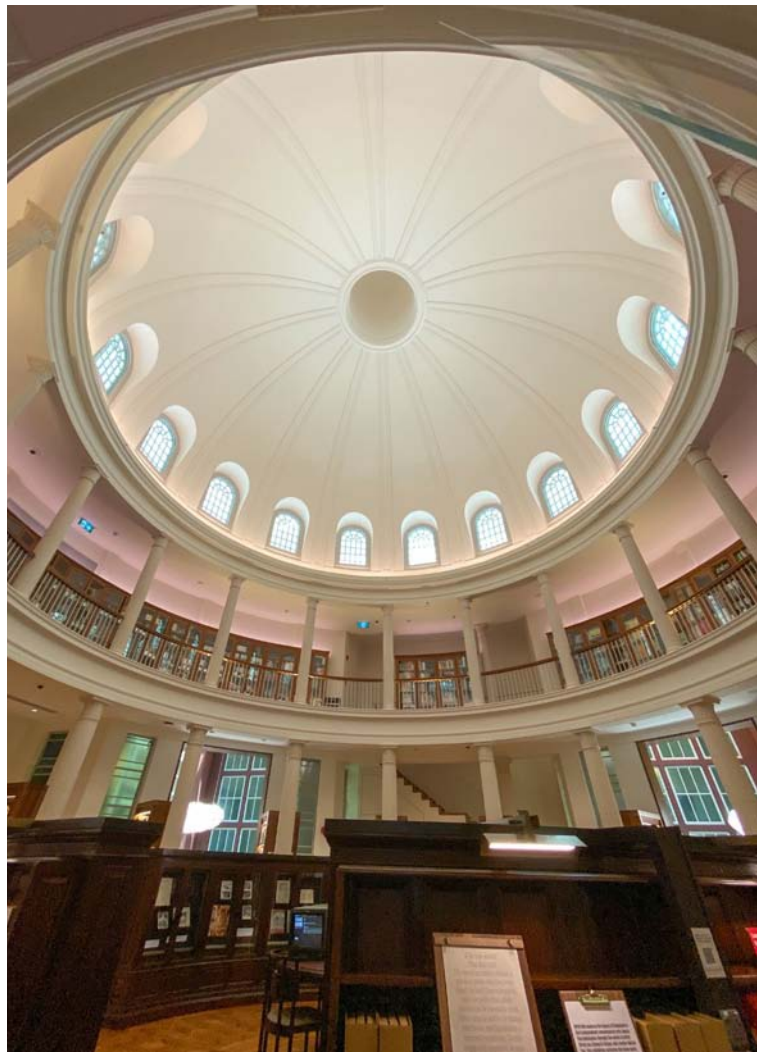
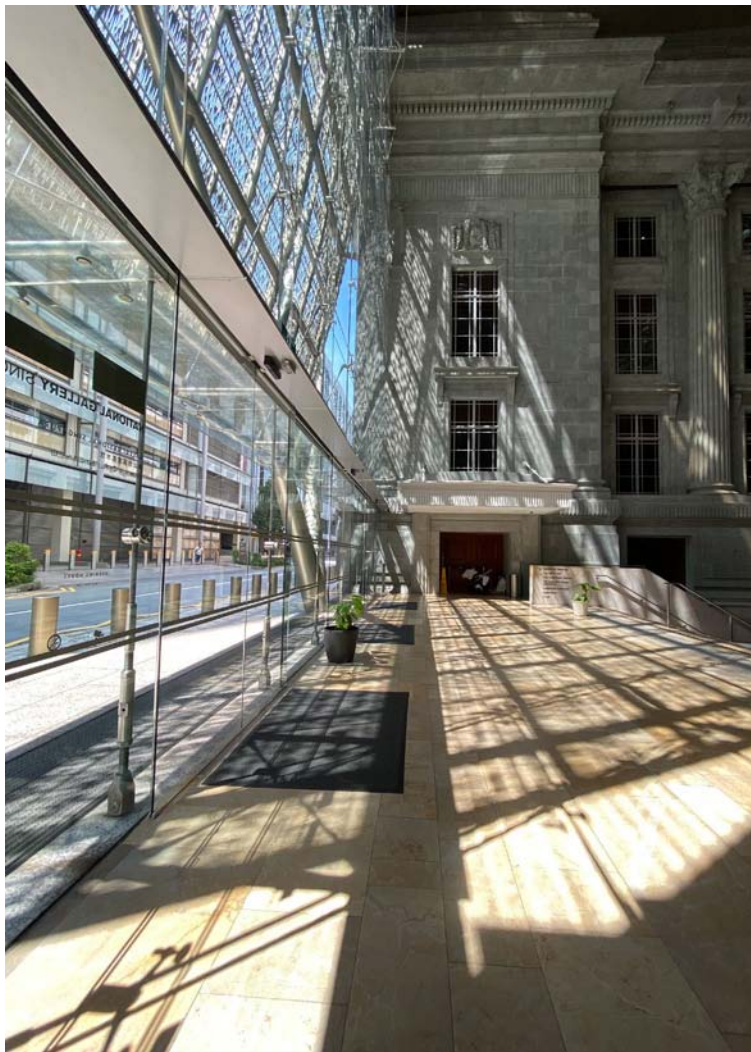
Embedded in the history of Singapore is the name Sir Stanford Raffles. It was something of a pilgrimage to see, at least from the outside, the famous hotel that bears his name. Judging by the other tourists who also paused to photograph and witness sleek cars crunch the forecourt gravel, we were not alone.



The former City Hall and Supreme Court Court are neighbours, now conjoined by a modern atrium to form an art gallery, learning space and museum. Here western influence can be seen in the work of Asian artists who poignantly depict the city in times past, reminding us of its chequered history and the backbreaking work of those who lived, toiled and sweated in this tropical location. There is plenty of space for modern art to breathe too, taking us on a journey of intrigue and imagination beyond the everyday. Particularly interesting was the work of school students in a display at the learning centre – confident, imaginative and accomplished.

Also in this cluster of civic buildings we had a peek into the foyer to The Arts House – formerly Parliament House, and the Victoria Concert Theatre, home to the Singapore Symphony Orchestra.

Theatre is performed every night on the stage of the harbour, where we watched the nightly display. Water jets and water mist are animated and synchronised with lighting effects and music. The stage scenery is the glittering backdrop of skyscrapers, and the auditorium the open air plaza.





Within the Shoppes atrium is another water sculpture – Rain Oculus by Ned Kahn. Above, viewable outside on the plaza, jets stream water into a huge whirlpool which cascades inside over a mock Venetian canal, risking gondola riders of a soaking.

Opposite page clockwise from top: Night Calligrapher, watercolour by Ong Kim Seng (1982); Singapore River, oil on canvas by Lim Tze Peng (1965); cupola in the National Gallery reading room; atrium link between former City Hall and Supreme Court. This page from top: Pagoda Street, at night; Spectra Light and Water Show; Rain Oculus.





Top: Chijmes – former Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus Middle Education School – now a dining and event venue.

Above: umbrella dryer, City Hall station.

Day 10: Saturday 28 September

The National Museum of Singapore seemed a building worthy of a photo, with the benefit of a visit inside to keep cool. It was open but completely encased in scaffolding. Conversely the nearby Singapore Arts Museum was “temporarily closed”, visible but behind building site boards.

Within the National Museum historical display is an old map printed to an enlarged scale on the floor. We found ourselves standing on Beach Road, which was in those days a promenade by the beach. Walking that road ourselves the day before, we had remarked on how inappropriate the name seemed to be – a long way from the sea.

When Raffles Hotel opened on that road in 1887 land reclamation using rock and beach sand was already under way. The expansion of the land area of the city is perhaps a metaphor for its commercial success.

One thing has not changed – the hot weather and tropical downpours. But air-conditioned cars, buses and metro trains have replaced the rickshaws worked by mostly Chinese immigrants for 12 hour days. Comfortable travel is now democratised. But what do you do with a wet umbrella?

By shop and mall doors there are long narrow plastic bags provided to wrap them. Singapore has to be kept squeaky dry as well as clean indoors. And at some stations you can even use an umbrella dryer. We wondered how durable our flimsy folding brollies would fare if churned through one. So far we have had no need to find out – we have only used them to shelter from the sun rather than the rain.

Gratitude for a safe journey hasn't the same significance than in days gone by. We visited the Thian Hock Keng temple in Chinatown, built for the worship of Mazu, a Chinese sea goddess. It is the oldest and most important temple of the Hokkien, who originate from southeastern Fujian in S.E. China. We were more than struck by the gilded carved decoration. Here was another holy shrine, another Buddhist sect, and a reminder that the country we know as simply China with a huge population is many distinct places and peoples.



Near the temple was a piece of art we were able to relate to more readily - a bronze depicting figures in a Chinese procession. These colourful events still take place and it was good to have a reminder that the streets of Chinatown, vibrant any day, are even more so for celebrations.

Sketch of the Chinese procession sculpture and surroundings at Telok Ayer Green, – the tree is a giant fern. Though in Chinatown, the building to the right is the Muslim Nagore Dargah Museum; right: Thian Hock Keng Temple, view from outside with Frasers Tower beyond.

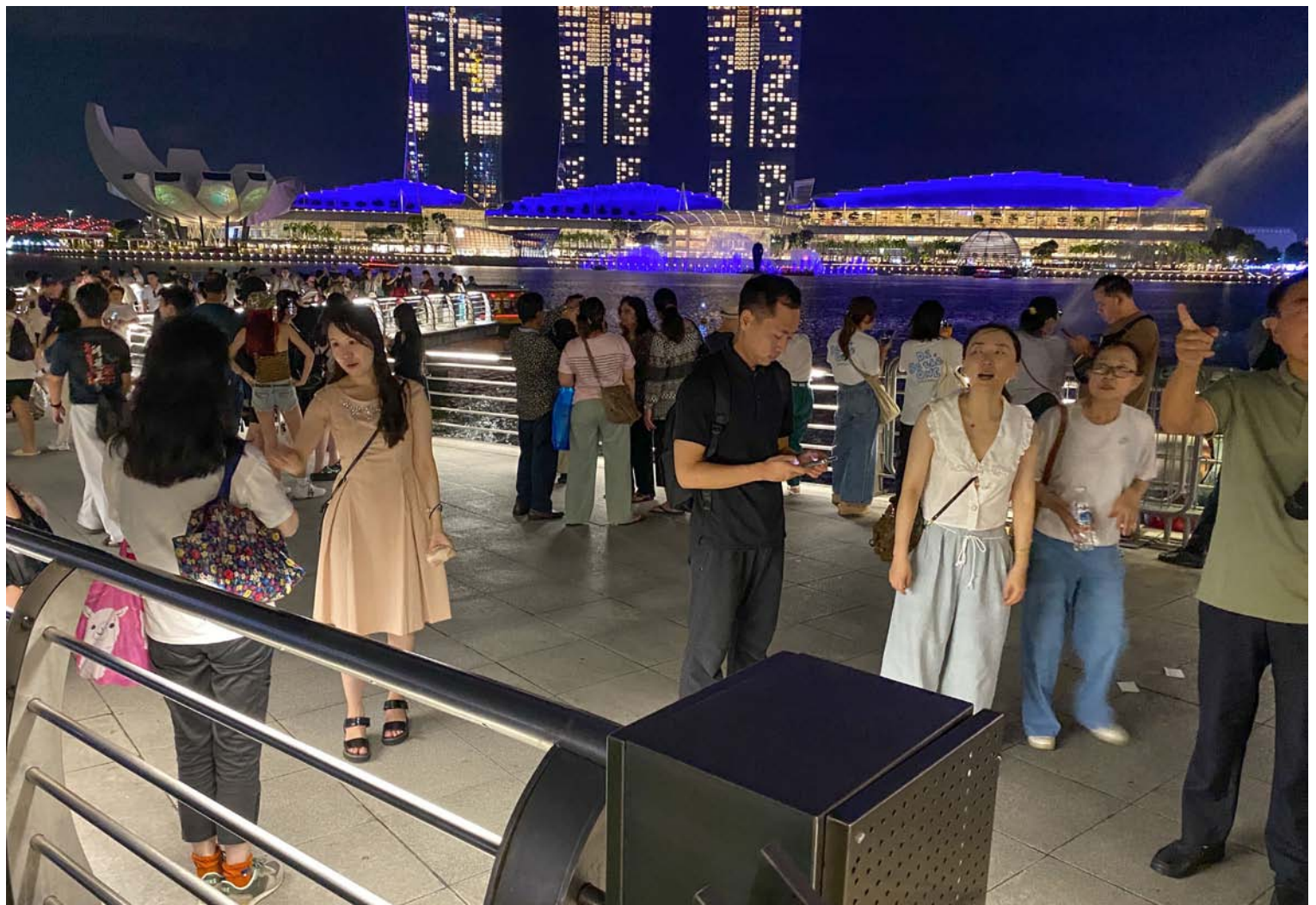
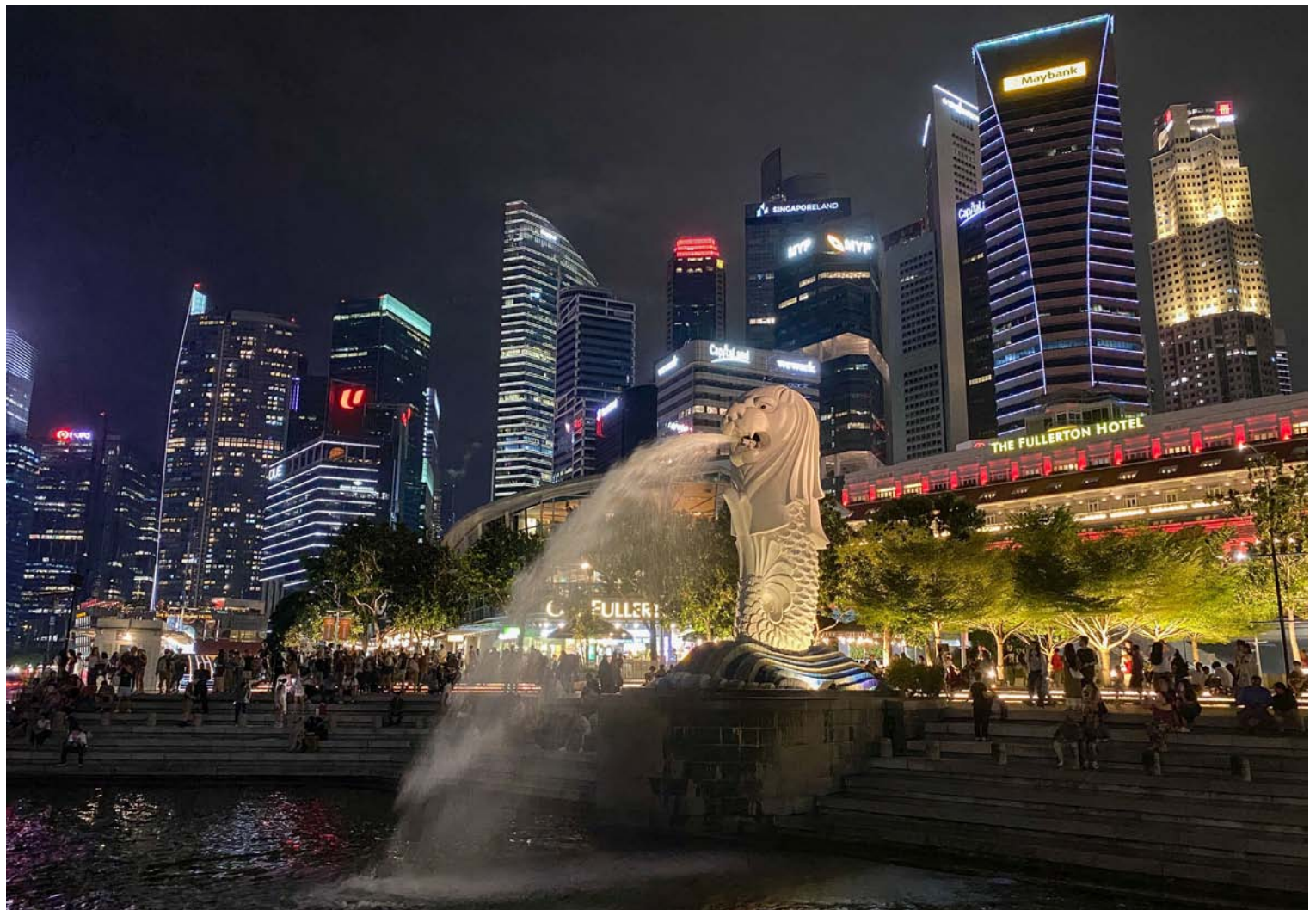


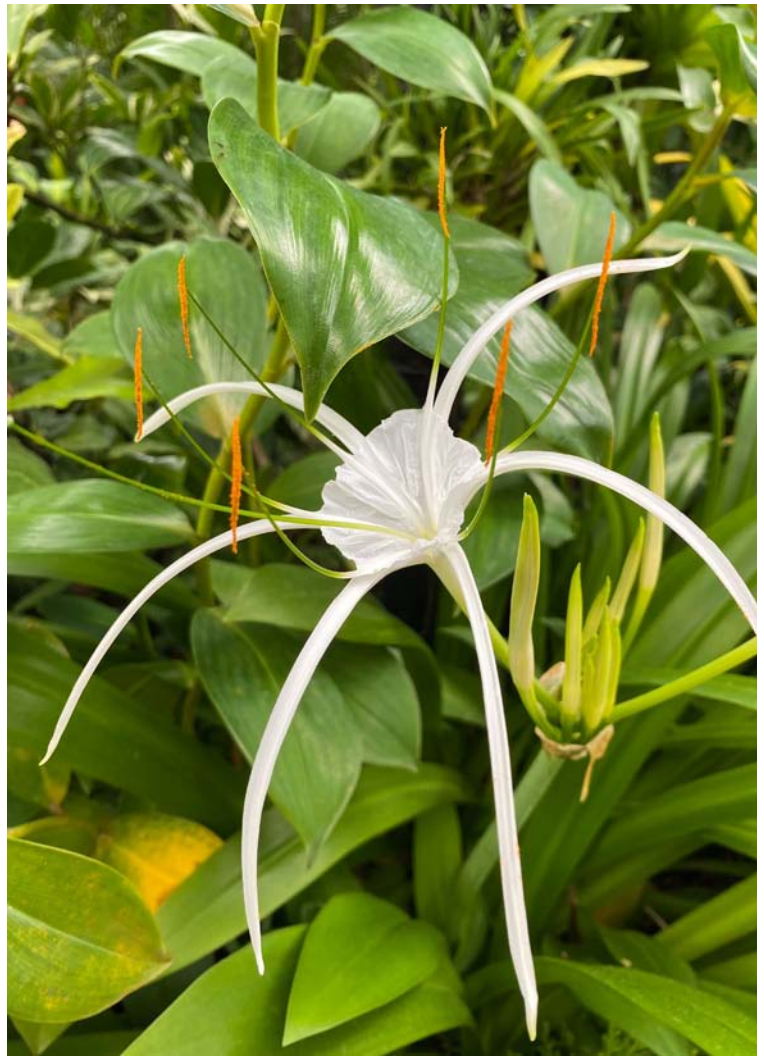


After dark, it seems as if everyone is in a party mood on the waterfront, where the giant Lion Fish spews an arc of water into the harbour. Water, and the sea, are, unsurprisingly, themes for celebration here. And there is something magical about the effect of light on water, particularly on a hot evening when everyone is promenading, eating, drinking, and of course, selfie-taking.

Top: “bumboats”, once used to carry cargo from anchored ships into the harbour, now carry sightseers; above: Jubilee Bridge.

Opposite page, top: Merlion fountain on Fullerton Road; bottom: promenading on Merlion Quay.





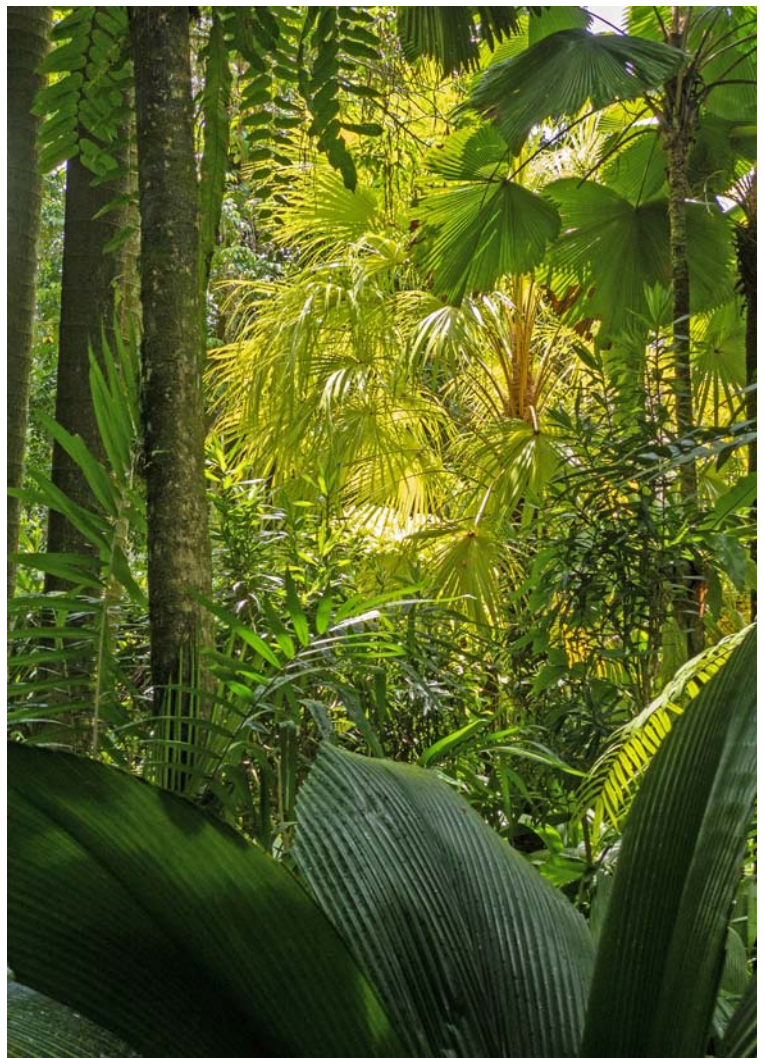
Day 11: Sunday 29 September

We took the metro to the Botanical Gardens. It is a park quite unlike any we might be accustomed to in Britain. We have hothouses, but here, we were already in a hothouse, and so what to us resembled tropical jungle is a thriving but carefully managed collection of species from equatorial regions around the world. It was a humid 30 degrees, normal for Singapore, but not normal for us. At our slow pace we had time to marvel at the array of plants and trees but had no way of knowing what they were. After browsing in the airconditioned shop, we went into the Orchid Garden – at a very favourable over-60s ticket price! Again we had a great time wondering just what it was we were looking at.

We moved on, to take in some more urban views from an elevated metro line. Few Singaporeans seem to have the benefit of much living space or private gardens. No wonder the city is on a “greening” mission with public spaces, and no wonder too that



Top left: Lower Palm Valley, Singapore Botanical Gardens; above right and right: in the Orchid Garden.



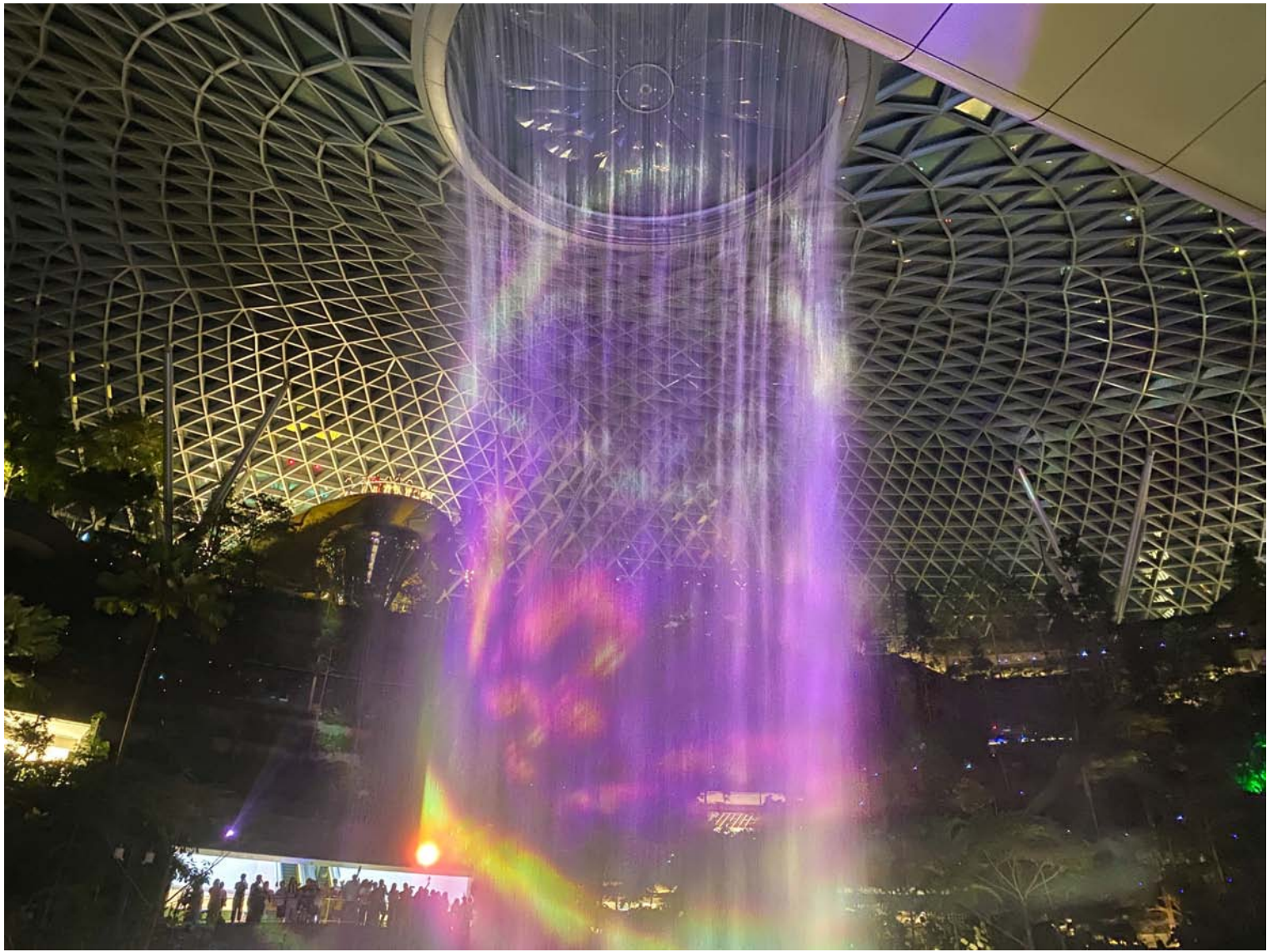
the cool shopping malls are so popular.

We alighted at Somerset station to visit one such mall and found a Japanese Restaurant. Sunday lunchtime was busy but there were tables, a chance to practice ordering by mobile and QR code, and an opportunity to sample Japanese food for the first time in years. And with that excellent meal, our trip was at an end. Except for one last bit of sightseeing.

This trip was intended as a one-off. We have experienced much that is very different from home, particularly the climate, but seen what to us is familiar, such as the multi-cultural mix of people. English is widely spoken, traffic drives on the left, we don't need electrical adaptors, and even vehicle number plates have a familiar look, as if a legacy from Britain in the 1960s. Street names are a curious mixture of the alien and names that remind us of streets at home. Everywhere in Singapore is sparkling clean. People are polite, helpful, and often give up their seats on the crowded metro to us oldies.

Top left: in the Orchid Garden; above right: Lower Palm Valley; right: Sunday lunchtime at Macca House, Orchard Road.





The light show waterfall in Jewel, a garden within Changhi Airport, was our final sight of Singapore. It has become a tourist attraction in its own right – quite an achievement for an airport. More water, more greening, more spectacle. And a moment for us to reflect on our journey.

We have navigated two metro systems, been inside awe inspiring temples, discovered great examples of art and architecture, eaten extremely well and made a memorable train journey. Every day has been a new experience.



Clockwise from top: illuminated cascade at Jewel, Changi Airport; well-ordered exit and entry to trains on a Singapore metro platform; even car numberplates have a familiar British look.



Tour Organiser: Trailfinders, Nottingham | Flights: British Airways & Malaysian Airlines
Accommodation: Hotel Stripes, Kuala Lumpur; Village Hotel Albert Court, Singapore