

WEDNESDAY 18 MAY 2011 MUMBAI

ET Travel



Dali-ance With Brilliance

For **Gustasp** and **Jeroo Irani**, stepping into the Dali Theatre Museum in Figueres was like peeping inside the wacky mind of the iconic Spanish artist

It may amount to artistic blasphemy to state this but we had never cared too much for Salvador Dali, the surrealist painter. Neither the man nor his art. The pointed twirled moustache, beelling eyebrows hovering above fiery bulging eyes and his extreme eccentricity amply reflected in his body of work seeded over the top and sensational.

That was till we stumbled on the Dali Theatre Museum, in the town of Figueres, Spain, where he was born on May 11, 1904. And we doffed our hats to the man's genius. About an hour's drive from Barcelona brought us to the treasure trove tucked away in the heart of a medieval-Renaissance town.

The rust-red museum itself was a surrealist fantasy and rivalled the exhibits within, in terms of sheer weirdness. The exterior was studded with representations of the loaves of bread sold locally that we thought initially were cow dung pats!

The pediments bore gleaming statues that resemble the ones that winners walk away with at the Oscars and over-sized eggs loomed on the roof while a blue transparent geodesic dome on the top of the building has become the town's symbol and emblem. Little wonder for this small town's sole claim to fame is the overwhelming presence of its most famous son whose larger-than-life ghost seems to stride around like a colossus.

Incidentally, the museum was built on the ruins of a theatre that was gutted in a fire during the Spanish civil war. However, since the opening of this showcase of Dali's work in 1974, the cash registers haven't stopped ringing. Indeed the museum is the fourth most visited attraction in Spain. Dali personally conceptualised, designed, decorated and painted the museum!

Walking through it was like burrowing into the labyrinthine mind of an almost insane genius with a skewed world view. Indeed life inside Dali's head seemed more exciting than in the real world! Space and time were distorted and the museum was almost like a magical theme park, hijacking the viewer and taking him or her on some crazy rides.

The master's works in Surrealism, Fu-



ture, Cubism and Impressionism can all be found here. This is the largest collection of Dali's work... 4,000 pieces varying from sculpture to painting, holograms and drawing, engraving to photography and even jewellery. And these range from the outlandish to the downright bizarre!

We caught ourselves smiling and laughing helplessly and voicing strong reactions that ranged from shock to disbelief. Were we going crazy and hallucinating or was the artist's mind spiralling into insanity? It might have, had it not been for his wife, muse and soul mate Gala who it is said reined him and his unbridled creativity and maintained things on an even keel.

When she died seven years before he did, the man and the artist went into decline, wilted and withered away... Dali attempted suicide a few times but was later brought back to Figures by his friends, patrons and well wishers who looked after him till his death. The museum that he created is also his mausoleum because the zany artist is buried here.

Ultimately, this is not some dull museum where you need a guide to give you profound explanations about what the artist wanted to say, his state of mind, his relationship with the universe etc. Dali famously said: "There are two kinds of vis-

itors. Those who don't need a description and those who aren't worth a description."

We might have fitted the second category but would have been redeemed subsequently in the master's eyes considering that we had a rollicking good time at the end of our agenda-less tour. As we wandered around, it became obvious that not only was Dali an artist, he was also an entertainer and the museum gives one a ringside view of what is an eminently enjoyable show!

And so we started in the theatre section - where Dali's 1941 Cadillac stood. Pop a coin and there is a shower of rain in the car! Above it is the boat that Dali and his wife used for romantic excursions.

Nature's Surreal Display >>> 24



ET Travel

JOIN US AS WE TAKE YOU PLACES

Dali Would Have Loved Figueres' Natural Beauty

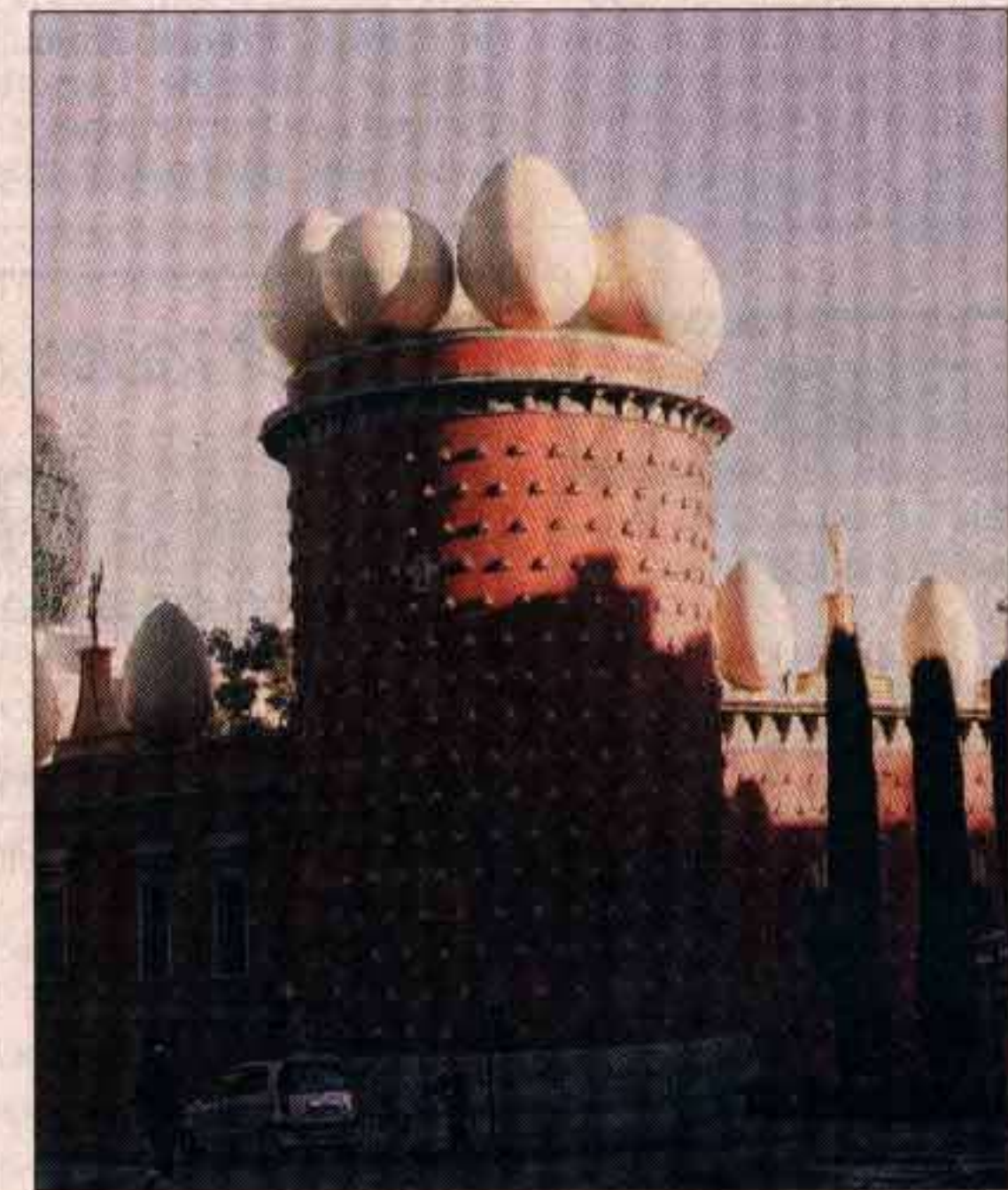
NO.1... CONFERENCE VENUE BIGGEST AND BESTIN MUMBAI



17 Conf. Halls
49 Guest Rooms
46 Apartments
3 Lawns

GCC BUSINESS HOTEL & CLUB

MIRA ROAD
www.gccclub.com
info@gccclub.com
Saikat 9870293399
Jagdev 9773104949



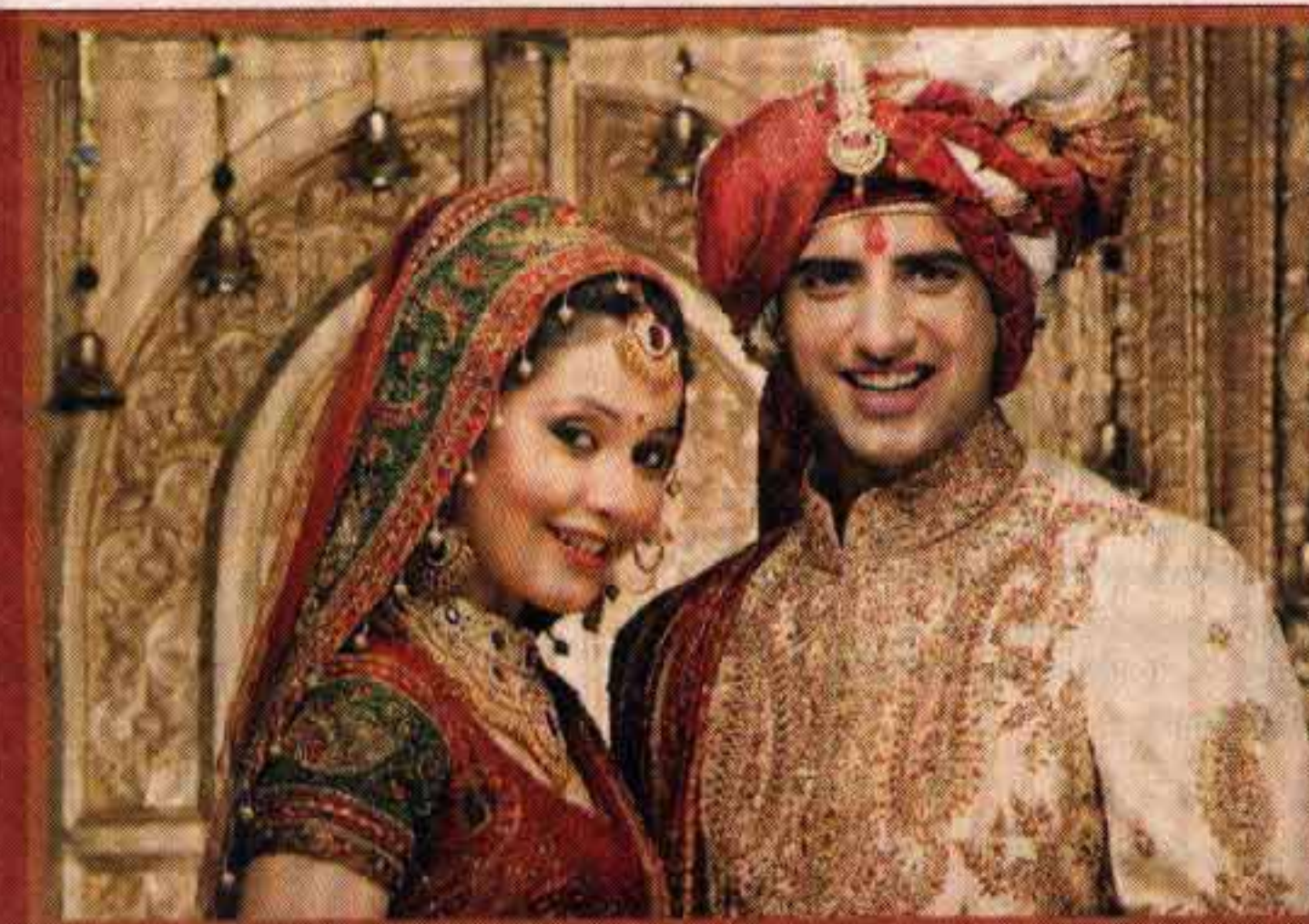
The boat drips with tears - of blue condoms! Up on the stage is a large digital image of Abraham Lincoln. Under this image is a room brimming with Dali's original oil paintings for much of what a viewer sees on the walls are just prints.

There are portraits of Dali and Gala dancing on the plains of Catalonia (Dali's home province); of Dali and Gala with one big eye, a big ear and part of the face dark and shaded; of the two zooming into heaven; and of the picturesque fishing village of Cadaques, full of light and shadows, where the ultimate surrealist spent summers as a child.

Crutches are a recurring theme in his work and were evocative of Gala's support especially when he felt like he was teetering on the edge and might well have tumbled into the bottomless abyss of depression. In the Dalinian universe, it was perfectly acceptable to portray his wife with lamb chops on her shoulder and to paint Beethoven the composer with the ink of squid which he applied with a shoe, one night in a fit of inspired rage!

Liz Taylor's glove bears an image of Christ, and elsewhere there is a room where the furniture, from an elevated vantage point, resembles the face of the famous actress Mae West whose spunky attitude to life the painter admired. ("Why marry and make one man unhappy when you can stay single and make many happy" she would say).

The adjoining Dali's Jewels exhibit was quite an eye opener too - it displayed sketches and paintings of jewellery that Dali designed and the actual pieces that were fabricated by jewellers subsequently on the basis of these outré outpourings. A mouthful of pear-



Give your wedding a royal touch!

Welcome to Imperial Palace. The place you will fall in love with, at first sight. Set amidst lush greenery in the heart of Mumbai, this 5-star hotel has everything to make you and your guests feel special. Come, fall in love