Monday, February 18, 2008
The group departs New York on a flight to Chennai.  *(Meals aloft)*

Tuesday, February 19, 2008
Late this evening, we arrive at Chennai Airport. Upon arrival, we check-in at the Taj Connemara Hotel.  *Taj Connemara (meals aloft)*

Wednesday, February 20, 2008
The morning is at leisure. This afternoon, we enjoy a city tour by motorcoach, including a visit to the renowned Government Museum of Chennai. The Government Museum displays the largest and most spectacular collection of bronzes in India. Of particular note are the various *Nataraja*, or Dancing Shiva, created centuries apart and displaying the artistic styles of each period. This evening, we are treated to a welcome dinner under the stars featuring live music and dancers and fine South Indian cuisine.  *Taj Connemara (B, D)*

Thursday, February 21, 2008
At Mahabalipuram, a 7th century Pallava trading port and UNESCO World Heritage Site, we examine the sublime rock-cut temples of Mahabalipuram and the spectacular shore temple, a spectacular two-spired shrine, unique in that it houses both Vishnu and Shiva in its sanctum. We enjoy a delightful al fresco lunch on the Bay of Bengal, serenaded by the sounds of the waves crashing against the shore. Next, we learn about the architecture and crafts tradition of the four states of South India at Dakshinachitra. Using actual buildings transported and reconstructed from each state, Dakshinachitra gives visitors rare insight into how each state’s architecture varies based on environmental and economic factors, as well as how crafts are produced for the home.  *Taj Connemara (B, L)*
Friday, February 22, 2008
Following a morning flight to Madurai, we visit the Meenakshi Temple, the great temple of this important Hindu pilgrimage city and an artistic masterpiece. Elaborate multicolored figures of mythical animals, deities, and monsters adorn the twelve temple towers, soaring high above the city buildings. This afternoon, we are welcomed into a weaving village to interact with local weavers in their homes to see patterns taking shape and learn about how skills are passed down to younger generations. Madurai is renowned across India for its high quality cotton and silk weavings, which are produced in these villages. *Taj Garden Retreat (B, L)*

Saturday, February 23, 2008
This morning, we drive past, tea, cardomom, and vanilla plantations blanketing the mountains en route to Thekkady, a tranquil hill station in Kerala. Late this afternoon, we cruise through Periyar National Park on a private wildlife tour. We observe the herds of elephant and sambar, gaur and wild pigs as they wander down to the lakeside. This evening, we have the opportunity to sample freshly prepared cuisine during a lively cooking demonstration by the hotel’s chef. *Spice Village (B, L)*

Sunday, February 24, 2008
This morning, we tour a spice plantation and learn about agricultural practices and the history of spice in the region. We enjoy lunch with the owners of a rubber and pineapple plantation, then continue to Kumarakom, Kerala’s heartland of lagoons, palm-fringed lakes, and paddy fields, interlinked with hundreds of winding canals. Low slung country boats transport everything through this canal network, from people to fish, rice and coconuts to the milkman and newspaper boy, local politicians and priests to wedding parties. We check in at the Kumarokom Lake Resort, a lovely resort property within the backwaters. This evening, we watch the sunset as we cruise along Vembanad Lake. *Kumarokom Lake Resort (B, L)*

Monday, February 25, 2008
Today is a leisurely day in the backwaters. The early morning and late afternoon are ideal times to arrange an ayurvedic spa treatment at the hotel’s spa. Ayurveda is the holistic science of healing practiced throughout India, but the method in Kerala is famous throughout the world. Late this morning we board our private boat for a cruise through the tranquil backwaters. Shaded by a wooden canopy, we cruise past simple, tiled-roof homes and observe as children play, women wash clothing and dishes, and people stroll past paddy fields. We disembark on a working coconut and spice farm, where we enjoy a private tour of the farm followed by a savory lunch prepared by the owner’s mother. We return to the hotel in the late afternoon for a leisurely evening at the spa or dinner under the stars. *Kumarokom Lake Resort (B, L)*
**Tuesday, February 26, 2008**
Following an independent morning, we continue to Cochin, a commercial port city set amidst lagoons, coconut palms and backwaters. Upon arrival, we visit the Chinese fishing nets, the cantilevered fishing contraptions that line the entrance to the harbor mouth. As we stroll along the coast, we pass the local fishmarkets and see the fresh catches laid out for purchase. We continue to St. Francis Church. Originally named after Santo Antonio and dedicated to him as the Patron Saint of Portu, St. Francis Church is the first church to have been in the new European influenced tradition. In 1524, Vasco De Gamma died on the site and was originally buried in the cemetery, but his body was sent to Portugal 14 years later. This evening, we are treated to a special dinner overlooking the harbor. We retire to our exquisite hotel on the tip of Willingdon Island this evening. *Taj Malabar (B, D)*

**Wednesday, February 27, 2008**
We begin with a visit to the oldest Jewish Synagogue in India. Built in 1568, it was destroyed by the Portuguese and rebuilt by the Dutch a century later. In 1776 a wealthy Dutch Jewish trader, Ezekiel Rahabi, added a clock tower and exquisite Chinese blue and white porcelain floor tiles, each hand painted in a different design. Its fascinating interior includes 19th-century Belgian chandeliers, a ladies gallery and an elegant brass pulpit. Free time will be given to meander the shops and narrow streets of the historic Jewish quarter. Next, we join a noted chef for a lively cooking demonstration in her private home, followed by a home-prepared lunch prepared by the chef. We enjoy a relaxing afternoon interacting with our host and her family and discussing Keralan cooking techniques. In the evening, we are quests at a Kathakali dance center to witness the most elaborate of the dance forms in southern India. Through exceptional makeup and costumes, the identity of the actor is completely transformed to create a super human being of larger-than-life proportion. *Taj Malabar (B, L)*
Thursday, February 28, 2008
The morning is at leisure to explore the craft and spice markets or relax in our luxurious hotel. This afternoon, we return to Chennai. This evening, we are treated to a festive farewell dinner hosted by a famous Bharatanatyam dancer at a private club. Over cocktails and dinner, she will discuss her career as a dancer and the history of this traditional artform. Taj Connemara (B, D)

Friday, February 29, 2008
This morning, we are guests at a Bharatanatyam music and dance school, where we are invited to observe classes and interact with the dance students. This school was founded in the 1920s in an effort to re-establish classical dance in a modern context. We continue to a famed Tamil film studio in Chennai for a special meeting with the director and a private tour of the studio. India is renowned for its whimsical musical films, both in Hindi and Tamil languages, which reflect Indian culture, and often its ability to laugh at itself, through often-predictable plotlines and hyperbolic characters. The zest and excitement for these films is nothing short of a cultural phenomenon; viewers can often be found singing and dancing in the aisles at movie theatres across the country. Depending on shooting schedules, we may be invited to watch a movie shoot in progress. This afternoon, we return to our hotel and the balance of the day is at leisure. This evening, we transfer to the airport for return flights to the United States.
Taj Connemara (B)

Saturday, March 1, 2008
We depart Chennai shortly after midnight and arrive in New York on the same day. (Meals aloft)