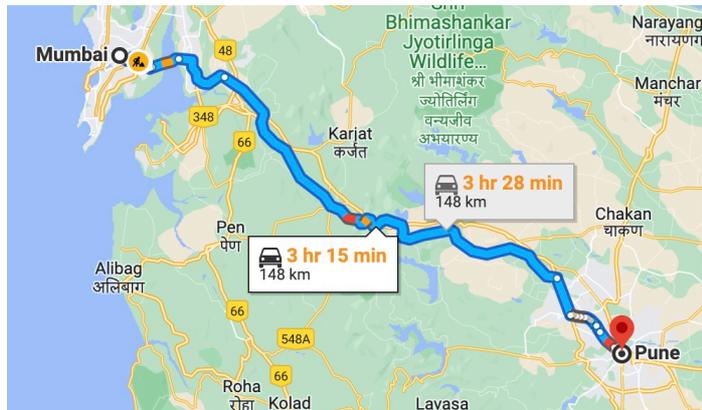
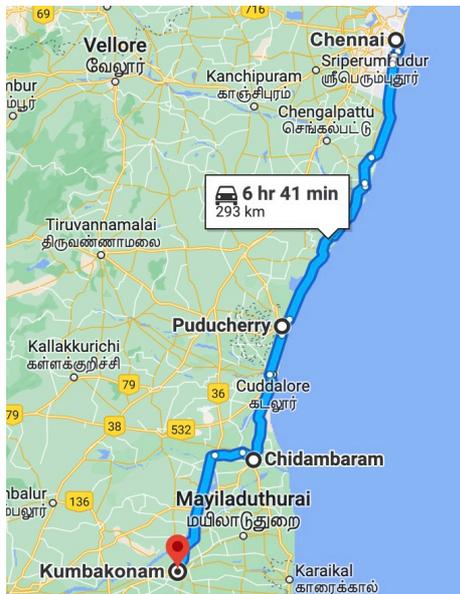


TRIP TO INDIA AND LONDON BY DICK AND LIZ ASKEY,
DECEMBER 1987 - JANUARY 1988

*a travel diary written by Liz Askey,
edited by Tom Koornwinder¹, 9 June 2022,
thanks also to Howard Cohl for careful reading.*

Schedule:

- December 11-14: Madras (Chennai²; visit to Mrs. Ramanujan)
- December 15-16: Chidambaram (conference at Annamalai University)
- December 17: excursion to Kumbakonam (visit to Ramanujan's home)
- December 18: Pondicherry (closing session of conference at Annamalai University)
- December 19-26: Madras (conference at Anna University and International Conference opened by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi)
- December 27-28: Poona (conference)
- December 29- January 8: Bombay (Mumbai³; visit to Tata Research Institute and conference)
- January 9-15: London, UK (culture and shopping, no math)



Conferences attended:

December 15-18: Ramanujan Centennial International Conference⁴, Annamalai Nagar, Chidambaram.

December 19-21: International Ramanujan Centenary Conference held at Anna University, Madras. The conference included a Number Theory symposium⁵.

1. thkmath@xs4all.nl

2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chennai>

3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mumbai>

4. see [Proceedings](#)

5. *Number Theory, Madras, 1987*, [Lecture Notes in Mathematics 1395](#), Springer, 1989

December 22-27: International Ramanujan Birth Centenary Conference⁶, Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Madras (with interruption on December 24-25 by political turmoil, see this diary about December 24 and 25).

December 26-28: Ramanujan Birth Centenary Year International Symposium on Analysis⁷, University of Pune, Poona.

January 4-11: Ramanujan Birth Centenary International Colloquium⁸, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Bombay

Sunday, December 13, 1987

This is unreal! Twenty-four hours worth of travel dulled the senses (four hours on the bus from Canberra to Sydney and an eternity in airports and on airplanes) and we checked into the Hotel Sands for what was left of a night's sleep before going on to Madras the next day. As soon as we left the airport I noticed the smells of a big city in that tropical climate. On the way to the Hotel Sands, as well as while being driven from the Madras airport to our housing for the next two days, the visual impressions of India crowded in on us – crowds, crowds of people everywhere, walking, on bikes or motor scooters, driving bullock carts, in automobiles and trucks. Dirt and garbage everywhere with pigs or goats rooting in it or cows feeding off of it. Going into central Madras the car sent to meet us constantly slowed to go around a cow sleeping in the center of the road or walking across it.

And there's color everywhere – brightly colored saris on the women. The color was even more vibrant, if anything, in the costumes worn by the people lined up at the airport and on a stretch of the road in Madras who were waving small Russian flags to welcome the Moiseyev Dance Company⁹, which was on the same plane we took from Bombay. Every year at this season there is a big cultural festival in Madras, but the dance troupe was here as part of a Festival of the U.S.S.R.

Srinivasa Rao¹⁰ and his wife¹¹ met us at the airport and we were promptly told that Professor Alladi Ramakrishnan¹² wanted to see us as soon as possible. He's a physicist; his son¹³ is a mathematician. There is a great deal of money in the family and we saw it this morning when we were picked up by his driver (45 years with the family) to be taken to his home and to a first class hotel for breakfast (the Savera). After a delicious South Indian breakfast we came back to his house, which his father built in 1918. His father¹⁴ was one of the committee which was responsible for drafting the Indian constitution; he was a well known lawyer in his day. We were shown pictures of him and other family members with such eminent sorts as Nehru and Indira Gandhi. Ramakrishnan set up the Alladi Centenary Foundation in 1983 in honor of his father. The object of the foundation "is to conduct research and stimulate creative activity at the highest level of excellence in various domains

6. See accounts of this conference on pp. 175 and 223-225 of the book: K. Srinivasa Rao, [*Srinivasa Ramanujan. Life and Work of a Natural Mathematical Genius, Swayambh*](#), Springer, 2021

7. see [Proceedings](#)

8. see [Proceedings](#)

9. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lacy-Zarubin_Agreement#The_Moiseyev_Dance_Company.

10. <https://mathscinet.ams.org/mathscinet/search/author.html?mrauthid=203778>, see also [K. Srinivasa Rao and his work](#)

11. Geetha Srinivasa Rao, <https://mathscinet.ams.org/mathscinet/search/author.html?mrauthid=202917>

12. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alladi_Ramakrishnan

13. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krishnaswami_Alladi, see also [MathSciNet](#)

14. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alladi_Krishnaswamy_Iyer

of human knowledge." Professor Richard Askey has been asked to give the next talk under the aegis of this foundation. He accepted.

All this hoopla is quite unbelievable. We're just going to accept it and "roll with the punches"¹⁵. What a contrast it all is with the squatters sleeping on the sidewalks or wherever they can find space. It looks like we will be given the royal treatment. That will show us one part of the "real" India – but not the part that is the poorest of the poor. That is always there; we will be driven past it every day, but we will really know little about it by the end of our trip. The main meeting in honor of Ramanujan will be in Madras in a week and will include a half hour visit from Rajiv Gandhi¹⁶, India's Prime Minister – definitely not one of India's poor. We have also been told that the American consul here in Madras will host a reception for the attendees at this conference in five or six days time. (I didn't bring fancy clothes for this sort of thing!)

The guest house in which we're staying (run by the Institute for Mathematical Sciences¹⁷) gives us a room with an overhead fan, two iron bedsteads with a thin mattress and pillow and a framework over which mosquito netting is stretched – no bed clothes, since who needs them in this heat. There are two metal desks and chairs and shelving made of concrete like the rest of the house – basic, but quite adequate. Fancier accommodations will come later, according to what Ramakrishnan said. We will be picked up shortly to go meet Ramanujan's widow. Time to get the camera out.

Monday, December 14

It was a very moving experience to meet with Ramanujan's widow. At 87 she lives alone, wanting to maintain her hard-won independence. She supported herself as a seamstress for forty years and bought the house in which she lives with the proceeds of those years of work. She has the bust of Ramanujan¹⁸ on a stand and she treats it like a temple, she told us through interpreters. Her foster son and his wife were there, as well as Srinavasa Rao and his wife, and Arnold Ross¹⁹, who is retired from Ohio State. Mrs. Ramanujan now has adequate pension money for her needs. She put some of her funds into buying some European style furniture, since she knew she would be having guests this month, and she also freshened up her house with a coat of paint. We were served bottles of cold orange soda (a universal drink around here), but turned down offers of fruit. (We're trying to minimize our chances of getting sick. The next four weeks will show us how well we succeed.) Mrs. Ramanujan was very appreciative about the bust; having it these past three years has given her great joy. That was the whole point of it. We're glad.

After lunch at Arnold Ross' hotel Srinavasa Rao sent us off with a student of his and a hired car to Mahabalipuram²⁰, where there are beautiful carved rock temples from South India's Pallava dynasty period in the 600s and 700s a.d. It was a port city during that period, but what's left are the temples, including the Shore Temple which is the only one remaining of several which were built. Cyclones out of the Bay of Bengal, plus time, have destroyed all but this remaining one. A fairly bustling rock carving industry, helped along evidently by the government College of Architecture and Sculpture, which is located there, are all that

15. <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/roll+with+the+punches>

16. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajiv_Gandhi

17. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institute_of_Mathematical_Sciences,_Chennai

18. Read about this bust and its copies on pp. 192-193 of the book: K. Srinivasa Rao, [*Srinivasa Ramanujan. Life and Work of a Natural Mathematical Genius, Swayambh*](#), Springer, 2021.

19. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arnold_Ross

20. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mamallapuram>

remains of what was once a busy city. All along the beach, as we drove the fifty-five kilometers from Madras, were resorts ranging from fancy to a good bit less than fancy.

The road from Madras itself, like roads all over India, teems with life. As Srinavasa Rao commented, if it moves, it's on the road. We stopped sometimes to let a water buffalo cross the road, along with all the other traffic. I was a bit surprised to see some of the three wheeled electric taxis, which are all over Madras, as far outside of a big city as Mahabalipuram. None of the footpedaled taxis came that far, however.

I think, after two days here, we may already be noticing the smells of India a bit less. Garbage and trash is commonly emptied onto the sidewalks and curbs. The smell of droppings mixes with the smell of whatever garbage hasn't been eaten before it rots – droppings from cows, water buffaloes, dogs, goats – and probably humans as well. Today we walked down to the Bay of Bengal which is a short walk from our guest house. We passed cow patties lying in the sun to dry, and the herd of cows which probably produced them was lying on the beach near a fishing boat. Maybe it gave them some shade but the beach could hardly have produced any food for them. One never knows, though. On yesterday's trip we saw herds of cows and goats grazing on what looked like little more than sandy beaches. We were told yesterday about Indian milkmen – which sounds very "western" until the rest of the description goes on to inform us that the milkman drives his cow to your house and milks it while you (or a servant) watch to be sure he doesn't water the milk.

Srinavasa Rao is a mine of such nuggets of information about Indian society. He is a physicist at the Math-Science Institute and his wife is a mathematician at the Ramanujan Institute at the University of Madras.

Srinavasa Rao said he is content to do what he can here in India, but his wife feels they are wasting their talents here and would prefer to live abroad. She clearly feels that the problems of India are so intractable that her responsibilities should be to herself and her immediate family.

And the problems are immense. We were introduced to some of them at the Shore Temple yesterday when several beggars zeroed in on us – obviously a couple of prosperous tourists. India, A Travel Survival Kit²¹, which we bought in Australia, advised its readers not to give money to beggars but instead to give money to some of the charitable institutions in India which are trying to deal with the problems which produce the beggars. It's not easy to turn away from them though. One man who came my way was one armed and one legged and got about using a stick.

The vendors, as well as the beggars, are "hard sell." Whether they were selling guide services, postcards or stone carvings they didn't give up easily. Any kind of polite turndown was taken as an invitation to keep pushing you for a sale. It bothered Dick more than it bothered me. I figured that was how they conducted their business of earning their living and it simply came with the turf whether I as an individual wanted to buy what they were selling or not. Both of us, though, were suffering from acute sensory overload by the end of the day yesterday. The sights, sounds and smells of India can be quite overwhelming. We are certainly being educated! I spent quite a bit of time during yesterday's drive trying to figure out how to describe what we were seeing and how we were reacting to it. Too big a job – I'll keep trying, but I'm not at all sure I'll succeed.

In an hour or two we're off for the five hour 240 kilometer drive to Annamalai University²² where the first Ramanujan meeting will be held. Two mini-buses have been hired to transport about twenty of us (George Andrews²³ isn't here yet. We think he missed

21. Lonely Planet, 1981; see at amazon.com or at archive.org

22. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annamalai_University

23. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Andrews_\(mathematician\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Andrews_(mathematician)), see also MathSciNet

his connection in London.) on what Srinavasa Rao said was a tiring trip. The roads we traveled yesterday weren't well maintained and I'll be surprised if the road we're to travel today is any better.

Tuesday, December 15

Bruce Berndt²⁴ is giving the opening talk in the Ramanujan Centennial Conference (December 15-18) at Annamalai University in Chidambaram. I'm sitting here letting his words wash over me, while I try to set down some impressions of what turned out to be an eight and one-half hour trip from Madras. Most of the trip was on one of India's better roads, according to Basil Gordon²⁵ of UCLA, who has traveled in India fairly extensively. A "better" road is rather ghastly; one of the country's worse roads (like that from Pondicherry to Chidambaram) would, in the U.S., probably be closed to traffic. No such waste here! If it moves it's on the road, just as Rao said a couple of days ago. There is no time of day when there's not foot, bullock cart, car traffic, etc., etc. moving on the roads. We saw only two accidents on our way here – one truck tipped over in the ditch by the road and, later, a truck/military vehicle crash. Why there isn't more road carnage is a matter of amazement. Drivers tend to go straight down the middle of the road, since the rest of the space is full of all the other forms of traffic. Drivers are past masters of the game of "chicken," swerving only at the last moment. Most buses, trucks and other large vehicles have "sound horn" painted on the back. Drivers sound their horns to signal that they're going to pass and to tell bike riders, pedestrians and cows to move over because they're coming through. Actually, considering the incredible crush of traffic on the roads, what this boils down to is an almost continuous sounding of horns. Add this to the noise of a mini-bus having the stuffing beaten out of its suspension system by the gaping holes, bumps and merely rough spots on the road surface and you get some notion (but only some notion) of a trip like this. Since the roadways aren't lit, the large trees that lined some stretches of the road were painted with reflective stripes so you can tell where they are after dark. Of course there is no reflective tape on the backs of the bullock carts, or on the cows, water buffaloes or people. It's a good thing that many of the people wear white. That helps control the slaughter level. We didn't hit anyone or thing or animal, but I constantly wondered why we didn't. I also couldn't understand why everyone didn't leave the bus six inches shorter in the spine from all those hours of jolting.

"All those hours of jolting," which were to have started at 2 p.m. started half an hour late, for reasons never discovered, and didn't last long before our first stop at Macmillan Publishers – their Madras branch. Rao was delivering several manuscripts for a volume honoring Ramanujan. We were all shepherded off the buses and into the office where we were served the inevitable bottle of orange soda. Since this is a hot, humid tropical climate (and I'm describing winter here) one overcomes any dislike of orange soda just to prevent dehydration. I have to keep thinking that, as one piece of material for this conference assured us, since the temperature range here at this season is 70 degrees to 90 degrees, "it is not very warm." If I can convince myself of that I'm all set!

Well, off we went again, jostling up and down through small villages and cities with their shops still open late at night and crowded with people, lit by an occasional bare light bulb, florescent tube, or kerosene lamp as it grew darker. Before the light went we also passed occasional road work being done mostly by hand and with hand tools. People carried road building materials back and forth on their heads. We stopped in one village where soft

24. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_C._Berndt, see also [MathSciNet](#)

25. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basil_Gordon, see also [MathSciNet](#)

drinks were bought for those who wanted them. Most of the shops are open to the world passing by, having essentially no front wall. Considering the climate there's never the necessity to build tight, sturdy structures to keep out the cold. Many of the shops and homes (huts, really) are built with palm fronds and thatch, with people sitting and sleeping on the ground.

Another stop was scheduled in Pondicherry where the members of the mathematics department of the university there (which isn't quite a functioning university, according to Mrs. Rao) were to meet us and serve us snacks at a local hotel. We were a couple of hours late at that point but they were there, still waiting for us. With some delay we two got tea instead of coffee, but it seems almost impossible to get tea without having it boiled together with milk and sugar. We consider ourselves lucky even so; coffee is much more commonly served in South India.

Shortly after leaving Pondicherry we passed through Cuddalore, a good sized town in which a political rally was taking place. Every few feet for blocks a florescent light tube was mounted on a thin pole and strings of colored lights were hung between them. A public address system was going with the regional party (not a national party) representative having his say. We were told all the lights would be taken down after the rally ended. It was a fascinating combination of sights and sounds.

The sign post said 33 kilometers to Chidambaram when the radiator in our bus boiled over as we approached a railroad level crossing. The driver let the bus roll backward to the side of the road to get us out of the way of the bus honking to get by. The driver poured more water into the radiator and a cloud of steam filled the bus. We all tumbled out and joined the party from the second bus which had pulled off and parked behind us. While we waited for the bus to get going again we all stood there with our heads back, gawking at the sky. Without the reflection of city lights and the haze of pollution to cloud the view, there were more stars in the sky than we've ever seen before – it was simply beautiful.

Back into the buses we went and off on the last leg of this "five hour" trip. We arrived at 11 p.m., about three hours late, and then we were all supposed to go off elsewhere to have dinner. No way were we going to have dinner at 11 p.m.! We begged off, as did one other person, and went to bed. This morning we learned that they had given up on waiting dinner for the group, gone home and left people to drum up some oddments to eat more or less on their own. It was also announced that they would be wakened at 6 a.m. ... but the group got that postponed by one half hour. Good thing we knew nothing about that foolishness until it was changed and therefore eliminated as a source of irritation.

"Irritations" seem to be unavoidable for me – at least the insect kind. When we got ready for bed last night I saw that I'd been bitten by something and my skin had over-reacted to it, as it did to the Soviet bed bugs. I am now the possessor of a red, inflamed itchy patch that spreads about three inches by eight inches over my belly. I can only hope that the other insects that will fly or crawl my way won't produce much in the way of reactions. I'd hate to cut my India stay short. I'm hoping the better class hotels during later meetings won't house us along with too great an assortment of insects.

Ah well, if I survived yesterday's trip, which was certainly a trial of soul and body, I'll hope for a small wave of insects this time rather than a major invasion.

We chatted during breakfast with Professor Ramaseshan²⁶, who is Director of the Raman Research Institute in Bangalore (now retired) and a cousin of Chandra's (as we later discovered). He's a very pleasant person – evidently very good in his fields too. He told Dick that Chandra²⁷ had nominated him for appointment as an honorary member of the Indian

26. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S._Ramaseshan

27. Chandrasekhar, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subrahmanyan_Chandrasekhar, see also [MathSciNet](#)

Academy of Sciences²⁸. A vote, which he indicated was just a formality, will be taken in about ten days. Bleep.

No Delhi Belly²⁹ or "runs" yet. I wonder how long we'll be spared that.

Electricity is a bit erratic here. I wonder at what melodramatic moments it will choose to go out on us.

Wednesday, December 16

There's a little lizard which runs up and down the bathroom and bedroom walls occasionally. I hope he's the hotel's resident bug catcher. If he is he can easily earn his keep.

Last night a dance group from Madras performed for the conference. Dances from all over India were beautifully performed by the group and both folk and temple dances were included in the program. The costumes worn were stunning – the colors glowed. I think "jewel-like" is the usual term for those shades of clear orange, gold, green and red.

This morning I went with the Murtys³⁰ sister Mano to the Sri Lord Nataraja Temple³¹, which covers forty acres in the center of Chidambaram. The main temple is to Shiva – the dancing Shiva, and there are lesser temples to Parvati, Subrahmanya and Ganesh, plus a newer Visnu temple. The "sanctum sanctorum" which houses the dancing Shiva, as well as the Chit Sabha, which houses the Akasa Lingam, are roofed with gold plates. There are many beautiful carvings including those on the main gate with "108 classical postures of Nataraja, Shiva in his role as the cosmic dancer" – as our Australian-purchased guide book puts it. I recognized some of the dance positions from last night's dance performance. Quite a bit of the temple statuary is painted so you don't have the impression of looking at cold stone.

Mano was there to make offerings and to pray, as well as to see this architectural monument built in the late 900s during the reign of one of the Chola kings. She and her brothers come originally from Andhra Pradesh, the state immediately north of Tamil Nadu, and she had been looking forward very much to seeing this place, about which she had heard a great deal from her mother. Very high expectations are often dashed and the rudeness of one priest plus the numerous beggars who zeroed in on us like bees to honey threw a good bit of cold water on her excitement. Her own preference is for a temple with peace and quiet where she can read and pray without being intruded upon. Later she and her brothers will be going to the village where they were born, where there is a temple which her grandfather built and which evidently belongs to the family. Its atmosphere suits her better, as does one in Pittsburgh which she has visited. Not all pilgrimages go as you might wish.

Mano is in family medical practice with one other physician. Since her brothers are at universities in Toronto and Montreal I assume she lives in one of those cities, but I don't really know. She's a very independent-minded woman. It will be nice to have some non-mathematical company available for "touristing" and shopping through some of the meeting time in Madras. It was also nice to have someone to tag along after at the temple since I probably would not have had the guts to go alone to an environment as totally foreign to me as that one. Sometimes, though, ignorance can be bliss. I gave the guide who had attached himself to us ten rupees and he not only tried to get an American dollar out of me as well but, according to Mano, he also told the driver of the car we borrowed from George Andrews that we were "chintzy." I, of course, didn't understand a word he was saying and since I'd given

28. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Academy_of_Sciences

29. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Travelers%27_diarrhea#cite_note-webm_Trav-9

30. [Ram Murty](#) (see also [MathSciNet](#)) and [Kumar Murty](#) (see also [MathSciNet](#))

31. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nataraja_Temple,_Chidambaram

him ten rupees rather than five at Manors suggestion I didn't feel chintzy anyway. Ah, ignorant foreigners! What do I know anyway?

Sometimes I think there is no distinction between the country and the city here. Dirt roads or poorly maintained asphalt surfaces plus the cows and goats and water buffaloes wandering on all the "city" streets give this particular Westerner a mixed message. Large farm-type animals belong in rural fields and crowds of people belong in cities. It just doesn't work that way here.

Millions of feet have beaten the earth into dust in India. Last night it rained heavily and today the dust is mud. The temple complex is stone paved so I was padding around in my bare feet in only slightly muddy water – just a small share of India's dust and mud. Not only was it necessary to remove my shoes but my hat had to go as well. I had on a little sun block, but we were inside much of the time and I kept to the shadow as much as I could when we weren't under cover. This hat of mine can be a nuisance in more ways than one. It's difficult to get into taxis while wearing it. I prefer the hat to smearing my face with sun block, but I may have to smear away, like it or not.

Several people have asked me how I like India. I'm still too confused by all the sights and sounds and by the radical differences from what I'm used to, to be able even to attempt an answer to that question. I think I "like" it, whatever that means, but I can see how easy it would be to retreat – even hide – from all that's strange to me.

This morning after we'd waited at the crossing for the train to pass, and commented on it to someone at the conference, we were told that there used to be more unmanned crossings but the government had to hire many more crossing guards because bullock cart drivers would often try to beat the train. The result was often worse for the train than the cart driver and his team – assuming that they survived. The impact was often enough to derail the train.

We are being so cautious of what we eat. After hearing Ram Murty tell about getting typhoid from something he ate in Bombay we're even more inclined to be cautious. He was sick for a month. Getting enough fluid – safe fluid – is also a challenge. We've been told not to trust the water but, as Dick phrases it, it "calls out to us" as the temperature soars. This morning at breakfast (all meals are served at the university) we did something only these circumstances could impel us to do – we drank coffee. The Indians boil it together with milk and sugar and it doesn't taste bad at all – but I haven't had a cup of coffee in over eleven years and Dick can count on one hand the number of cups he's drunk in his whole life. The things necessity will make one do!

I keep forgetting to add that we may have the last casting of the Ramanujan bust sold. When Basil Gordon (of the Gordon gin family) found out one was still available, he said that he was definitely interested, especially since the price was "so cheap." Ah, the perspective of those with real money

Friday, December 18

Wednesday night the whole group from the conference went to the temple. It looks very different after dark and when a service is in progress. Not only was there a crowd of people but a number of bells – some very large – were being rung continuously just a few feet away from us. It was deafening. I think they rang the whole time the priest was passing a flame back and forth in front of the main idol in the sanctum sanctorum. Noise at that level sets my teeth on edge, but it was still worth going. It's certainly not something I'll find just down the street in Madison, Wisconsin.

Thursday was a day of pilgrimage. We went to Kumbakonam³² where we visited Ramanujan's home, the extravagantly carved gate of the temple just down the street which he liked to visit, the secondary school he attended and Government College, where he started his college level training. The older buildings at the college were quite attractive. The Hindu goddess of knowledge was pointed out to us – a proper decoration for an educational institution. We have pictures from both schools, including a shot of the group of boys who swarmed around Dick. He told them he was there because of Ramanujan and asked them what he did and a chorus of "mathematician" came back at him. The teacher who joined the group told them they were talking to the "famous Dr. Askey." It's silly, but we're going to get a lot of that while we're here. Dick says mathematicians aren't made to be famous. So we'll enjoy all the hoopla and go right back to being Joe Average when we leave India. We turned on All India Radio this evening and heard a talk on Ramanujan by Srinavasa Rao, who had met us at the Madras Airport. He quoted the words of Dr. Richard Askey. So it's going to be a zoo and we're in the monkey cage! When we went to visit Ramanujan's home we did just that, in effect, to the family which lived there. I felt we were imposing on them and suggested we leave after a brief few minutes. Ramaseshan told us this was a typical house with every room in a straight line one after another to the back of the house – about fifteen feet wide by forty-five feet long.

We spent quite a bit of time in Ramaseshan's company and that of his daughter Sita on Thursday. He offered us space in his car for the ride to and from Kumbakonam, as well as the ride from Chidambaram to Pondicherry where the last session of the meeting was held. Dick thinks he was probably sizing up this fellow who had been proposed as an Honorary Member of the Indian Academy of Sciences. Whatever his reason it was delightful to get to know him and his daughter. He's a very charming man. He told us a variety of interesting things on the way down, ranging from the history of mathematics, position in Indian science as compared to that of physics to some comments about the pariah dogs³³ we saw in the villages we passed through. He pointed out several Jains wearing masks over their noses and mouths in one village. The mask was to prevent them from breathing in germs, not to protect themselves but to protect the germs; Jains don't believe in killing anything – even germs.

The ride to Kumbakonam was through lovely countryside. Acres of green rice paddies stretched away from the road which was often lined with large tamarind trees. The mud huts in the village, according to Ramaseshan (he told us to call him Siv) are covered with thatch which lasts about five years and the mud walls themselves will last about twenty-five years with proper maintenance. In this farming area we found out an additional use for the roadways. Crops are spread out on the road to dry and sometimes cars drive over them. It's felt that that helps press out the moisture. And of course people sit on the edge of the road surface as well as the shoulder to socialize.

Saturday, December 19

I'm sitting here in the session which Dick is chairing at the Anna University meeting – a good opportunity to "play catch-up" with this notebook.

Thursday evening at Kumbakonam, Ramaseshan gave a very nice talk on Ramanujan and his place in Indian science. He had some personal recollections and connections to relate which Dick particularly enjoyed as they were new to him. The principal at Government College talked briefly before Ramaseshan's talk and he concluded his remarks with a poem.

32. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kumbakonam>

33. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_pariah_dog

sung in Sanskrit, about Ramanujan. What a delightful thing to do! Mathematics meetings would surely be enlivened if they were injected with a bit more Sanskrit.

On Friday the conference was on the move again, this time to Pondicherry³⁴ for the closing session. Again we traveled in Ramaseshan's car – such an improvement over the mini-bus. While Dick gave his talk I went off with Sita to see the Sri Aurobindo Ashram³⁵, which is a very extensive operation indeed. In just over an hour, Mrs. Gupta, who is a member of the ashram and a friend of the Ramaseshans took us to two furniture, leatherwork and stainless steel showrooms, through the handmade paper factory and the weaving workshop, which was set up many years ago by the German woman who still runs it and trains the people working in it, to the place of meditation where the founder and a woman called the Mother (a French woman who spent sixty years in India) are buried, and through the cafeteria facilities where all the members and visitors to the ashram share common meals.

She showed us two large boilers which produce the steam to cook rice to feed about 2,000 people for a usual lunch and 3,000 to 4,000 people at Christmas time when many friends and adherents of the ashram come to Pondicherry. Four very large stainless steel containers in which the rice is cooked were made in the ashram's stainless steel workshop, along with the utensils and dishes that are used to feed the daily crowd. The ashram has been in existence for sixty years, owns a great deal of property in the city and, according to our Australian-bought guide book, is the object of resentment from many people in the area since it has much of the best property in Pondicherry. This city was a French enclave until it was ceded back to India in the 1950s and the ashram headquarters are located in the old French section of town. The buildings are lovely, large and spacious and extend right up to the broad sidewalks which, in turn, line wide, clean streets. The cafeteria fronted on a lovely park in which was a memorial statue to the woman who brought water to Pondicherry, through a series of wells, in Napoleon's time. Ramaseshan told us the story in some detail.

Sita and I left Mrs. Gupta at the cafeteria and took the auto-rickshaw back to the meeting. Quite a way to travel – that auto-rickshaw! The driver pumps up and down on a long handle to get his three wheeled vehicle started – and once started it has to compete with the heavier traffic, on the street.

We had rented a car for the drive back to Madras. It costs 400 rupees, which is about \$35. It was worth every nickel. I was amazed at how much smoother, relatively speaking, the road from Pondicherry to Madras had become since our mini-bus traveled over it on the way to Chidambaram and Annamalai University. Obviously that says something about the padding in the seats and the suspension in the bus. It was well worth what we paid and since these hire cars which travel between cities are readily available it was no problem to get one. We traveled in caravan fashion right behind George Andrews' hired car, which he had had for all three days of the Annamalai meeting. After we'd been on the road for some time, a group of people waving red banners with a hammer and sickle and C.P.I. [Communist Party of India] printed on them, forced the cars to stop. Later that evening we learned that George, on his driver's advice, had contributed five rupees to the Communist Party. Our driver told us that the men were factory workers on strike and George's contribution was evidently enough so they didn't press us for a contribution, too. We were just glad to get going back to Madras again.

That evening the group of us Americans who had left the Annamalai meeting early were invited to a cocktail party at the residence of John and Nancy Stempel. He's the American consul in Madras. We were joined by Dave and Jan Bressoud³⁶ (Dave works with

34. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pondicherry>

35. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Aurobindo_Ashram

36. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Bressoud, see also [MathSciNet](#)

George at Penn State) for a very select party in a very select home. Its large grounds also had tennis courts, a swimming pool and a volleyball court. It was a beautiful and beautifully appointed home – our U.S.-tax dollars at work.

The Stempels' two daughters were there and I talked at length with them both. The elder, Amy, is finishing her last year at Carnegie-Mellon, majoring in journalism and creative writing. Jill, the younger daughter, attends a school in India from which she would like to transfer because she's tired of defending the U.S. against such arguments as that the CIA is behind the Sikh unrest in the Punjab. I'd get tired of that sort of thing, too. Jill is a sophomore and she's interested in working as a film writer. Her father is a journalism graduate of Indiana University. He and his wife are very pleasant people, which, of course, is what you're supposed to be in that line of work!

Today the conference at Anna University³⁷ opened with, among other things, the Inaugural Address on the work of Ramanujan presented by Richard Askey. Actually he focused on how the work of Ramanujan has lived on, in the sixty-seven years since his death, in the work of other mathematicians around the world. Since there were non-mathematicians in the audience he did not make it a technical talk. He did a very good job and three people complemented me on his talk after it was over. I don't know how many people complemented him!

The vice-chancellor of Anna University gave the welcome and Thiru Subramaniam, a former Union Minister in the government of India, gave the President's Address, as he also did to open the previous meeting. These speeches are basically political, as is evidently traditional at such functions. Subramaniam's speeches were pretty good at both meetings I thought. Mrs. Ramanujan was there and George Andrews was tapped to present her with flowers and a shawl and, after Dick's talk, also a tribute to her part in caring for Ramanujan and preserving the papers that later became known as the Lost Notebook³⁸. It was quite touching and certainly reflected the gratitude that he, Dick, Bruce Berndt and others feel towards her,

Dick, as one of the speakers at the head table, had an ornate, brightly colored neck lace-like affair put around his neck. This was also done for the speakers' table people at the last meeting and we watched them all promptly remove them and lay them on the table in front of them. Now we know why they did that. The beads in the main part of the necklace (garland) are made of sandalwood which has a very strong fragrance. We intend to take it home with us, so we'll see how long the scent lasts!

On the way back to the hotel from the meeting we passed the Cathedral of St. Thomas which was built early in the 1500s and is covered with cream colored stucco and decorated with lacy fretwork – a real treat to the eye. Doubting Thomas is supposed to be buried there. Dave and Jan Bressoud visited it and Dave said that there is a digital clock in the nave with a blinking cross where the colon would be in the usual digital clock.

Sunday, December 20

Last night Dick gave a talk to a mixed group of mathematicians and Madras citizens who meet several times a year to hear talks on scientific subjects. It seemed to go quite well, especially for the mathematicians, who could understand the more technical parts. Two talks in a day is a heavy workout.

This morning pictures from the conference were on the front pages of two morning newspapers including The Hindu. Not all the information – or quotations – is quite accurate.

37. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_University

38. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramanujan%27s_lost_notebook

News articles in the last couple of days have said Dick, George, and Bruce were from the United Kingdom and that Dick was chairman of the mathematics department at UW-Madison. However, they usually got his name right.

We're not the only people who read the newspapers. This morning Dick had a letter delivered to him at the meeting. It was from a man who identified himself as a "well trained psychic channel (medium)" as well as a graduate in mathematics. He said that he had received a communication from Ramanujan's spirit and wanted "to help this spirit to ventilate its thoughts and ideas" and further that he would like to "build up [his] scope for getting technical knowledge the spirit would divulge." He gave Dick his address and invited his response. Dick couldn't palm off the letter on anyone else. Both George and Basil Gordon told him it was all his. How cruel!

Speaking of Basil reminds me of the last casting of the bust, which he was going to buy. Bruce said that the Madras Port Trust, where Ramanujan worked, would like to buy it so Basil has deferred to the Port Trust. If they don't take it, he will.

Tonight we will be seeing an Indian dance program which will be presented by one woman. We're told she's good. ... She is. We've now seen dance which uses the eyes, the face and the fingertips as well as the arms and legs. Dick said he's now seen someone move her neck without moving her head, but I missed it. Mrs. Sudharani Raghupathy focused her program on classical dances – four of them, one of which was based on a book of dance theory from the fifth century before Christ. If we see enough dance this good we may start picking up some of the nuances of Indian classical dance.

Wednesday, December 23

Monday was back to standard mathematics talks – nothing out of the ordinary, except for the fact that Dick and the other speakers were asked for their autographs several times. "Fame" is so fleeting; a month from now no one will ask Dick for his autograph!

Yesterday the BIG meeting in Madras opened³⁹. Everyone was given an individually numbered, non-transferable admission card to the auditorium. No handbags, tape recorders or transistors were allowed and we were all to be in our seats by 8:15 for a function which was to begin at 9 a.m. In addition we all had to walk through metal detector gates like those at airports and have a hand-held metal detector run over us. All of this was in honor of the fact that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi would be giving the Inaugural Address to open the meeting. Robert Rankin⁴⁰ and Chandrasekhar also gave opening talks as did Bambah⁴¹, vice-chancellor of Punjab University, the Governor of the state of Tamil Nadu and the director of the Indian Atomic Energy Commission. Except for the governor's speech all the talks were pretty good. The governor got a bit carried away and overdid the purple prose. Gandhi presented his speech well; we were told by Ram Murty that Ramanathan⁴² had written it for him. Of course he could change it in any way he chose, but whatever the source it was a good speech. Chandrasekhar gave a talk later on Newton's Principia. I listened to the historical part but with no background in science, when those parts of the talk came I read unobtrusively from James Clavell's Noble House. That I could understand. Obviously my education was sorely neglected.

Today Dick will be talking at 11:30. Today I'll be going shopping with Mrs. Ramakrishnan so I'm skipping the day's talks. Tonight George Andrews talks at the Alladi

39. precisely 100 years after Ramanujan's birth on December 22, 1887

40. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Alexander_Rankin, see also [MathSciNet](#)

41. <https://www.insaindia.res.in/detail.php?id=N55-0045>

42. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K._G._Ramanathan, see also [MathSciNet](#)

Foundation and afterwards The Hindu will be taking several of the conference speakers (plus me) to dinner. I think that will result in an article or two in The Hindu. The newspaper, TV and radio coverage of all these Ramanujan meetings has been "something else again."

We have been shepherded from one place to another without let-up. It's been, for the most part, quite enjoyable, but we're both getting quite tired. Yesterday we had to leave the hotel at 7:30 a.m. because of all the security precautions for Gandhi's visit. Into the bargain both of us have eaten or drunk things that have left our insides not quite happy with life. It's nothing serious but that also drains our energy. Last night Dick had to write out transparencies for today's talk, do a big backlog of hand laundry and we both watched a TV documentary on Ramanujan. Again we were asleep later than we should have been. Fortunately between the Poona meeting and the one at the Tata Institute for Fundamental Research in Bombay we will have several days with nothing going on. Rest and a trip to some of the nearby caves are on our agenda for that period. Dick has turned down several invitations to visit a number of other places during that time. That's necessary for our survival!

On Monday night George Andrews gave a talk on Ramanujan's work and the surprise in it to the Indo-American Association. Larry Moody, who's the U.S.I.S.⁴³ man at the American Consulate here in Madras, hosted it and the dinner following the talk at his home. One of the "surprises" in George's talk is that he's a magician as well as a mathematician. He started with a card trick to catch audience interest and to make a point about the Rogers-Ramanujan identity about which he was talking. His talk was totally non-technical, very well done and highly enjoyable. With that as a "lead-in," I expect to enjoy his talk this evening at the Alladi Foundation. Right now I think I'd better check that the bell captain has been able to mail my letters. That six page opus to all the family I particularly want to get off. They'll wonder about us if they don't hear soon.

Radha Silk Emporium has beautiful saris for sale – but not quite as many as before I arrived. I think I've done my major shopping for our stay in India now.

It's fairly steamy outside today. It's still the monsoon season here – the second of the two monsoon seasons in this area – and it poured this morning with the rain coming straight down out of a gray sky.

A light lunch of cheese curds deep fried in a light batter – with something pureed and green to go on it – provided a good pick-me-up. That and some shopping may have been about right to get me going again, along with a day spent moving slowly and at my own pace. I was a bit concerned at how fatigued we've been but this break in routine seems to be a restorative.

Thursday, December 24

It's a most unusual Christmas Eve. Not only is it warm, humid and tropical but we're pretty much "confined to quarters" here in our hotel. A head of government here in Tamil Nadu died in his sleep last night of a heart attack. He was a film maker before going into politics and is very popular with the people here. People are stopping traffic, evidently to honor his memory, and nothing but foot and bicycle traffic is moving on the street outside our hotel – a highly unusual experience for a week-day here. I just saw twenty-five buses packed with people, some of them on the roofs of the buses, roar past the hotel and around the corner. They must be on their way to some sort of demonstration.

Ran from The Hindu (he hosted the party last night for the speakers from the Ramanujan Centenary meeting at the Taj Coromandel Hotel) called George Andrews this

43. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Information_Agency

morning to say that he'd had trouble getting to his office – his car had almost been tipped over—and he recommended that we not leave the hotel. A few minutes ago Dick answered the telephone and was told that today's symposium was cancelled. I wonder what this will do to the chances of our catching our scheduled flight to Bombay at 8:30 this evening. Our trip to India is proving to be even more interesting than expected! We'll pack our suitcases, but for a few more hours it will be an open question whether we're on that flight when it leaves. Last night we got to the Taj early for the dinner party and spent the time profitably in a shop which sold Indian carpets. We should receive our three purchases in four or five weeks, if there are no hitches.

Dick has been talking for the last couple of hours with a man who works for a company which is making a one and one-half hour movie on Ramanujan. He said that Bambah came in at some point in their conversation and said that it looks like it will be a day or two before we'll be able to leave Madras.

Friday, December 25

Merry Christmas! Well, as long as we can't get to the airport to leave Madras it's good that we're marooned in a five star hotel. A long stay in some of our other quarters of the past two weeks could be hard to take. Everything is still closed up tight today. The funeral of Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran⁴⁴ is late this afternoon after a four hour funeral procession. Yesterday there was some violence – stone throwing, looting and arson – much of it as people tried to force shop closing and no traffic movement. The police had "shoot to kill" orders and the mob was sizeable in some places. Elsewhere in Tamil Nadu one man committed suicide and a woman tried to burn herself to death. MGR was very popular in his ten years as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. Programs like that of feeding poor children and women in rural areas of this state were particularly popular – not surprisingly. It seems he was a film star, not a film producer, as I said yesterday. In twenty-five years as a movie actor he made about one hundred films, if I remember the newspaper comment correctly.

Yesterday one of the people here for the Ramanujan conference left the hotel and while he was on the street he saw a pregnant woman pulled from a car. (People were quite serious about letting no traffic move.) He also said that someone had died last night in a house nearby but no one could take the body out since traffic wasn't moving. That's not so good in a tropical climate like this. The hotel ran an armed escort service to the airport yesterday afternoon and this same conference participant took it because he felt he had to get to Bombay and didn't want to lose his scheduled seat on the airplane. This morning George Andrews said that as of 9:30 last night he was still in the airport, according to people here with whom he stayed in contact. We are SO glad we changed our plane reservations from 8:30 last night to 8:30 tomorrow night! We had considered taking that armed escort to the airport, too – we even packed everything up. When Dick found it was possible to get through to Indian Airlines to change our reservations he cancelled out of that – definitely the best decision.

Plans to have the six speakers scheduled for yesterday and today at the cancelled mathematics conference speak in an abbreviated session tomorrow are evidently being made. If it can be arranged Dick will want to go since our flight isn't until 8:30 p.m. In the meantime I doubt that we'll leave the hotel today, despite the possibility of Christmas dinner at the American Consul General's home. Elizabeth Bowen, someone from the Consulate whom we met at Larry Moody's dinner and who had lunch here in the hotel yesterday, said

44. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M._G._Ramachandran

that we could be added to the Christmas festivities with no difficulty but since neither of us is "into the crowd scene" we will probably stay out and have a very quiet Christmas Day, 1987.

I'm seeing an occasional car on the streets, often with a black flag and a portrait of MGR. I hope that means it's safer on the streets today. I'm sitting here reading, looking out the window occasionally and checking the laundry occasionally. Things dry so slowly here. Jan Bressoud said clothes she washed had grown moldy.

The Ambassador cars you see all over here in India are tough cars. George Andrews said that India bought an entire Fiat plant in the 1950s and has been turning out 1950s cars – the Ambassadors – ever since.

Saturday, December 26

Madras is back to normal – blaring horns and traffic rumbling past the hotel. That may make the nap I'll try to take later more than a little difficult. However yesterday the crowd at MGR's funeral got out of hand and the police finally opened fire. Four people were killed. Traffic noises are definitely preferable to that.

Dick just left for the abbreviated meeting which will be held at the Indian Institute of Technology today. He should be back about 5 p.m. and then we do the last five or ten minutes worth of packing and leave for the airport. It looks like we'll be able to stay overnight at the Tata Institute guest house before leaving for Poona. No matter how we work it we'll still arrive late for the Poona meeting. How is it that insurance policies put it? "Not payable in the event of natural disaster, war ..." – something like that. I guess civil disturbances are in the same category.

We tried calling Salem, Pittsburgh and Madison⁴⁵ yesterday. No luck – busy, no answer, or couldn't complete the call. We have a call in to Salem again this morning but if it doesn't go through within the hour we'll have to cancel it since it would be too late to disturb the folks. It's early morning here, but getting late into the evening there! ... The call went through. It was good to hear that everything is fine in Salem. They could hear better than I could, with a less than perfect connection. It was good to hear their voices anyway.

At the dinner party sponsored by The Hindu Dick had a chance to talk to R.K. Narayan⁴⁶, some of whose novels we read last summer as "homework" preparation for our trip to India. Today on the way to Bombay he thought of a question or two he'd have liked to ask. Had we known we'd be in the same room with a popular Indian novelist for an evening we might have come up with an intelligent question to ask somewhat earlier than two days too late.

The Adyar Park Hotel may look awfully good compared to whatever we find in Poona. It may have been one of Madras' five star hotels but it still had a few cockroaches, which are probably impossible to avoid in a tropical climate like that of South India.

Sunday, December 27

After a loong day's drive we are finally arrived at the Institute of Armament Technology outside of Poona⁴⁷. Dick plunged right into the talks, since the meeting is already half over, and I'm in our "V.I.P. quarters." I think I'm getting quite tired of being a V.I.P. I don't want to be fussed over or be waited upon by half a dozen people. And after a long day's

45. Salem (Missouri), Pittsburgh and Madison are the places where Dick's parents and the children of Dick and Liz lived.

46. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R._K._Narayan

47. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pune>

drive like this my irritation quotient is quite high. The next time someone addresses me as Madame I'm sorely tempted to tell whomever it may be that Madames run brothels and that's not my line of work. They're only trying to be helpful but I'm finding it quite trying to have so little personal space and privacy. One doesn't want to be left alone all of the time but I could certainly use it for more of the time.

The drive from Bombay is on fairly good roads through attractive countryside. Poona is up in the hills something like 185 kilometers from Bombay – though "hills" may not be an adequate word. The switchbacks coming up these "hills" were impressive. They were clogged solid with large trucks moving in low gear along with a sprinkling of cars. We sat in the back seat of our hired car, grinding slowly up the hillside to the plateau on top, hoping none of the trucks would lose their brakes. The shapes of the hills and the aridity of the landscape reminded us somewhat of the American southwest, although the vegetation wasn't the same. We went through a tunnel at one point which was lit only by the brake lights of the truck ahead of us and our own headlights shining very dimly. That was a bit unnerving.

We chatted a bit yesterday in Madras with Basil Gordon, who stayed at the New Woodlands after we were transferred to the Adyar Park Hotel. MGR's funeral procession had gone past the New Woodlands and he had gone as far as the gate to watch – just close enough to get a whiff of tear gas. People were in the trees throwing rocks at the police and they retaliated periodically with tear gas. Basil said that MGR had played in 136 movies, mostly as the hero. The man who usually played the villain finally got tired of being the "nasty," so he shot MGR in the neck⁴⁸. The logic of that eludes me, but it did produce a great surge of sympathy for MGR – good for the political figure if not for the movie villain.

[A poll, according to Ramaseshan, showed that 85% of Indians are not vegetarian; the reason they don't eat meat is because they can't afford it. Non sequitur, but I had to stick it in before I forgot it again.]

We gathered that things may be sticky in the state of Tamil Nadu while the political succession to MGR is being worked out. Something else that makes for a volatile situation is the continuing problem in Sri Lanka with the Tamil minority. Tamil Nadu, of course, is sympathetic to the Tamils.

Monday, December 28

The Poona conference has ended but we're here for the night before an early start tomorrow for Bombay. I'm sitting under the mosquito netting waiting for my hair to dry after taking a cold shower – cold, because we couldn't figure out how to get hot water out of the hot water faucet. This area houses the Southern Command of the Indian Army – maybe cold showers toughen the troops!

The landscape here is very attractive. Solid rock isn't too far below the surface but there's quite enough vegetation to feed the herds of water buffalo and goats that we pass on the highway. One flowering bush that is common has gently drooping branches covered with bright magenta blossoms. It's beautiful but I haven't found a name to fit to the beauty yet, so it remains the bush with the magenta flowers.

A van from the Institute for Armament Technology took several of us into Poona about noontime today. This city is much cleaner than Madras and is much less crowded. As Mizan Rahman⁴⁹ from Carleton in Ottawa commented, even the squatters' huts (which are fewer and farther between than Madras' are) are neater and more tidy. And then there's the climate to recommend this place; based on one day's acquaintance with it I'd say it's "perfect

48. [in 1967, MGR survived](#)

49. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mizan_Rahman, see also [MathSciNet](#)

summer weather." It's much dryer than Bombay (less humid) which is a blessing. In the summer it reaches over 100 degrees, which is not my idea of perfect summer weather. If Madison's winters were like this winter day in Poona ... ah!

On our way into town we passed three women carrying large baskets full of dried cow dung patties on their heads. The patties are used as fuel for fires. If it weren't for that use there would be a great deal more to step into on the streets of India's cities!

Last night the conference participants were treated to a flute and sitar concert. It was quite incredible to listen to the beautiful tones produced by a piece of bamboo – obviously not a "garden variety" bamboo flute. The other half of the program was presented by a group of nine sitar players, accompanied by a guitar and three percussionists, one on two small drums called tablas. I was quite fascinated by the rhythm of the drummer's beat. Again we enjoyed a first rate performance of one aspect of Indian culture.

Professor Balasubramanian⁵⁰, an Indian mathematician attending this conference, provided the intermission entertainment. He did a parody of a classical Indian musical drama. It was an absolute delight and hilariously funny. When Dick complimented him afterwards he commented that his inspiration for his performance was Danny Kaye. He had introduced it by saying that he had been following Dick Askey and George Andrews from meeting to meeting for the last two weeks and knew they had had to sit through all sorts of cultural programs and here was one they had missed.

Tonight's dinner in the officer's mess (we are on an army post) was good vegetarian food with less searing flame in the spices than the food of Tamil Nadu. It was good and I overate. Several dishes included a thin spaghetti – though nothing else about them looked or tasted Italian. Dessert was small "donut holes" with a very thin covering of edible silver (and I do mean the metal) in a sweet syrup. We didn't eat the silver leaf but the "donut holes" themselves were quite good. The Indians who eat with us must wonder about these foreigners and their strange eating habits. We haven't touched a glass of water since we've been here. We've been warned off of it by too many of the Indians to dare take a sip. The very first thing Dick wants to do when we get to London in just under two weeks is to drink a large glass of water – maybe a pitcher full!

Ramaseshan said that when they have foreign visitors come to Bangalore they very carefully monitor what the visitors eat – until after they've given their talks. Then they let their guests eat whatever they want to eat.

Wednesday, December 30

We have left behind us one of the smells of India – mothballs. The V.I.P. quarters at Poona had mothballs scattered in the drains, on shelves in the corners – obviously attempting to control the bugs, especially the cockroaches. This isn't the first time we've seen mothballs scattered like this. I wonder if it does any good.

As we were driving through Poona we saw a little boy riding a bicycle several sizes too large for him. He reached the pedals by putting his legs under the cross bar. It meant he had to pump with his body on a tilt, since the bar was in his way, but despite that obstacle he was moving at a pretty good clip. Necessity is the mother of invention, as that old saw puts it.

Travelling by road is an exhausting experience in India. For a while the lovely scenery on the plateau on which Poona is located was a distraction. One great ravine we passed reminded me of the Grand Canyon – smaller scale but breathtaking nonetheless. Then, after three hours or so on the road, the traffic begins to wear you down. There are all

50. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramachandran_Balasubramanian, see also [MathSciNet](#)

those close shaves when our driver skims past a big truck with only millimeters to spare – and this happens constantly – or the pedestrian who doesn't look too carefully before darting across the road or the bicyclist whose wheel wobbles dangerously when he's only millimeters from our front fender. The same dense concentration of trucks was grinding down the road out of the hills as crawled up it on our way to Poona. At one point a truck was upside down in the ditch edging the road. The view into the valley below occasionally took one's mind off the traffic, but for brief moments only. Once down on the coastal area approaching Bombay the heat was with us again and our shirts were wet with sweat. An elephant trudged by as we approached a long bridge to the island that is Bombay. And the dust of India is always with us.

Once onto the island there was still the drive to the south end of the city to reach the Tata Institute⁵¹. Our driver must have been getting tired of all those hours on the road, too; he drove even faster although there was even thicker traffic to contend with. We finally arrived, limp and dirty, only to find ourselves yet again on a military post. The Tata Institute is the only piece of this southern point of the island that isn't part of a naval base.

We have a room in the Tata guest house; it's eight stories high and not quite finished. It's also a first class pigeon perch – or I suppose I should say crow perch, since that's what most of the birds which flock around here seem to be. We have a lovely view of high rise buildings standing white against the skyline across the bay. In the near distance separated from us by a high wall topped with several strands of barbed wire, is a squatters' village. This seems so typical of Indies contrasts. The longer we're here the less I feel I know about this vast Indian subcontinent which houses such a rich mix of languages, cultures, races and religions. I guess we can keep our eyes open and see and learn as much as we can, but increasingly I don't feel I really know anything. We've been traveling for four months now and we're both getting tired, although we wouldn't have missed this whole experience for anything. Still, it will be very nice to be home and see all the family and our friends again. Home looks increasingly good from this perspective of time and distance.

Friday, January 1, 1988

Happy New Year! Two evenings back I found, when I got ready for bed, that my entire body was covered with a rash. Heat rash for New Year's! Ridiculous! I guess going from a Bombay winter to a Madison winter will have its advantages after all. The rash seems slightly better today and I hope it will continue to improve, as I intend to spend the day in the Tata's air-conditioning. In two days we'll move to the Hotel President for the rest of our stay in Bombay and since that will be air-conditioned I can hide out there if the rash doesn't subside.

Yesterday, rash or no, we spent the day being tourists. We breakfasted at the Taj Intercontinental – the new section of the Taj Mahal Hotel, which is Bombay's ritziest hotel. We had their bread basket with toast, a brioche and croissants, mango juice and tea – a pleasant if not outstanding meal. Then we browsed in the shops in their shopping arcade before going out to the Gate of India (a monument erected in 1924 to commemorate a 1911 visit of King George V and Queen Mary) to catch a launch to the island where the Elephants Caves⁵² are located. The trip to the island takes an hour and we passed a number of huge freighters, an aircraft carrier, fishing boats and a number of launches like the one we were on. The launch anchors some distance from the island and all the passengers are herded onto a smaller boat which is poled in to a long very narrow jetty that sticks out into the water.

51. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tata_Institute_of_Fundamental_Research

52. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elephanta_Caves

One of the obvious disabilities of being a tourist and a foreigner was in operation here. A woman clamped her hand very firmly on my arm to guide me the length of the jetty, pointing out ropes I shouldn't trip over, the mangrove trees in the swampy area below the jetty and just generally trying to justify the ten rupees she promptly asked for when we were on dry land. A woman had given Dick the same treatment I'd gotten, but since neither of us wanted or needed the "guide" he gave each of them two rupees and we walked away – not without argument, of course.

A quarter mile of stone steps takes the visitor up to the caves and all along the way there are people wanting to rent you palanquins⁵³ to carry you up the steps or to sell you guidebooks, postcards and trinkets. There are also several girls and women, colorfully dressed and carrying brass water containers on their heads. Their purpose is to sell you the privilege of taking a photograph of them for as many rupees as they can talk you out of. (This is just one of the many things open to negotiation here in India. When we hired a car to go to Poona the price asked was 2,200 rupees, until Dick pointed out that the price for a longer trip from Madras to Chidambaram had been 1,300 rupees. Immediately the quoted price sank to 1,500 rupees – probably still a bit high but much more acceptable than the first price. We took it and didn't feel so much as though we were being "had.")

The caves themselves were well worth the trip. According to the guidebook we purchased they were carved in the early 600s a.d. and are devoted to Shiva in his various manifestations. The central carving shows Shiva in his male and female manifestations – as destroyer and creator – and is beautifully done. Both time and the depredations of the Portuguese have had their effect on the carvings but what is left is no less beautiful. I can't do an adequate job of describing them so I can only hope the pictures we took turn out well – and even that is not nearly as good as actually seeing the carvings.

After leaving the launch again at the Gate of India we walked across the street to the Taj Mahal Hotel – the older portion – and ate a very good meal at their Chinese restaurant. Our final stop of the day was at the Prince of Wales Museum⁵⁴. They have a marvelous collection of stone carvings from all over India, including some from the Elephants Caves, in addition to a large number of excellent miniature paintings – Mughal and other styles and periods – as well as items from Nepal, Tibet, China, Japan (even some netsukes⁵⁵ and inros⁵⁶) and a few European pieces. That's the only museum we've visited in India, probably the only one we will visit, and it's nice that it turned out to have such a high quality collection. Our trip back to the Tata Institute proved to be a slow, sweaty one. We hadn't gotten good directions from the Tata bus driver on where to catch the bus for the return trip, so we ended up walking at least half of the distance. That in itself wasn't so bad, except that my rash would have been happier if I hadn't been so hot and sweaty.

When we finally arrived back at the Tata we cooled down over a soda pop at one of the canteens in the building and watched the sunset over the Arabian Sea. The finish to the day was a cold shower for me (we can't figure out how to get hot water out of this guest house shower either) and a powdering of talcum to help my rash.

Today I'm in the Tata's air-conditioned library with a lovely view out of its windows of the waves breaking as they come in off the Arabian Sea. A good view, air-conditioning and reading and writing – that's my day on this first day of the New Year.

53. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Litter_\(vehicle\)#Indian_subcontinent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Litter_(vehicle)#Indian_subcontinent)

54. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chhatrapati_Shivaji_Maharaj_Vastu_Sangrahalaya

55. netsuke: miniature sculpture, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netsuke>

56. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inro>

Saturday, January 2

Two days in a row of total inertia! Dick has gotten some work done and I've done some reading and a little writing, but we didn't leave the grounds of the Tata at all. We napped this afternoon. Dick's remark was that we were finally free of the stresses of daily life in India. At the Tata we hardly know we're in India, beyond the obvious fact that almost everyone we see is Indian.

After seeing the Tata medical officer yesterday, slathering Caladryl lotion all over my rashy body and taking the pills which are supposed to have an anti-allergic effect, I can at least say I've done something effective to improve that situation. My skin looks a great deal better. I have wondered, though, what sort of knock-out drops are ingredients of those anti-allergic pills. I've been slightly woozy much of the day. That's a bit too relaxed and stress free.

Tomorrow we move to the Hotel President which is the last move we make until we leave for the Bombay international airport and our departure from India. Both of us keep remarking that it's X days "and counting." Dick is counting the days until it's safe to drink the water and I counting a little further, to the day we arrive home. At that point the stress level will probably go up again since there's so much to do to get settled in again. We'll make it!

Monday, January 4

Well, we're safely moved to the Hotel President. The air-conditioning does great things for my rash. After we moved in yesterday we went walking for half an hour or so in the Colaba area. That was enough for the rash to start "complaining" again. I may be somewhat constrained these last five days to spending much of my time in air-conditioned places.

The mathematicians attending this final Ramanujan meeting began to collect in this hotel yesterday. Some had arrived on Saturday. As of today there's still no sign of Dave and Jan Bressoud. I wonder if Jan has finally had more than she could take and they've gone back to Penn State. I hope not! In any case I can keep myself amused since we picked up two more of R.K. Narayan's books at the hotel bookshop. Swami and Friends looks good, based on the first twenty pages. It says on the cover that it's been made into an eight part series for national TV.

Wednesday, January 6

Yesterday four of us "math wives" found the World Trade Center, which is just behind the President Hotel, and enjoyed exploring the shops there. We found nice batik bedspreads, cotton clothing, brassware and silks. I went back again with Jan Bressoud and Pat Schmidt to show them some of what Mrs. Satake and I had discovered yesterday. There are several government sponsored shops there where one can rely on the quality of the goods offered and on a fair price as well. That's much less stressful than having to haggle over the price, which I find unpleasant to do.

Yesterday Mary Rankin and I took a city tour starting from the Taj Mahal Hotel. It was thirty-five rupees for the ticket, which took us into parts of Bombay which we otherwise would not visit. We went to the Malabar Hills where we walked through the Hanging Gardens⁵⁷. The bushes shaped into camels, horses or birds were fascinating to see.

57. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanging_Gardens_of_Mumbai

Just below the Hanging Gardens is the Parsi Tower of Silence, where the Parsis lay out their dead, for their bones to be picked clean by birds of prey. The Parsis don't believe in defiling the elements, like earth and fire, with dead bodies, so this is their alternative way of disposing of their dead. The tour guide told us that N.Y. Philharmonic conductor Zubin Mehta, as well as the Tata family here in Bombay, are Parsis.

We also stopped at the Prince of Wales Museum, where I enjoyed looking again at the beautiful Indian miniature paintings, at the aquarium (for which a fifteen minute stop is more than enough), at a Jain temple which was built in 1904 (another of these remove-the-shoes situations) and at Mani Bhuvan, the building where Mahatma Gandhi stayed on his visits to Bombay between 1917 and 1934. We went past, or stopped at, virtually everything mentioned as a sight worth seeing in our travel guide, India, a Travel Survival Kit. I wonder if the tour guide knows the book! Pages 525 to 530 tell all.

Saturday, January 9

It's just forty minutes until our Qantas flight is scheduled to leave Bombay. There's not much to recommend the departure lounge here at the airport – but then airports in general have little to recommend them. Bastions of boredom, waiting and inefficiency, and it feels even more so at 1:30 a.m.

The last couple of days have been a bit slow. I've done some shopping – and a good bit more browsing – with the other math wives. On Thursday evening we were treated to a movie and dinner at the Institute. The movie came advertised by Dick as "something about India and Nepal on adult themes." I figured it for some kind of travel film with something quirky going on between the birds and the bees. It turned out to be a newly released full length feature film⁵⁸ in Hindi with subtitles in English. The "adult theme" revolved around two brothers and their wives. One of the brothers and his brother's wife, both in unsatisfactory marriages, gave in to a moment of passion when one of the marriages had passed the point where it could be retrieved, and the result was twin boys. That's an over-simplified version of the plot, which was well acted and also had some beautiful Nepalese scenery to offer. We enjoyed it. It's been many years since we last saw an Indian film. This one was directed by a man named Batticharya⁵⁹.

The other cultural entertainments offered at this conference were a very good dance concert in which a brief explanatory narration, with dance steps and motions, preceded each number and made it easier to understand the classical dances which we were watching, and a violin recital of classical Hindustani music. That was this evening. We left at intermission, partly because we wanted to be sure we had adequate time for dinner before we left for the airport about 10 p.m. ...

Sunday, January 10

... and partly because listening any longer would have involved more pain than either of us cared for. It sounded too much like a lovelorn cat screeching on the back fence. Classical Indian violin music is an acquired taste and we haven't acquired it yet. We did hear from an Indian in the audience that the woman who gave the recital is held in high regard. She has a Ph.D. in music and a master's in Sanskrit and is a professor at Benares Hindu University; originally she is a Tamil from Madras. A number of Indians sitting near us were keeping time to the music. We, however, since the musical style is so unfamiliar to us, couldn't find the

58. Pancvati, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0156866/>

59. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basu_Bhattacharya

beat, much less keep time to it. I don't think we'll live long enough to acquire a taste for this type of violin music, but it was probably "good for us" to be exposed to it. We did like the tabla player who accompanied her; there we could find the beat!

We said good-bye to our mathematical friends when they returned from the concert and then we were off for the hour's drive to Bombay's international airport. The Qantas flight was on time; both of us slept for more of the nine and one-half hour flight than has been our habit in the last four and one-half months of travel; and Saturday morning found us in London.

At the airport we got a reservation at a discount at the Vanderbilt Hotel on Cromwell Road, just two long blocks from the Victoria and Albert. The hotel sprawls down most of a block facing on Cromwell Road, with the insides of several adjoining four story 18th and 19th century houses connected and attractively redecorated for a coordinated effect throughout – striped wallpaper, high ceilings and subdued but attractive and substantial furnishings in a traditional style. Our discounted room price is forty-five pounds – down from seventy-seven pounds in peak season. Considering the traffic noises from Cromwell Road, which our room faces, I wouldn't want to pay any more. In any case, the noise didn't keep us awake. We were immediately asleep for a three hour nap as soon as we were checked in and carried our luggage to our room.

We spent the afternoon at the Victoria and Albert, enjoying a number of this museum's first-rate exhibits. The new Toshiba Gallery of Japanese Art and Design had a number of marvelous netsukes and inros, as well as tsubas, ceramics, textiles, lacquerware and armor and the gallery itself is very well designed for pleasant and informative viewing. Just before closing time we made our way to an Indian exhibit where we found ourselves capable of a greater level of appreciation than would have been the case before this month just past in India.

Maybe the best thing about yesterday though was eleven and one-half hours of sleep. Even though we woke up three or four times it felt marvelous. As we walked back to the hotel from the V. and A. we found ourselves thinking "There are no cows on the streets! No one sleeping and living on the sidewalks! Only cars and trucks on the streets!" It did seem a bit strange after our Indian experience.

Another thing not quite as expected is that it's not all that cold here in London. Although that in itself is pleasant we had hoped for something that would prepare us a bit better for the bitter cold we'll face on our return to Madison. That can wait. We'll enjoy what we've got!

Wednesday, January 13

Sunday started with some standard "tourist" things to do. We visited St. Margaret's Church and Westminster Abbey next to it. Since it was Sunday a good part of the Abbey was closed off so that its usual Sunday business could be conducted. The chapter house was open, as was the Pyx Chamber⁶⁰ with its display of church plate from the 1600s and later, and the Abbey museum, so we went there instead. The chapter house has some nice medieval tiles and paintings, plus a colorful past history that included being used as the meeting place for Parliament for some years in the 1300s. The plate showed interesting examples of the art of the silversmith and goldsmith from the 1600s to contemporary times, with some plate that had been made earlier in this century. The museum was a rather odd place, with most of the exhibits being funeral figures of wood or wax which were made of various English kings and queens as funeral figures to be displayed on or next to their coffins.

60. <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/about-the-abbey/history/pyx-chamber>

Our next stop was the Tate Gallery, where we hoped to see a Beatrix Potter exhibit that's on through the end of this month. The line went out the door and down the front steps, so we didn't even try for it. Instead we saw an exhibit of drawings and watercolors from J.M.W. Turner's early years in the new Clore wing of the Tate, which is devoted exclusively to showing Turner's work. His work is always fascinating for the way in which he uses light in his landscapes. We finished our afternoon at the Tate with a viewing of a commercial film of a few years back called The Tales of Beatrix Potter. It had no dialogue, but was dance interpretations of Potter's tales by members of the Royal Ballet. The costumes were marvelous because they were pure Potter. The dancing was, unfortunately, largely dull and uninspired.

Monday we went to the National Gallery where we spent most of our time with the Dutch (Netherlandish) painters Rembrandt, Jan Steen, Vermeer, van Goyen, Ruysdael and others we came to enjoy during our year in the Netherlands. As always we looked for a Dutch flower painting so we could count the insects painted on the blossoms and stems.

We also stopped at Northwest Airlines and discovered that we go through customs and change airplanes in Boston rather than Detroit. Once we learned that we stopped worrying that one hour between planes in Detroit wouldn't be enough time to make our connection for Madison. We strolled through the Burlington shopping arcade, which was built in the 1700s, and enjoyed window shopping at its expensive stores which displayed everything from cashmeres to netsukes.

Children's Book Store, Ltd., Young World, was the final stop for the afternoon. Dick unearthed this one while reading the Yellow Pages in the telephone book. The shop had a very good selection of children's books and we came away with eight of them, including Once There Was a Tree – a Russian book which Ginny Moore Kruse had mentioned to me just before we left on our trip.

Our evening was spent at the Westminster Theatre where we saw an adaptation of C.S. Lewis' Narnia book, The Voyage of the Dawn Treader. The costuming was quite good (although Prince Caspian was given a hairdo that looked like a horse's tail) and the special effects were effective and well done. Unfortunately the cast tended to recite its lines rather than act the parts, so that tended to keep us from getting involved with the characters. We enjoyed ourselves anyway; we were seated right behind a school group.

Yesterday we decided to stand in line for tickets to Antony and Cleopatra. Unfortunately when our turn came there was one single ticket left, so we passed the pleasure on to the woman standing behind us. We'd been talking to her for much of the forty-five minutes or so that we'd been waiting in line and she felt rather conscience-stricken. We reassured her that it wasn't the only play we wanted to see and off we went to walk across the bridge over the Thames and on to the Tate. That walk felt good in view of the excess of sitting we've done lately – but we kept it up all day and I wore my feet off up to the knee before we got back to the hotel. Dick held up better.

The Beatrix Potter exhibit at the Tate was a real delight. Many of the original paintings for her books were there, along with studies she had made while preparing them. Early sketchbooks from her childhood, along with sketches done by her brother (who became a professional artist) and her father, who was also interested in art, were included. Eighteenth century costumes from the Victoria and Albert, which Beatrix Potter had studied while doing The Tailor of Gloucester, were included in the show, as were pictures of the author's beloved Lake District done by a wide assortment of artists, including some whose work Potter admired. We spent a good two hours in the two small rooms occupied by the show, enjoying every bit of it.

Over the next few hours we wandered in and out of book stores on Charing Cross Road, sat over tea and dessert in a Swiss restaurant and stood in line for tickets to The

Winter's Tale at the Barbican Theatre, done by the Royal Shakespeare Company. Everyone was dressed in white throughout; the special effects were impressive (and sometimes overwhelmed the dialogue – especially the scene where the bear kills Antigonus); the part of Autolycus, which is something of a clown part, was played for 20th century musical comedy laughs, which didn't mesh well with the rest of the characterizations; and 150 lines of dialogue were cut. The quality of the acting as a whole was much better than that of The Voyage of the Dawn Treader and that helped compensate somewhat for our disappointment in the way in which the play was treated. The attitude of APT⁶¹ toward Shakespeare needs to be more widely held! All of this exposure to alternative treatments of the Bard makes us regard APT even more highly than we already do.

Friday, January 15

Chicago, and the last leg of one very long trip still over an hour away. It should be about 11 p.m. by the time we get to the house – we, however, know it will really be 5 a.m. Oh, if only our flight hadn't left Gatwick four hours late because of fog! We had been looking forward to getting home at a reasonable hour and to seeing Suzanne, David and Ben. We've called them and left a message on Jim and Kathy's message recorder, and Suzanne and David are going to let the folks know we're back.

We're going to be on the telephone a lot in the next few days – and everyone we talk to will speak English with an American accent – even the little sprite I chatted with on the airplane from Gatwick to Boston! The airplane wasn't full and I was lying there spread over three seats reading a book. All of a sudden a very young face fringed with long, black hair appeared between me and the pages of the book. It was a little girl who was simply delighted that I had "fallen asleep reading a book" – as it seemed to her looking at me upside down, as she was doing. We talked for a few moments and then she leaned over, put her arms around my face and gave me a gentle hug. I was quite delighted with her, too!

To back-track a couple of days – on Wednesday we got a late start, since I was feeling under the weather during the morning. About noon we ambled off in the direction of the British Museum, both to visit it and to see what we could find in the area. What we found at the B.M. was the Hull-Grundy collection of about six hundred netsukes which was given to the museum eight or nine years ago. We couldn't find a collection anywhere close to this good anywhere in Japan, except at the art and antique shop in Kyoto where we bought a netsuke. This collection wasn't there the last time we visited the British Museum and the British Library. Dick remembered a fantastic clock collection which he and Jim saw during the month we were in Oxford during the summer of 1970. We didn't re-visit it since we were running at half speed during what was left to us of the day.

After leaving the museum we wandered in and out of several shops, just browsing, until just before its closing time we discovered a shop called Nihon Token, which sold Japanese artifacts and antiques. Michael Dean, the owner, showed us a couple of new books – one a beautifully produced book on netsukes and the other, an even more beautiful book on lacquerware which he had cowritten. We also learned that he had a stock of three hundred netsukes so, since it was already ten minutes past his closing time we said we'd return the next day. We did, and spend two hours looking at a first rate collection of netsukes. The longer we looked the clearer it became that we'd buy one. Our only problem was how to cut the choice down to only one. Price eliminated some beauties but even so, the choice was difficult. A very early tiger (probably 16th century) done in a very dark wood is a lovely souvenir to wrap up a four and one-half month long trip that we'll never forget.

61. [American Players Theatre](#) is a world-class classical theater in Spring Green, Wisconsin.

In a little over an hour we'll be back in Madison, exhausted after about twenty-two hours either traveling or sitting in airports waiting, and more than ready for familiar faces and places. Still, we'll continue to be actively reminded of our trip as the many packages we mailed from Japan, Australia, India and England come in over the weeks ahead – and as we take the last of the malaria pills every Friday for the next five weeks.