

Karen's Travels to Peru 2012

(To see a full slideshow of photos, please visit:

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In February 2012, I took the Real Affordable Peru trip through Overseas Adventure Travel. This travel log is dedicated to Corina Duran, an amazing trip leader, but more importantly, and amazing woman who helped create the type of memories that inspire you every time you replay them in your mind's eye. She is a cultural ambassador of Peru and a dedicated historian who shared not only her knowledge, but herself.

Day 0 Pre-Travel

My long awaited for one month work sabbatical is finally here, and begins with a hunt for a new camera after discovering last minute that the one I had purchased less than a year ago is broken. I've always been a Canon girl and maybe this is payback for cheating with Nikon. There's no way you can go on a trip to Machu Picchu without a decent camera, so I am forced to spend some of my vacation money on a new camera which isn't so bad, but the accessories are a killer when you don't have the option of hunting online. Nikon, I'm breaking up with you forever.

Fortunately, Chris, at the Watertown Best Buy, goes above and beyond as usual. After calling several Best Buy locations and other stores, he finds the Canon I want at Newtonville Camera in the time it takes me to get him a mocha at Starbucks as a small token of my appreciation for all of the cameras he has explained to me. This kid is one of the most helpful people I've encountered at any store. If I had a business I would scoop him up in a heartbeat.

I spend my first night on sabbatical at Stellina in Watertown, where I live, for author night. The speaker is Dr. Donna Hicks, author of *Dignity*. I've read the book and really liked it, so hearing her speak is food for my intellectual soul. The Allagash was pretty good, too. Michael meets me for a farewell dinner, even though I'll only be gone for 11 days. Any excuse for some good food and company. I recommend the warm tomato salad.

Day 1

Getting There

Micki has worked extra time each day this to get off early to surprise me with a ride to the airport. True love. I'm thrilled not to have to pay for a taxi. We have a smooch at the airport and we each take a photo together with our iPhones. I look terrible and if the plane goes down, I hope he doesn't show it at my funeral as my parting image.

I get to Logan and just so you know, even though the sign says you don't have to remove your netbook from your bag, and they announce you don't have to remove your netbook from your bag, security will take your bag, pull out all of the contents, and pat down your netbook along with everything else in your bag. Then, you get to

repack it in front of everyone looking like some rookie traveler, who can't follow instructions. I don't care if you x-ray my lady bits, but making me repack my perfectly-packed, full bag that I can't reconfigure the same way so I have to stuff a few things in my jacket pockets and carry separately, annoys me. At least the netbook wasn't in my other bag where I stuffed enough underwear for the entire trip.

As I'm killing time in a quiet corner, some flight attendants gather for some fun between flights. One guy is doing his *Sister Act* cabaret routine with his campy rendition of *I Will Follow Him*. I know you will think I am making this up, but he should really turn around, because there is a real sister sitting within earshot, with a full habit, beads, and everything! That's dumb. I let go of an opportunity to test out the video on my new camera, while getting some great footage.

At my gate I hear multiple announcements that the flight is "extremely full." I'm not really sure what that means. Once all the seats are taken, it's full and that's it. Planes don't get "extremely full." It's not like the Boston MBTA number one bus that goes from Cambridge to Roxbury on Mass Ave. during rush hour. Maybe it's airline speak for overbooked, since the American Airlines attendant is looking for three volunteers to give up their seats for \$300 vouchers. Any other time I would be interested, but I don't have the time to spare since the next flight is too close to my connection. After several pleas, they still need two people, and vouchers are now being offered at \$500. That first person who volunteered must have gone from feeling elated to cheated.

As I'm boarding the plane, the woman walking down the aisle in front of me smells like **strong** mothballs. They must be her pockets! I'm grateful when she sits down long before I get to my seat, 25D. When each person comes closer to my row, I wonder which person is going to sit next to me, and relieved when particular people pass by. The prospect of sitting next to someone hacking away or toting their big McDonalds bag makes me uneasy. I notice there are lots of people with McDonald's food, not just by the bags, but because the plane is starting to smell like the last time I took the Greyhound bus to New York City. (I'm sure for some people who know me they are shocked to learn that I actually took the Greyhound to New York City!) Fortunately, it's only a one hour flight and it is uneventful. Even after all of the voucher drama, there are empty seats on the flight and today is my lucky day; one is next to me.

I arrive at JFK with over six hours to kill. The flight from NY to Lima leaves at 10:15pm and arrives at 6:15 am. Normally, that would be in sync with my body clock, but I have to figure a way I can sleep on the flight. My options are beer or a sleeping aid.

I get a cozy corner bar seat at O'Neal's Pub near my gate. Two nice French ladies on one side of me want to know if I can get "wee-fee" on my suspect netbook. You wouldn't know that this pub is in an airport. A guy on the other side of me orders a turkey burger that takes about 45 minutes to arrive even though it is pretty empty. And they are out of ketchup. Now I know how to kill one hour of my layover. I go for the chicken quesadilla which isn't horrible, but the filling is kind of stingy and so much a miss on one section, it's like eating dry Matzo crackers. There's not much of a beer selection, so I pair it with a Blue Moon.

The slow service and lack of customers is to my advantage. I can nurse my beer and hang out comfortably without any pressure to leave. I use a couple of hours to familiarize myself with my new camera. I find a smile detector setting that takes a photo when it senses someone smiling. If you have to rely on that setting, you are a bad photographer.

I decide I better get up and walk around for some circulation, a preventative measure to avoid deep vein thrombosis for my long flight. The problem is that I'm so paranoid about my suitcase getting lost my backpack is stuffed with most of my clothes and is "extremely full."

The flight from JFK to Lima is as comfortable as it can be for an overnight flight and LAN seems to have it together in terms of service and the plane itself is nice with individual TVs, pillows, eye masks, ear plugs, headsets, and blankets.

Day 2 Welcome to Lima

The rest of my trip is only a fraction of what I can document and there are probably a couple of discrepancies, so if I accidentally re-write Peruvian history, I apologize.

I arrive without any issues and get my first glimpse of Lima with Ramon who takes me to my hotel. He is super friendly. He has an oldies station on the radio and tells me he listens to this channel to improve his English, but I think he secretly likes the music.

He gives me an overview of Lima along the way. The number one industry is mining and number two is fishing, which makes me hopeful of some good dinners. He also tells about the famous Pisco Sour along with a drinking guide and tells me to be careful: one is for talking, two is for dancing, three is for whatever you want to do, and four is you are out of control.

The part of the city I see at first is not particularly nice, but we turn a corner and suddenly we are on small highway abutting a beautiful beach. The ride along the coast is impressive, but also scary looking. Along one side are cliffs with stairways that lead up to the city. They look like they were carved out of regular beach sand and could come down easily. Ramon tells me that in this area, the ocean is too rough and cold for swimming. He also tells me a story about a group of elderly travelers who looked at the water and asked the tour guide what kind of animals they were looking at in the distance. The tour guide responded, "Peruvians," referring to the surfers suited up in their black wet suits.

I get to my hotel, Jose Antonio, which is in the Mira Flores section of Lima. I'm happy to see a bed even though I only have a couple of hours to make up for the red eye. The hotel is fine: clean, quiet, and comfortable.

Our group meets for the first time and our trip leader is Corina Duran. She is a mountain woman, who now lives in Cuzco, and has been a trip leader since 1996. She is finishing her master's thesis in international business and speaks four languages: Spanish, English, Italian, and Quechua, her native language. She gives us info about Peru and some tips to get started.

Peru is broken into three general areas: coast 10 %, jungle 60%, mountains 30%. The jungle produces a lot of the fruit and coca leaves. Corina explains that coca leaves themselves are not cocaine the same way that grapes are not wine. It is the mix with chemicals that make it cocaine. Coca itself is a medicinal herb.

There are 30 million people in Peru, 10 million in Lima. Of the 10 million, 1.3 million are Chinese. Peru has a lot of Chifa restaurants, which is a mix of Chinese and Peruvian food. Lima has the largest Chinese population in South America and the history is 100,000 came to replace slaves when slavery was abolished.

Most people have apartments instead of owning because mortgage rates are 18%. The tax on goods is 19%. The currency is Nuevo Soles and the rate is about 2.6 Soles/\$1.

We have lunch together and begin our afternoon bus tour. Our local guide is Ivonne Martinez and our driver is Segundo. Ivonne is a great guide and knows a lot about Lima and the other places we visit with her. Here are a few fun facts I learn on the tour.



Peru is also known for potatoes and has over 4,000 varieties. Someone better tell Ireland they have some competition. On this tour, I think we try 3,999 of them and although they can be quite delicious, I'm OK if I don't see a potato for a while.

- Mira Flores means Look at the flowers and there are several nice parks. However, there is, not much rain, 2-3" per year, so it is expensive to maintain. Water trucks circulate the city to spray the flowers.
- Lima is made up of 42 districts and each has its own mayor. Lima was originally inhabited on the ocean to help trade with Panama and Spain, and to provide water to the military. The military became voluntary in 1998 when peace treaty was signed with Ecuador.
- The styles of housing are mixed. Some are Spanish Moorish, some are, French Baroque.
- A common brand is D'Anafrio ice cream. In addition to stores, there are vendors on the street everywhere.
- Peru is open to all visitors of the world with just a passport except for Chinese citizens.
- Voting is required and when you vote, you get some kind of sticker on your ID. Otherwise you can pay a fine or be required to perform community service.



The bus tour moves from the new city to the old city. The extravagant and beautifully architected buildings used to be homes for the affluent and elite. However, half of the buildings are now empty and home to many squatters. There is some business redevelopment, and one street is an entire row of musical instrument shops. However, it has a ways to go. We learn a lot about squatting throughout our journey and my learnings are below with a journey to a shantytown.

National Museum of Archeology, Anthropology, and History

We visit the National Museum of Archeology, Anthropology, and History, which offers a pre-Columbian exhibit that includes a lot of recovered pottery and artifacts from the Moche civilization. Originally the Inca language of Quechua language was not written (Quechua now uses the Spanish alphabet), and what was going on at the time is represented by the art on the pottery. The different periods of pottery can be identified by the number of spouts in the pouring vessels. In addition we see some pre-loom weaving made of alpaca and llama, skulls, and figurines with enhanced genitals.



San Francisco Monastery



Our next stop is the San Francisco Monastery. Unfortunately, it is one of the few places you cannot take photos. I resort to purchasing a postcard and taking a photo of it. The courtyard is amazing with beautiful flowers. The library has lots of books that go back to the 1600s. The books cannot be touched or read because they are very fragile. Lima is hot and humid which compromises the condition of the books.



There are 28 monks here, but they are cloistered.

The walk downstairs is a catacomb-like layout with three sub-touraine levels that were used as a cemetery. Each partitioned section had about 12 bodies in them without coffins. In total, they discovered 25.000 bodies. A lot of the bones are on display in bins that are sorted by parts except for one display that mixes different parts that is more artistic in nature.



When we go outside we get to visit the church which is quite opulent. Outside on top of the church are black headed vultures that are kind of creepy.

After the monastery, we head to the main plaza. Some of the buildings have grooved boxes structures out the front so that ladies could have tea and see what was going on the plaza, but no one would know they were out there.



Larcomar Mall

We head back to our hotel in Mira Flores and a few of us head to the Larcomar Mall, just a few blocks away. It is built on the edge of the cliff and overlooks the ocean. The development of the beach shows a changing area with some smaller homes that abut large buildings, hotels, restaurants, and stores; signs that the area is becoming more exclusive. It probably won't be long before the few remaining single homes are knocked

down for larger buildings. The view is beautiful, but has an American feel because of Starbucks, Dunkin Donuts, and KFC. Fortunately, we bypass the food court and dine at Mangos where an incredible fish dinner and a cocktail is only \$23.00. However, when I order my margarita, something gets lost in translation and the waiter shows up with a shot of tequila with a plate of salt and fresh limes.

Day 3 South of Lima

Our day begins heading southeast along the coast of a long stretch of ocean. Along the way we see areas for restaurants, beach goers, surfers and joggers. The coast is stunning.

Pachacamac

Our first stop is the Pachacamac archeological site. There has been some restoration, but it is only done with rocks already there. We see a lot of ruins that are a little more Egyptian looking in nature than what I expected. Much of the area is blocked off, but we get to climb up Temple El Sol that has a view of the ocean.



Villa El Salvador Shantytown

We head to local market to get some food to donate to the shantytown we are visiting. Along the way, we pass by a women's prison with a long line of visitors. Most women are incarcerated for drug trafficking. We see lots of vendors with all kinds of creative vehicles to sell their wares and make a living. There is no welfare program in Peru, so Peruvians have to be creative in making their own employment. The government reports an 8% unemployment rate, but it is really higher and doesn't represent the underemployed.



Most people come to the market every day because they work for daily pay and cannot afford to purchase for more than a day's worth of food. The market is like a farmer's market, but has many stands that sell other items like household goods. For about \$4 I get a really large bag of rice that will feed many families.

We arrive at the shantytown of Villa El Salvador, known as the other face of Lima. There is a huge contrast between the modern urban area of Mira Flores and the shantytown that seems more grandiose than comparing an elite urban area of the US with a poor area in the same radius.

The shantytown we visit has security at the front and it is comparable to a gated community. There isn't a crime issue there and everyone has to work together to get the community to the next stage. Four boys are excited to greet us and practice their English. We are told not to give money to anyone. People are not begging and they are self-sustaining.

The squatting process is people squat or basically live on government lands. It's OK for people to squat on property that is not being used, but they have to show they are extremely poor. Squatters can eventually get ownership, but it takes eight to nine years. They have to meet certain requirements like improving the property. Shantytowns go through several stages of development and the time from squatting to ownership. In the first stage of a shanty town, there are no basic services. They get water by trucks, which create a few jobs. This lasts about two to three years. People work and save money through self-employment through construction, taxis, laundry, etc. They don't pay for rent or use of the land. Once they save enough money, residents buy a pre-fab house, which would probably be looked at as primitive to most people in this country. All of the houses are the same size. This is considered the second stage. The shanty becomes a young town and once they mature and develop, they can become part of the district. When people finally own their homes, the local government provides services like water.

Villa El Salvador started when people migrated and squatted in the mid-70s after an earthquake. It is home to the largest furniture manufacturers in the country. NGOs like care have donated machinery.

At the shantytown, we meet Maria, who is one of three women who run the Comedor (soup kitchen.) They feed about 60-80 families/day. The kitchen is one small room with two large pots, and a water spicket. We give her the food we bought at the market. She is very grateful for our donation, but at the same time stands in pride for what she is doing for her community.

A lot of the shantytown residents work in furniture manufacturing. After the shantytown we stop on a street of furniture vendors. The furniture is beautiful, real wood, contemporary and about the same price as what you would pay for at Ikea. However, one issue with the manufacturing is that all of the trees used to create the furniture are not necessarily replaced.

In this day's journey, we see some shantytowns that have progressed into communities. One town Chorrillos is 50 years old and has moved from a shantytown into a community.



Barranco



For dinner we eat at a restaurant in Barranco, a section of Peru that is a Bohemian section where you find a lot of artists and musicians. Barranco means cliffs. There are a lot of beautiful walking areas and we walk over the Bridge of Sighs to a little plaza that has a few bands and art displays. A couple of my trip members dance with a few of the musicians.

Day 4 Cusco



Flight to Cusco

We head out for a morning flight to Cusco. In Peru, there are no boarding calls. People get in line and politely board. It's pretty quiet without the drama of people trying to get their bags settled, making last minute cell calls, and texting. It's

like that most of the trip. You don't hear a lot of loud people chatting away on their cell phones. It's refreshing.

I'm a little worried about the altitude even though I have taken some medicine. The altitude at Cusco is about 10,600 feet. Younger people tend to be affected more than older people, and I am the youngest on the tour. I've taken my prescribed altitude medicine, and get the "normal" effects of tingling in my legs. I also spend the day following Cornina's formula of water, caffeine, chocolate, Gatorade plus tea made from the Coca leaves. I am a little light-headed all day, and my heart elevates quite easily, but thankfully, I have no nausea. It's tolerable as long as I take it slow and use a couple of hiking poles.

It is the rainy season and all day long we are wearing different configurations of clothing all day long by rotating rain gear, T shirts, fleeces and sweaters.



Alpaca Factory Store

We stop at an Alpaca factory store and our hostess, Gaby, tells us the difference between real and fake Alpaca items. Some alpaca products are used with their natural colors and others are dyed using vegetable dyes. Alpacas are shaved every three years during the summer. We get to touch some vicuña wool, and it is incredibly soft. Vicuña is a South American camelid that is protected and a vicuña scarf could cost \$1,200.

Sacrificial Alter

We stop at an area where we go into a rock structure that also has a sacrificial alter. Different ancient cultures practiced different kinds of sacrifices. The ancient Incan world is broken into three sections. In the sky is the Condor to represent the spirit. The mid world is represented by the puma for its strength, and the underworld is represented by the snake.

Sacred Valley

We tour the Sacred Valley and each turn gives a stunning view. There are a lot of livestock on the road and at one point a burro stops our bus by standing on our side of the road. We have multiple bus stops throughout our trip for animals and Corina refers to them as Peruvian traffic jams.



Pisac Archeological Site

We go up the mountains to about 11,600 foot altitude and each turn gives a different and inspiring view. Our next stop is Pisac, ruins with archeological terraces. So far this is the most incredible view of the tour. On the other side of the mountain there are a lot of holes embedded in the mountain. This is actually the Inca cemetery and the Incas carried the bodies there and put them in the holes. Below on some of the tiers there are men working and they are performing restoration.

We head to the hotel and along the way there are a lot of livestock, pigs, bulls, burrows and many of them are free. Some are tied up in the front yard the same way some people would put a dog on a rope in the front yard without a gate. Except in Lima, all of the dogs we see on the tour roam free and they never bark at people. Many of them walk in packs and politely share a bag of garbage.



The women we see walking on the roads often wear hats such as the tall white-painted Panama hat that ranges from \$20-\$50 USD. The simpler felt hat goes for about \$5 USD. Many women wear the traditional dress and the type of dress indicates where the women come from. Most women wear two long braids and you almost never see anyone with gray or white hair. Corina tells us that her grandfather told her that eating puma with prevent you from getting gray hair. However, eating puma is prohibited by law, so there must be another reason for these women with long black hair.



On our way to the hotel, we see a lot of remnants of a carnival from the day before. However, we pull over on the road for an unplanned stop to see a festival where people are dressed in white with white face paint. They are dancing and as part of the tradition they chop down a tree. The festival is sponsored by one of the villagers. Another surprise which is a rainbow which is nice after a day of off and on raining.

Urubamba

The town we are in is Urubamba, which means it's a clay town, which makes sense after seeing all of the adobe houses in the area. There are clay bricks in the windows because many people cannot afford glass windows, at least not right away. The town has a technical school and is home to many farms. We see some different crops and they rotate the crops to preserve the soil's fertility. We see some other ruins along the road that are being restored and the aqueducts are still active today.



We arrive at our lodging, Villa Urubamba. It's a very special and quaint sort of B&B with a handful of rooms surrounding a beautiful courtyard and the mountains as the backdrop.

Day 5 Urubamba / Ollantaytambo

River Rafting



Today will start with a river rafting trip in Lamai on the Urubamba River. Lamai has hot springs here and when the water is high, people come to get some water in the morning that is like sparkling water. Our guide, Orlando, is very fun and friendly, and he teaches us a few Quechua words. We see people

gathering mud on the banks. It is their jobs and the clay they collect is used for making bricks. The river is running fast, but not rough. The view is fantastic. We see a waterfall high up in the mountains.

Ollantaytambo Archeological Site



After rafting, we go to Ollantaytambo which means city of stones. We visit the archeological site, important area for the Inca trail. There is evidence of pre-Inca ruins and the Inca's just added on. It was the empire for Pachacutec, the ninth Inca ruler. In the 1500s, Spain tried to conquer the Incas, but the Incas fought them off and won. However, other Europeans came to take over after.

There are a couple of aqueducts that are specifically for boys and girls. How shadows display, gives Incas information. There is a sun temple that we get to climb. The view from the top is really fascinating. If you go to the top, you can see what's below on the other side of the mountain.

Descansado Beer Tasting



On the way we stop at a chicha beer house, Descansado, where the owner has a little farm and makes beer from corn. First we play El Sapo, a traditional Peruvian game where you toss brass pieces onto a board with a frog and if your piece falls into one of the holes you get points. Corina gives us a lecture on the beer process. The beer is made with corn. The owner's God daughter, Flor, gives us a beer tasting. I don't care for the yellow beer, but I like the pink beer. However, it doesn't taste like beer to me and it has a strawberry flavor.

On the premises is a room filled with Guinea Pigs, which is a special occasion meat in Peru. Guinea Pigs cost about \$10, and in bring in good money for the breeders. Corina points out that in this area, farmers are not poor. They don't have a lot of money but they do have houses and food. Even as we drive through the town, we see a lot of kids playing and they look healthy.

Home Hosted Lunch



Our next stop is a home hosted lunch with Señora Emma. We stop along the way to get beer or wine. I choose a dark Cusqueña beer which reminds me of a Negro Mondelo. Señora Emma has twin daughters and a four year old daughter, Lupe, who has Down's Syndrome. Emma sends Lupe to a free program and she is doing quite well. Emma and her mother prepare the meal. The house is very close to the river and they had a flood. Fortunately, the Grand Circle Foundation has helped them fix it.

We make guacamole and it is probably the best guacamole I've ever had. Today is the birthday of one of my fellow travelers. At the other end of the table Corina brings out a chocolate cake in the shape of a Guinea Pig with little teeth and eyes. I think it is really cute and it even has a candle. However, Corina explains they don't do birthday cakes in Peru. I take a closer look and this isn't a cake at all, but a cooked Guinea Pig. Now it doesn't look so cute to me. I knew Guinea Pigs were part of the Peruvian diet, but it really didn't truly register until now. It gets taken back into the kitchen and chopped up. One of the travelers asks Emma's daughters if they play with the Guinea Pig. They look at us like it is a weird question. To them, the Guinea Pig is just a form of food, not pets. I try the tiniest bit with apprehension, which isn't bad, but a little "gamie." I quickly wash it down with a traditional Peruvian drink made from corn that looks like grape juice. The rest of the meal is fantastic and the best meal I've had in Peru: rice, sauce, potatoes, some type of fritter, squash soup, that doesn't sound exciting, but was prepared as well as any nice restaurant I've been to. I ask Emma how she learned to cook so well and she tells me from her mother.

Peruvian Cemetery



The next stop is the cemetery. There are a few underground graves for poor people, but most are above ground in concrete stacked on top of each other, kind of like cemetery apartments. Most have a little window where you can put in things to represent the person who is entombed. We see pictures, bread, beer, flowers, and other personal trinkets. Most people pay for them for 20 years. Once the 20 years are up, you get a notification (well, I guess the family does) to renew.

After three attempts, if no one responds, the tomb is opened, and the body is removed and cremated for a new person. So, they really are cemetery apartments. Later in Cusco we see a much larger structures off main road many compartments high with lots of spaces for additional bodies.

Day 6 Urubamba to Machu Picchu



Urubamba Farmers Market

Our first stop is the Farmer's Market which only occurs on Wednesdays, so we are lucky to be there to see it. It sprawls out on the streets and partly indoors. It's incredibly busy. It's an opportunity to see people in many different kinds of native dress. The farmer's market going back before money was a bartering system.

Ceramic Factory

Our next stop is a visit to a ceramic factory. It's not really what you think of as a factory, more like a workshop. It has a beautiful little courtyard with lots of flowers and plants and is home to an owl monkey and a few parrots. We get a tour of the workshop and if you've ever taken a pottery class, you can appreciate the work that goes into it. My favorite item in the gift shop is an apron with a picture of a Guinea Pig on it.



Ollantaytambo

We go to Ollantaytambo to see the village part outside of the archeological site. We visit a 1400s Inca House. The people live inside and do their work inside as well. The wife makes dolls and they have Guinea Pigs in the main room as well as a separate room. If the house was in the US it would probably be turned into a museum. There is a courtyard with a rooster, ducklings and a dog and cat.



Machu Picchu



We get the train to Agua Calientes from Ollantaytambo. The train is comfortable with cushy seats, but the seats face each other and there is not a lot of leg room, so you might be playing footsies with the person across from you until you negotiate the space. The train ride has lots of views of the river which is very rough, but mesmerizing to look at, especially with mountains as the backdrop.

From Agua Calientes, we take the bus ride the mountains, which is an adventure itself. The busses must be retrofitted with some special gear to handle the incline. There are a lot of hairpin turns and if you are sitting at the window and look down the bus is close to the edge of the mountain. In many spots when two busses meet, one backs up without hesitation. As scary as it looks, the bus drivers have lots of confidence and can maneuver well.



It is believed that Machu Picchu was inhabited by 75% women and 20% men. Women were chosen and cloistered to serve deities. Machu Picchu abuts the jungle and was never found or invaded by the Spaniards. Spanish glass vases were found at Machu Picchu, so the theory is that the vases were stolen and brought to Machu Picchu.

The official founder of the Machu Picchu archeological site is Hiram Bingham, who established it in 1911.

Bingham was doing some topography for Germany, but was told about Machu Picchu. He tried to get some financial support to explore the area, but the US government didn't care. He borrowed \$4,000 from his girlfriend and paid local people to help him explore the area. Bingham was warned to be careful of cannibals. He organized an exploration group by paying local farmers.

Machu Picchu is considered the "Lost City of the Incas." It is 80% original and 20% restored. It appears that there were about 800 people living there. How they built the city, transported the stones, and crafted the construction is a mystery. Corina later showed us a Nova piece where the people in the show tried to replicate how it was done, but they didn't really prove anything.

When we get there, we hear of a woman who got injured today and is being taken out by helicopter. As we walk in, a nurse runs by us with oxygen for another person and we see her being assisted back to the main entrance. Fortunately, Cusco has a higher altitude than Machu Picchu and time to get used to the altitude and the lower altitude makes it possible for me to tour without any issues.

I think I can speak for all visitors that there is no picture that could ever give you anywhere close the feeling you get by seeing Machu Picchu with your own eyes. I don't even know what words to use because amazing just doesn't measure up. Our visit starts with a drizzle and ends with rain, but we proceed just the same.

After the afternoon of touring we get on the bus to return to Agua Calientes. However, a tree falls in the road and several busses come to a halt. It's big and someone will need to come with a chainsaw to get it moved. However, our confident bus driver does some fancy maneuvering and takes another path that seems a bit tenuous, but we make it.

Day 7 Machu Picchu Gate of the Sun

We have another day to spend at Machu Picchu which is exciting, but it is disheartening that it is another gloomy day. After breakfast we head down to the bus, the rain stops, but it still looks ominous.

Today we will split into two groups. One group will have a less strenuous walk around Machu Picchu and the other will take a more challenging trek up the Inca trail to the Gate of the Sun lead by another guide, Joel. Joel is very warm and friendly and excited to use every US expression he has learned. One of my tour mates helps him to increase his mental phrase book. He teaches Joel, "You're a pain in the aXX." I have a good laugh, but more at Joel's reaction, "Oh my gooooooodness!" However, it's rounded out with other expressions of "This is not my first rodeo" and "You snooze, you lose."

The trail up to the Gate of the Sun is only about 1 ½ miles and actually not as strenuous as I anticipated. However, except for two tiny spots, there are no railings, it's all stone, and it's wet. One bad misstep is likely to bring death or severe physical issues. Joel is a good leader and no one in our group has overestimated their physical fitness level. As we start going the sun peeks in and out of the fog. We get to the top at the Gate of the Sun for the view that you see in the 1940's National Geographic, except it is covered with fog. We take a group picture in front of the sign as proof that we made it. After a bit, we discuss waiting about 10 minutes to see if the fog would clear and it does! The sun gods are smiling on us. We trek back with images in our memory banks that are unlike any other.



That afternoon, we take the train back to Ollantaytambo and then the bus from Ollantaytambo to Cusco. The bus goes through lot highlands and we are lucky to see a glacial cap that is often covered with fog. You know it's rare when the trip leader takes photos for herself. There is a family selling their wares and another photo op is a girl with her burros and a baby.



On the ride back, Corina gives a history on some of the more modern social and political problems of Peru. In the 70s there was a 70% illiteracy rate. In 1980 there was a democratic election with two parties, one of them a Communist party. They promised to help poor people, so many people supported the communist party that one and the communist party took power, but not just with support, but by using terrorist tactics. They blew up city hall, schools, offices, and there were many car bombings. There was a very anti-American sentiment. That drove away tourism and investments. This started an internal war where over 70,000 people were killed and more than 80,000 children became orphans.

To coerce people to join the movement many town leaders disappeared. Terrorists would tell people if they didn't join, they would take away their children and many children were kidnapped. Leaders were tortured and left in the town plaza to die and if citizens helped, they would also be killed.

In 1985 a second terrorist Nationalist group took power. They were from Chile and Argentina along with an American, Lori Berenson, from New York. This group aligned themselves with drug dealers and used force by kidnapping rich people.

In the 90s Peru elected a Japanese leader Alberto Fujimori. He had Peruvian citizenship, which is a requirement for presidency. Presidents serve for five years and then must step down for a term before they can run again. He was elected a second time, but aligned himself with drug dealers. but controlled them. He brought roads and cell towers to small towns. Fujimori was elected a third time. In 2000 he went to an economical convention in Dubai and faxed his resignation and escaped to Japan. However, he was later brought back to Peru, and is imprisoned in one of the prisons he built.

Corina shares that when she was 11 when there was a signal at school, it could be a terrorist attack and the students would crawl under their desks.

Drugs are still an issue in the country today. It is more in the jungle border area. In the time we were in Peru, the two highest mafia drug lords were captured. However, if you look online, that there is some skepticism that it will not be enough.

We arrive in Cusco and check into Hotel Portales, a very nice hotel compared to a very simple hotel in Agua Calientes.

Day 8 Day in the Life of a Peruvian

Today we head out way off the tourist trail, but our first stop is at a fruit stand in Cusco. We buy a lot of fruit to take to the school we will visit today. It's very inexpensive, 100 oranges for 20 Soles, less than \$8.

As we leave the city, we see women lined up outside a building with their babies. It is Vaccination Day, which is a one-day annual event sponsored by the government. We pass through the Santiago area where the first movie theater in Cusco is being built. Since 2005 it is illegal to squat here. There are no house numbers. If someone gets a letter, a radio communication over loud speaker announces a letter has arrived for a particular person.

Dinner is on our own tonight, and I team up with three of my tour mates for the Inca Grill, one of the more popular and trendy restaurants. One person in my party orders a whole Guinea Pig and when it comes out, it looks really big for a Guinea Pig. He totally enjoys it.

Farmlands

Our ride is very bumpy on the farm roads. We see lots of farms and stop to look at some of the different crops. Several times we stop for the Peruvian traffic; sheep, burros, etc. The farm area is very family oriented and we see some families out on the farm together. Alcoholism and domestic violence can be an issue. There is a program that if there is an incident of reported domestic violence, the man is put in jail for a whole year. Divorce in this area is low, one percent compared to the 60% rate for Peru overall. All people expected to participate in the community. If a person doesn't participate after that, the person is kicked out of the community.

Along the way we encounter people on the road and Corina passes out some of the fruit we bought at the market. They are so grateful and it is our honor to be able to share with them.



Maras

We pass through Maras which means salt city. Many of the doorways have old stone lintels with stone carvings. Some of the doorways have sticks with bags on them which are the equivalent of Open signs. It's morning, but the Chicha beer houses are ready for business.

One health issue for the area is Diabetes. Prostitution is illegal except for some areas of Lima and Cusco, but child prostitution is prohibited and there are signs at the airport that child prostitution is illegal. AIDS is also an issue. Much of the child prostitution is driven by the Internet. There is no death penalty in Peru, but it carries a life sentence. Child prostitution is not necessarily driven by Peruvians, but foreigners to the country.

Moray Archeological Site



We stop at the Moray Archeological site. There are circular terraces in a sink hole that was a crop experimentation site. When topography was done by the Germans, they saw the site from helicopters. UNESCO wants to enter Moray, but people are concerned that the money won't go to the right people. Spiritual groups come there during the full moon for ceremonies. The town holds a corn fest there in the May/June frame time.

Racchi Escuela



We pull up to the Racchi School and children take our hands and escort us to the school yard. It's summer in Peru, but there are some summer students. My new friend is a very nice boy named Orlando who wants to be a mining engineer. A few students recite some poetry and then do the same ceremonial dance that we saw back in Urubamba, except this time we are part of the celebration and we all get a turn at chopping down the tree. I'm last and the tree goes over with two light taps. Then we go inside and the children introduce themselves, and say what they want to be when they grow up. The children are between five and twelve. It's encouraging to hear them talking about wanting to be doctors, guides, and lawyers, especially the girls. The Grand Circle Foundation has adopted the school and they are working on the computer lab, so it could happen.

Children are required to wear a school uniform, even if it is public, but they are a little more relaxed about it in the countryside. The problem for some families is that they depend on the harvest money to pay for the uniform, but they don't have the money until well after school is in session. Children also must know cursive writing, but the books don't have cursive and they have a lot of mistakes in them. We have a discussion on the bus after about the real value of knowing how to write cursive in our computerized world and not everyone feels the same.

The principle of the school is Señora Blanca. She also teaches, so she is really doing two jobs on one salary. She is very appreciative of the food, school supplies and monetary donations were contributed to the school.

We have Spanish/English lesson with the kids and we finish with them singing the Peruvian National anthem which is quite long, but they all seem to know it and sing with passion.

Winay Away Coop (Weaving Forever)

In Chinchero we go to Winay Away, a weaving coop stated by Julio Callanaupa. Upon arrival the woman at the door sprinkles flower petal on our heads. We are invited for lunch and we get to sit with some of the workers. At my table we have Justina and her one year old Valedia. She is 30 and has four children. The women here have multiple braids instead of just the two we are used to seeing. It is the style for the women in their village.

We get a weaving demonstration. Everything is made by hand. The wool is washed and the strands are spun by hand. The strands are hand-dyed with vegetables and other natural products such as minerals are used to alter the color. The buds of the choncinall plant turn red and when you add lime they turn bright. Blue is considered

sacred and made from a medicine plant. The items are hand woven and knitted. A table runner might take a month to make. After 8 days of touring, I make my first souvenir purchase, a handmade hat.



Day 9

Today we stay in Cusco. We start with a walk through the Cusco market. Many people shop here daily, because they can't afford electricity for refrigerators. Even though it is morning, many people are eating lunch because they have been up since very early in the morning selling their goods. This is not a tourist area and tourists can be targets for pickpockets. Corina has arranged for a security guard to watch over our group as we tour the market. I don't feel unsafe at all, but I can see the concern. Several vendors know Corina and they are quite friendly.

At one point, many people from our group purchase crafts. Corina gives us an option of going down the meat aisle that is not exactly like going to the meat aisle of Stop & Shop. All body parts are there. We see a woman making jawbone soup. It's good that there is very little waste, but I can't for the life of me think of what becomes of the snouts and heads and it's probably better that I don't know. If the sights don't get to you, the smell will. Ironically, the meat here is probably more organic and healthier than the meat we eat here, but the experience can make you consider becoming a vegetarian. Fortunately, after the meat section we pass the flower section and head to the chocolate section.



As we are walking to our next stop, someone is making graffiti. Corina is upset and a man records her on his camera. Now that this has happened, I realize that you don't really see any graffiti in this area. The punishment for putting graffiti on an Inca stone is a four year sentence.

After the market we head to the Sun Temple known as Coricancha. It is an important temple in the Incan world because it was dedicated to the sun god. The Spaniards took control of it and incorporated a convent into it.

Saqsaywaman



We take the bus up to Saqsaywaman. The rocks here include the tallest and heaviest of the archeological structures. The White Christ, a gift from the Palestinians in the 1940's overlooks the city.

We meet up with a Shaman, Pedro. He is 55. He performs a healing ritual that involves use blowing into coca leaves that he adds to several other objects and rolls up together in a cloth. He waves the cloth over each of us and then burns it. He has to stay until everything is completely done burning.

Handicraft Market

That afternoon we are on our own and I travel with some of my travel mates to the largest handicraft market in Peru. It a great place for souvenirs, textiles and bags. Price negotiation is common place here, but the prices are so inexpensive, there isn't a lot of room.

I meet up with some travel mates for dinner at Tunupa. We have a lovely dinner on the balcony. The restaurant fills up and there is a nice Peruvian band.

Day 10

Today is a free day in Cusco. I am heading to a museum, but get sidetracked by a carnival. There are many people in different costumes performing dances. What a nice surprise. What's not a nice surprise is that it's common to spray people with foam and tourists are not excluded from getting blasted. I decide to get out of the fray by going to Starbucks that is on the second floor. It also has a balcony, so I can get some better photo shots. It's probably the nicest Starbucks I've ever visited. While I'm there, I notice all of the customers are American or European. It comes with an American price as well.





That evening we have a farewell dinner that starts with a review of the trip and a Nova film about Machu Picchu. It's our last meal as an entire group.

Day 11 Farewell from Lima

This morning we say goodbye to several people and Corina, who head off to Lake Titicaca. The rest of us head to Lima for a final farewell lunch. A few of my travel mates and me spend our final hours overlooking the ocean at Larcomar for a cocktail before heading home.

A Note of Thanks

Thanks to my travel mates: Darla, Bob, Geri, Dorothy, Lance, Tillman, Carolyn, Lucy Ann, Jack, Brenda, Tom, Monica, and Julie. Also a big thanks to our main driver, Mario. Happy travels!