

Trip and Arrival in Peru – July 31, 2005

Marcia and I left Albany at 1PM on Saturday on a Delta commuter jet to Cincinnati, then onto Miami. We passed over Pittsburgh on the way to Cincinnati and got a good view from the air of the downtown area we were in when we visited Jaime on the weekend of July 10th.

At the Cincinnati airport we surprised Marie (Marcia's sister) and Kal Tinka, who had forgotten that we were going to meet them in Cincinnati and fly on the same plane with them to Miami...they thought we were going to meet them in Miami! It was great seeing them again, and we really enjoy traveling with them.

Landed in Miami at 7PM Saturday night. We had decided just to check our suitcases thru to Miami, then claim them, and then re-check them on the LAN-Peru flight to Lima Peru (as we had 6 hours to kill in Miami). The Tinkas had checked their bags all the way thru to Lima, but they came with us as we picked up our bags on the carousel in Miami. Imagine Kal's surprise when his bag came out (still with the tag on it, checked thru to Peru) on the Miami carousel! Marie's didn't come out, so must have been checked thru correctly. Anyways, Kal was glad they were with us at the carousel!

We had dinner, then got in the first long line to check in, then the second long line to send out checked luggage thru the scanning machines. Flight from Miami to Lima leaves at 1AM Sunday morning...a 6 hour flight to Lima. Waiting in the lounge at the gate, it's apparent that 95% of the folks waiting for the flight to Lima are natives of Peru (or at least South America)...many, many small children (and it looked like a lot of them had been to Disney World). It was a sold out flight, with people on standby. Imagine our surprise when they announced (in Spanish) that they wanted Senoir Elving (and I forgot what title they had for Marcia) to come to the podium. They gave us upgrades to Business Class for the trip to Lima (and nothing for the Tinkas)! We still can't figure out how...we've never flown on this airline & their only USA partner is American Airlines, who we rarely fly. All I can think is that I was nice to the girl at the original check in counter that was having a rough day!

Anyway, Marcia and I had a great flight (big, fold out seats, special dinner, etc.) and we caught a nice nap (feeling very sorry for the poor Tinkas, in the back of the plane with the Llamas)!

Great flight (a big 767-300). Landed in Lima at 6AM (they are on Eastern Standard Time...one hour behind back home). Got all of our luggage, cleared customs, and met one of our tour guides that had a bus and they drove the four of us to the Marriot in Malefiores (a suburb of Lima), and gave us a briefing, on the bus, about our group. Guess it will just be 20 people, all from the USA.

Wow... we are really surprised how nice the Marriot (and it's location) is. Right on the Pacific Ocean, with an outdoor market and a shopping mall right next to it, in what's supposed to be a very safe part of Lima. Great rooms with a great view of the Pacific.

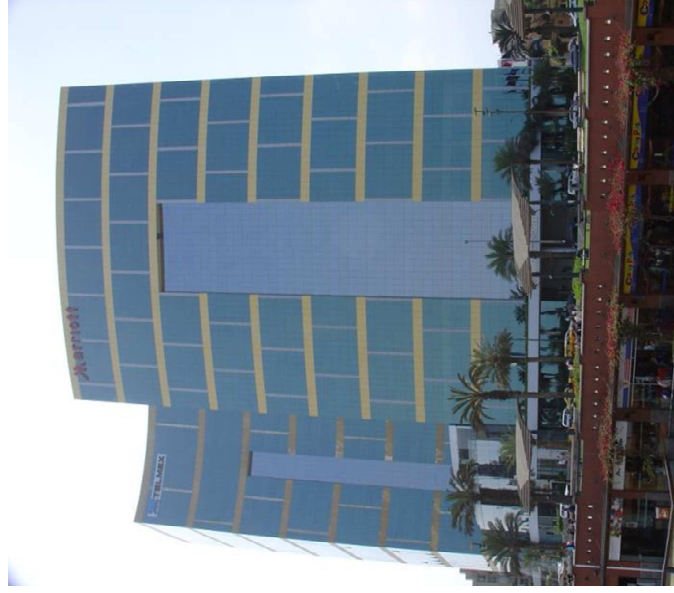
We just had a nice breakfast at the Marriott. Marie and Kal are taking naps, and we are going to meet at noon and do some exploring (the market, mall, beach, and walk down to a restaurant out on a pier that the guide suggested might be good for us to try for dinner, tonight).

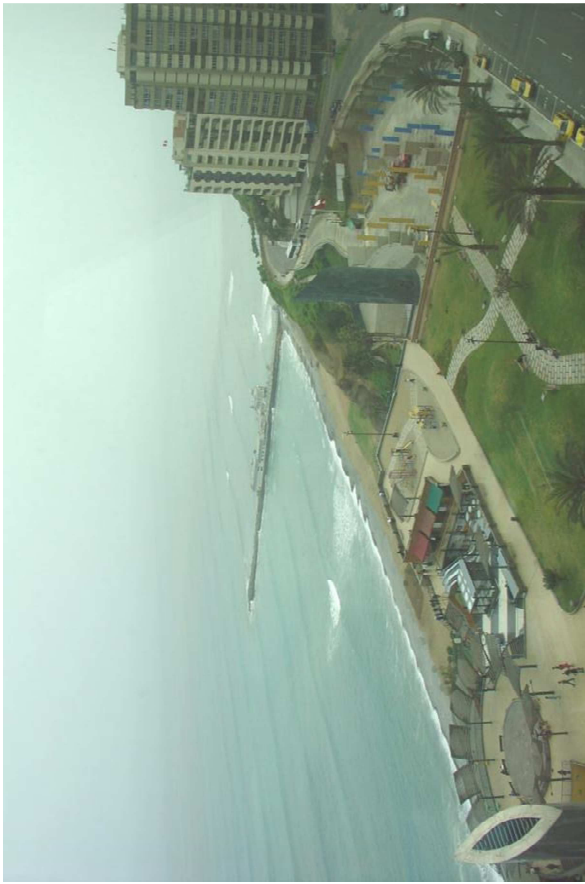
Today (Sunday) is a free day for us. She said some of our group got in last night, and the rest will get in late tonight.

Tomorrow (Monday) we all meet at 2PM for our first event...4 hour tour of Lima, then a dinner.

Then we will be up early on Tuesday for a bus trip to Ica to then fly over the Naca etchings in a small plane, then overnight at the Bellestros park and boat trip next day to the island with the wildlife sanctuary, before returning to Lima.

We are all well, having a great time; this looks like a first class trip!





Monday - Our 2nd Day in Peru

This was our second day in Peru, and we spent the whole day in the capital city of Lima.

We met the Tinka's for breakfast at 8:30AM (the excellent breakfast buffet at our hotel, the Marriott), and decided what we would do until our first "planned tour group activity" at 2PM.

We decided to do a little "exploring" and walk on a main street, towards the center of the city, to find the "Artesian Market", where they would have all kinds of souvenirs for sale. We charted a route on our map, and started out on about a half hour walk, all along a busy main street. Every taxi cab recognized us a tourists, and honked their horns at us, on the chance we wanted a taxi.....very noisy! The next most popular "profession" was money changers, walking the street, looking to convert your money to the local currency.....obviously, we were prime targets, as we do not look like locals! Third most common job appears to be police/security guard. There was one standing at every corner, so we felt safe, even in a city that's known for a lot of crime.



We found the market (many very nice, clean, permanent stalls, with roofs and walls), each with a well dressed vendor and very good merchandise. Many interesting things, and the vendors were not "pushy".

A little after noon, we started to walk back to the hotel, and took another main route that went thru more of a residential section.....very interesting to see how the Peruvians live in this section of the city (which is one of the best sections to live in).

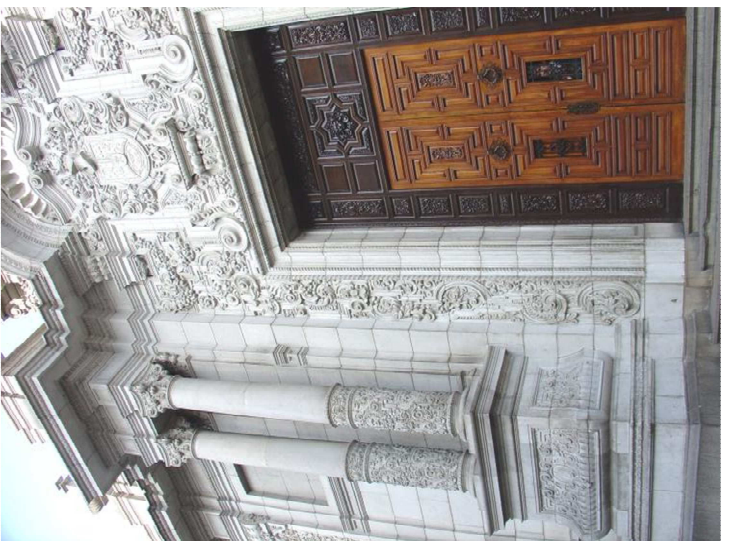
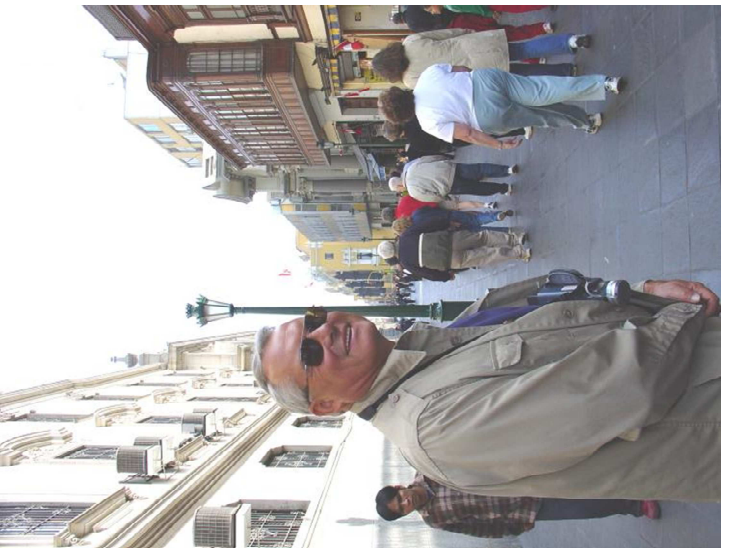
At 2PM we met our group, and went on a tour of the city of Lima, hosted by a local guide, Hernando.

Got on a big 40 seat tour bus (and there's only 20 of us in the group, so a lot of room!). Drove all around Lima, stops to get out an view the ocean, major buildings, etc. Took a tour of the downtown cathedral. Lima was the premier city on the Western Hemisphere from 1700 - 1850. It's population was 800,000 in 1954, but now is 8,000,000 (in a country of 24,000,000 people). The move of rural people to the city has caused the influx of people, resulting in shanty towns, overcrowding, and crime. The beautiful downtown area, with the old, classic Spanish and government buildings, is now in somewhat poor shape, with the better-off residents having moved to the suburbs and the major firms that used to occupy downtown buildings doing the same.

Lastly, we stopped and went thru a National Archeological Museum. Thru all of this our guide, Hernando, was doing an excellent job of describing Lima, Peruvian history, and the ancient cultures.

Got back to the hotel at 6:15PM, then met our group (and main local guide, the young lady that had met us at the airport Sunday morning) for dinner at the Marriott. Dinner was excellent, and we got to chat more with the other members of our group.

Then, off to bed (and packing) as we leave tomorrow by bus for our trip to Ica and the flight in the small planes over the Nasca lines.



Tuesday - Our 3rd Day In Peru

After breakfast our group of 20 boarded the tour bus at the Lima Marriott and we departed around 7AM for Ica.

As we'd be on the road only one night, we were able to leave a lot of our baggage behind at the Marriott. We are real happy to discover that the Marriott will also hold some of our baggage when we next leave them (for about a week) to go to Machu Piccu and Lake Titicaca. The domestic flights have a weight limit of one bag per person of 44 pounds, and we feared we were over; now, we can leave enough behind at the Marriott to stay under the weight limit, and pick it up when we come back to Lima the day before we depart for home.

Our guide says our group is large at 20 for a General Tours group; they normally try to keep the size to 14 or 16! Boy, 20 people is great; we've already gotten to know everyone, there's little delay when the group has to move, and with 20 people on a 40 seat bus, there's plenty of room (and windows).

Our trip to Ica took four hours, with two stops for shopping/refreshments, traveling the whole way on the Pan American Highway, mostly along the Pacific Ocean. Most of the land we went thru is true desert, with occasional areas of irrigated farming, huge tent buildings breeding chickens, and mining operations. In some areas, huge sand dunes and sand "pyramids". Many "shanty towns" along the way where Indians have migrated towards the coast looking for work and have built small square houses of woven reeds and hay (which I guess you can get away with in a desert where it never rains!) We drive thru towns and small cities which don't look a lot better than the shanty towns; this is definitely a third world country with massive poverty. The educated Peruvians we talk to say an issue is that the upper class have one or two children, the middle class have two or three children, and the lower class have 6 or more (adhering strictly to the Catholic Church's stand on birth control). The burdening lower classes have had negative affects on schools and the whole infrastructure.

Half-way thru the trip we drive out of the overcast that normally blankets the Lima region during the South American winter, into the sunshine that is normal in the Ica region.



When we got to Ica (around 11AM) we toured the museum with a local guide.....strange museum, covering the earlier people. Showed actual mummies, skeletons of people who died of various illnesses, and skulls with holes in them, as these were the people that did brain surgery with stones!

Then a nice lunch at a "Club Med" style resort...seemed to be many vacationing Europeans at the resort.

Then, onto the highlight of the day, flying over the Nasca lines, which are huge pictures drawn on desert plateaus by the residents in the 1200's. They are too large to be seen anywhere but from the air (they were not discovered until the 1920's when commercial airliners first saw them) and there's much speculation as to not only how they were produced, but why.

We boarded two 10 passenger planes (window seats, high wings, perfect for this type of sightseeing...I sat right behind the pilots and enjoyed watching them fly the plane and watching the instruments. We flew about 20 minutes (over desert) to Nasca, then over each of the 12 or so drawings. When we got to the drawings, the pilot would expertly bank the plane in a tight spiral so folks on one side of the plane could get pictures; then he'd bank it the other way, so the other side had a perfect view. I know a man in the row behind me got sick; I don't know how many others! A great trip; up in the air about 1-1/2 hours.

Left the airport and went to a local public resort built around a real lagoon (remember.....we are in desert). Then a 45 minute trip back north to our hotel for the night, the Paracas resort, which is inside the wildlife preserve we'd be investigating tomorrow.

All the time, our guide, a young Peruvian lady, has continued to do a great job (whether in explaining things to us, or handling the traveling details).

Checked into the hotel at sunset (smaller, rustic rooms) but a beautiful resort right on a bay in the Pacific Ocean. We had a great dinner (not included in the tour) at the resort restaurant, overlooking the Pacific, at 8PM. They had a great show, during dinner, which was very professionally done by local youths, depicting local dances from the Inca times, Spanish times, and after independence from Spain.

Off to bed, looking forward to tomorrows' boat trip to the Ballestas Islands.



Wednesday - Our Fourth Day in Peru

Up early after our one night at the Hotel Paracas Resort, located on a bay on the Pacific Ocean inside of the Paracas National Wildlife Refuge.

The Hotel Paracas was built at 1944, and is all one story rooms and bungalows, with many sports and recreations facilities, pools, etc. The rooms were rather Spartan, but nice. We discovered the rooms had no heat (hey...we're in a desert)...but it does get cool at night during the winter! Fortunately, we had enough blankets and good hot water in the shower in the morning, so all is well.

After a quick "Continental Breakfast" for our group (which I discovered, later, means just bread, juice and coffee...I got in the wrong buffet line....another groups'...and enjoyed my breakfast of eggs, sausage and fruit....and I assure you that I did not do this intentionally!)

Now, for the highlight of the day, the trip to view the wildlife on the Ballestas Islands (which the Peruvian like to call the "Peruvian Galapagos").

We got into one big powerboat, right at the dock in front of the Hotel Paracas. It was an open boat that just held our group of 20 people in about 6 rows of seats. We had been warned it would be cool at full speed, so we were all well dressed, with many layers of clothes. Once again, our tour guide went along to do the commentary, as we were not going to get any English commentary from the Peruvian Captain! This was a very fast boat (I estimate 30 miles/hour, maybe 35 mph, at full throttle. We went thru the bay, stopping at the far point to view some wildlife and a unexplained drawing on the side of the mountain...some say it was drawn by the same people that drew the Nasca lines, others say it was drawn by pirates in the 1700's. Then, we continued on our 15 mile trip to the Ballestas Islands.



At the islands, we cruised around (with the captain frequently stopping to boat and slowly swinging it around so all could see a special site and take pictures. The island themselves are very beautiful (all rock and sand, but with many caves and tunneled passages right thru an island). Apparently, the convergence of warmer Peruvian water with the Humboldt current, coming up from Antarctica, causes much plankton to grow, so many fishes, and so many of the species we saw....all types of birds and many, many sea lions. Literally, we could see tens of thousands of birds at one time, covering an island. Also, sea lions with their babies, all posing for us! You are not allowed to set foot on the islands, but that was fine, as they are all covered by bird droppings.

Then, back to the hotel at high speed. When we arrived, the hotel (which runs the boat excursion) had free souvenirs for each of us, and gave us coffee and tea refreshments.

Next, our tour guide took us on a walking tour of the small town that the hotel is in, where we watched the fishermen bring in their catch, and bought souvenirs at the market.

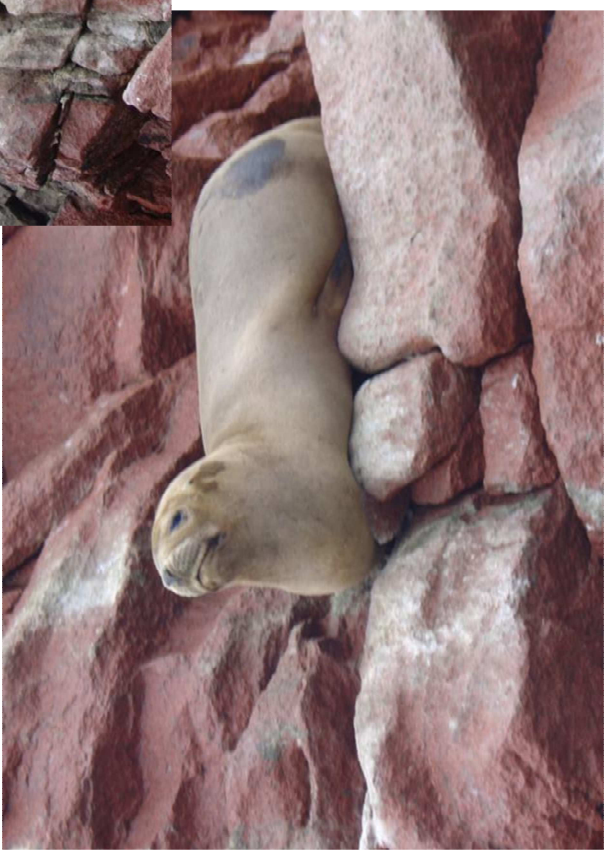
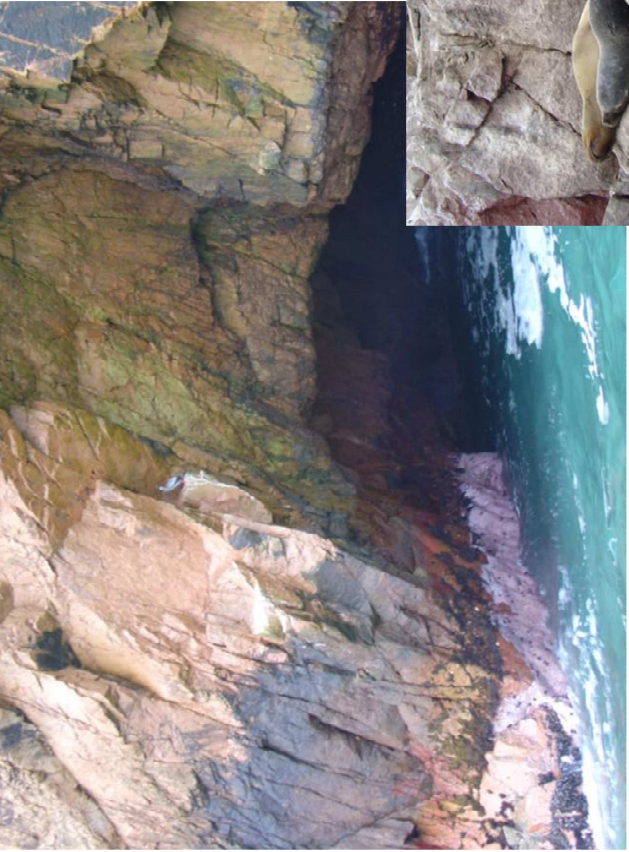
We then went back to our rooms and packed, then lunch at 12:30 in the hotel restaurant.

We left at 1:30PM for the four hour drive back to the Marroto in Lima. The Tinka's, Marcia and myself plan on having dinner tonight at that fancy restaurant we walked to the other day...it's the fancy seafood restaurant built at the end of the pier, down the cliff, below our hotel. It's called the Rosa Nautica. We plan on taking a cab, as it would be too dangerous to walk the steps down the cliff at night.

We have to be up for breakfast at 4:00AM tomorrow, then depart for the airport at 4:20AM for our flight to Cusco (we are catching an early flight so that we can spend plenty of time at the famous market in Pisac, which is only held on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays).

So, I will be attempting to send off this e-mail when we get to the Marriott, tonight, around 6PM. You will also be receiving our e-mails discussing days 2 and 3, as we could not find an internet hook up after we left Lima on Monday.

We will continue to write these daily recaps each day, but don't worry if you don't receive one each day; it just means we could not find an internet hook-up (and my laptop saves them, and will send them out all-at-once when we do get a hookup). Hopefully, We'll get you updates before we next get back to Lima (the day before we return home...that would be, I think, the 10th of August).



Thursday - Our Fifth Day In Peru

Well...this was a busy day!

Up at 3PM to shower and pack and get luggage ready for 4PM pickup, then leave the hotel (the Lima Marriott) at 4:20AM for our 7AM flight from Lima to Cuzco. We used the duffel bag we bought to "store" some stuff at the Marriott so that we would not be over the weight limit for domestic flights. Our tour operators did a great job in getting us to the airport, walking us thru the procedures, etc. We said goodbye to the young lady that had been our main guide in the Lima/Ica area (we will see her again when we return to Lima next Wednesday).

A nice flight to Cuzco on a new Airbus A320, landing just after 8AM. Met by the new tour guide that will be with us thru Cuzco/Machu Picchu, Puno, and Lake Titicaca. A nice young Peruvian fellow, Uri, who speaks very good English.

We loaded into a small bus (maybe 26 seats), but huge windows and very comfortable. Then, they drove us to the hotel in Cuzco that we will be staying in next Saturday night and Sunday, the Liberator, to relax for a few minutes and have some refreshments.

Then, off to the Sacred Valley. We stopped at a place that makes alpaca garments, and had a good explanation of the different quality "grades" of alpaca stuff; also some shopping. Then we stopped at a cooperative that weaves fabric the traditional way, but the main attraction was their Lamas, Alpacas, and similar animals. Our new guide did a great job educating us on these animals (which we were able to pet and feed).

Then off to the famous market at Pisco. Our guide took us to the farmers market area, and showed and described the food for sales, then let us loose to shop for a while.

Then (by now it was 1:30PM), off to lunch at a beautiful restaurant right next to the Urubamba river.

Then, the highlight of the day...we went to the Inca ruins at

Ollantayambo, which our guide says some say rivals Machu Pichu. Had a great climb and great explanation from our guide of the giant fortress.

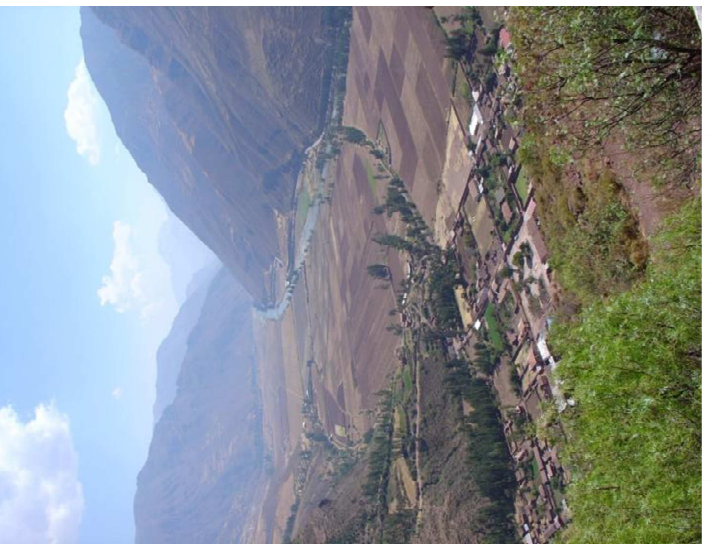
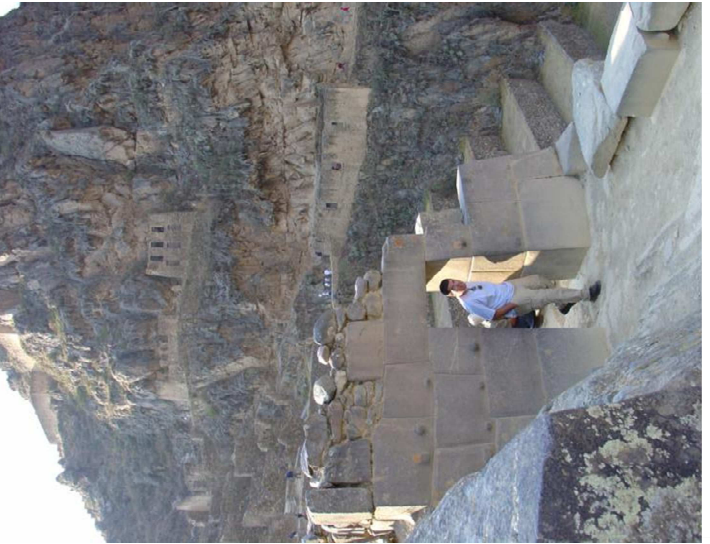
After we left the fortress, our guide took us to visit the inside of some actual homes, currently used by the natives. We went into a home that was on a courtyard which three other homes faced onto. The homes were built in ancient Inca ruins. The people let us in, because they sell souvenirs (our guide told us to leave a tip if we didn't buy anything)! It was really sad to see the way these good folks live...they had electricity, but no running water or toilets, and they raised guinea pigs (for sale to restaurants... it's a delicacy in Peru) right in their house...literally 50 or so guinea pigs running all over!

Got to our hotel (the Posada Del Inca) a little after 6PM....dinner at 7:30PM.

Perfect weather...all day.

Now getting ready for tomorrow...train ride to Machu Pichu and tour of the famous ruins.





Friday - Our Sixth day in Peru

Buffet breakfast at our hotel in the Sacred Valley, then boarded our bus at 8AM for a fifteen minute ride to the train station at Urubamba to catch the train that will take us to the town below Machu Picchu, as there is no roads that go there...beautiful weather...sunny and about 50 degrees, but warming up by the minute!

Boarded our train (a beautiful "Vista Liner", with big windows and windows on both sides of the ceiling). We had assigned seats, but we got lucky (the Elvings at least) and were on the left side of the train, which has a little better scenery, as the river is on that

side...the Tinkas were on the right side, but they were facing forward, unlike us. I did not realize that we would be traveling on this train trip from the western (drier) slopes of the Andes to the eastern (wetter) slopes. Our guide informed us of that, and it was amazing to watch the mountains start to be fully covered in vegetation...something we had not yet seen in Peru. Machu Picchu is part of the tropical rain forest/Amazon basin, albeit the highest part!

About one-and-a-half hour trip to Aguas Calientes, the town right below Machu Picchu and the town where our hotel would be (The Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel...where my mother and sisters stayed when they visited Machu Picchu). Incredibly beautiful sights all along the way, as the valley narrowed, the vegetation grew denser, we spied snow capped mountains, and even glaciers in the mountains.

-We arrived at the train station at Aguas Calientes about 11AM. Our excellent tour guide, Uri, recommended that rather than immediately going up to the Machu Picchu ruins, that we check in to our hotel, then leave 1/2 hour later for the ruins, have our included lunch buffet at the Sanctuary Lodge Restaurant (right at the entrance to the ruins), then start of tour of the ruins around 1:30PM. He said that this way we'd miss the biggest crowds. We all said OK for several reasons...his made sense, it would give us a chance to change into lighter clothes, as it was now 75 degrees and sunny, it would give us a chance to take unneeded items out of our backpacks, and we were going to be able to go back up to Machu Picchu tomorrow (a second day) as we were not leaving Aguas Calientes until late afternoon, tomorrow.

Checked into the beautiful hotel, took a break, then boarded the special bus that takes tourists up to Machu Picchu on the dirt/gravel road, built in 1948, with the incredible "switch backs". No guard rails, but incredible views as we ascended over 1500 feet to the ruins. Had a quick buffet lunch.

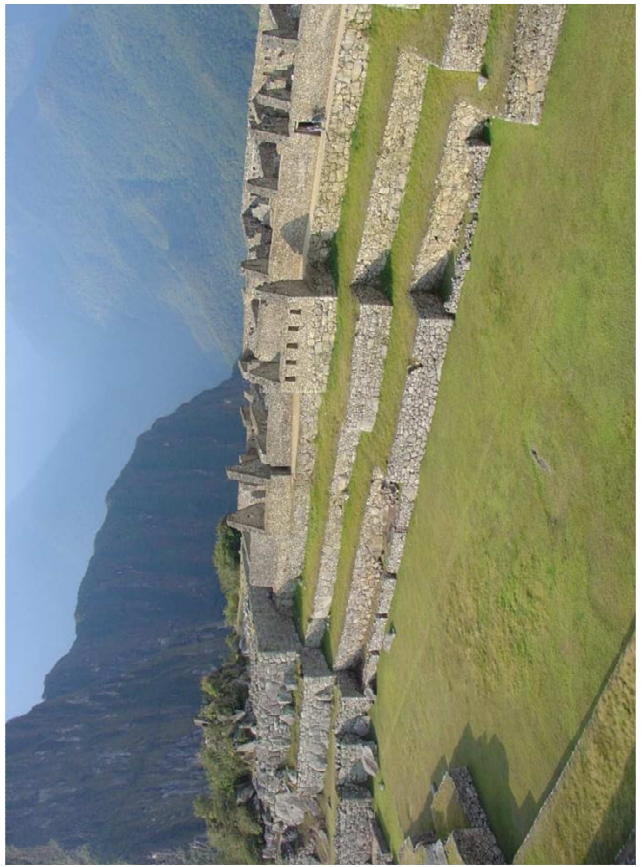
Then Uri led us on a tour of the Inca ruins, and he did a great job...led us in a logical order of places to see, gave great explanations of not only the different areas, but the history of the site and its discovery. Then, we all climbed up to the "caretaker's hut" to get pictures taken with us standing with the ruins below and Huayna Picchu mountain in the background (Huayna Picchu is the tall mountain that's always in the background of all of the classic photos of Machu Picchu).

There was a special meeting and ceremony going on honoring all of the indigenous Indians of South America, and all had sent representatives, dressed in native attire. It was fun watching them view the ruins and have a genuinely good time. Left a little before 5:30PM, taking the special bus down the mountain switchbacks, watching one of the little boys (who always run down the stairs, wave at the bus, then run in front of it at the end, jump on board and get tips. It was actually raining a little bit when we got off the bus... first rain we had experienced in Peru.

Had a wonderful dinner with the group at 7PM at the Machu Picchu Pueblo hotel. Our tour guide handed out our tickets and Machu Picchu admissions for the next day, for those planning to go back to the ruins. He also offered to lead anyone interested on a climb of Huayna Picchu (this is the huge mountain that serves as the backdrop for Machu Picchu...not to be confused with the climb to the Sun Gate.

Off to bed, with all thinking about whether they wanted to attempt to climb Huayna Picchu...the walls appear to go almost straight up, and we couldn't see where any trail could be!





Saturday - Our 7th Day in Peru

Marcia and I were up early to catch breakfast. Marcia had long ago decided that she would not be going up to the Machu Picchu ruins for the second day. Instead, she had signed up for the bird tour on the Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel grounds from 7AM - 9AM, then a nature walk thru the grounds from 9AM - 11AM.

So, she took off at 7AM, I went back to the room to finish packing (Marcia was going to have to check out of the room at 11:00AM), then I headed off to meet the group going up to the Machu Picchu ruins.

We left at 7:30AM for the ruins, with our tour guide Uri. Some of the group were going to roam the grounds or climb up to the Sun Gate. 9 of us said we wanted to climb Huayua Picchu (the huge mountain behind the ruins that you see in most pictures of Machu Picchu) with Uri.

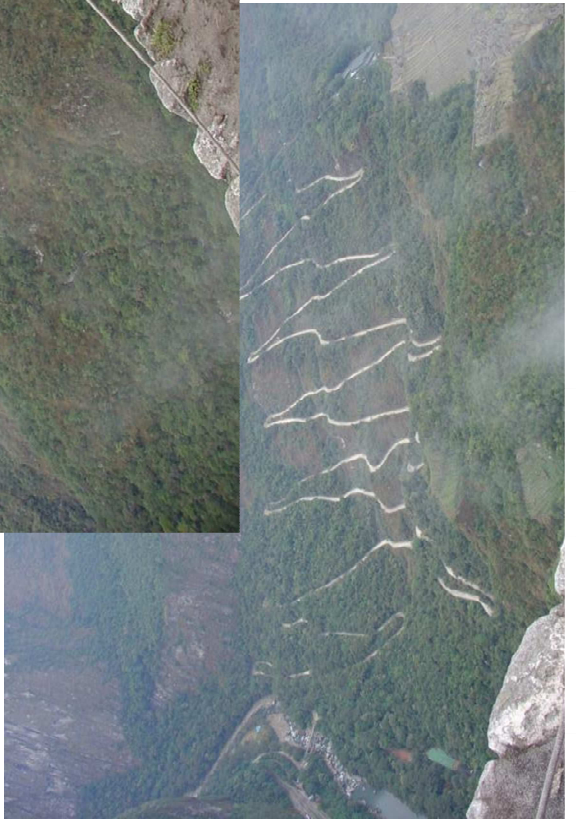
Off we went (Marie, Kal, myself and six others from our group) to Huayua Picchu. It was an incredible experience...climbing a trail (built by the Inca's) that traversed the face of a mountain that rose at an angle of about 75 or 80 degrees (the mountain face, not the trail)! Steep drop offs on one side; sometimes climbing near vertical portions with the aid of permanent ropes or cables. I don't think any of us ever really felt frightened, but the hearts and chests we pounding much of the way...due to the effort it was taking to keep climbing and the fact we were breathing air at over 10,000 feet high. Marie, Kal, myself and three others made it to the top, with our guide, in a little over an hour. The last three ladies made it up about 20 minutes later. Having said that, Uri, our guide, had to stop often to let us catch up to him and to catch our breath (Uri is 31 years old, in great shape, and he told me that he climbs Huayua Picchu about once a week, as he has tours of the ruins to conduct each week.

The view from the top of the mountain was spectacular...360 degree view, looking down on the ruins and the switchback road, way below. The climb down was also "interesting" as very steep!

Back to the hotel for lunch at 2PM, then to the train station for the 5PM train to Cuzco. The train ride was about four hours. We got off one station early, and were picked up by our tour bus to take us to the hotel, as they said this would cut about half an hour off our transit time. We arrived at the Cuzco Libertador, a 5 star hotel, about 9PM.

Now, I have to tell you that Marcia became quite sick today! She was fine when we split up at 7AM, but when I got back to the hotel (and everyone had checked out of their rooms by this time), several in our tour group told me Marcia was laying down on a couch in one of the common areas. She was feeling nauseous and achy. She skipped lunch, and it took a bit of help from Uri and our fellow tour group members to get her to the train station (not an easy walk) and onto the train. Marcia was very uncomfortable during the train ride, and the half-hour bus ride to the hotel. When we got on the bus, another agent from General Tours, Jennifer, was there, and Uri had her call ahead to the hotel to ready a wheel chair and to contact a local doctor. The bellmen met the bus with a wheel chair, we got Marcia up to our room, and the doctor arrived within 5 minutes. He diagnosed that she had a bacterial infection salmonella infection most probably from bad food. He gave Marcia an injection to control nausea and diarrhea, and wrote prescriptions for electrolyte solution, antibiotics, and two other pills. I said I had seen an open Drug Store and would run out and get them filled, but he summoned the Bell Captain, who sent a Bell Boy to run out to get the prescriptions filled. Marcia started on the medications at 10:30PM last night, and is steadily getting better (I am writing this at 9:30AM Sunday). She is resting, but feeling much better. The tour group members were all very helpful thru this experience, especially the Tinkas!





Sunday - Our 8th Day in Peru

As mentioned in the last e-mail, Marcia became quite sick on Saturday. She saw the doctor and started medications Saturday night. She stopped "moaning" halfway thru the night, so I hoped she was feeling better, which was confirmed when morning came and she said she was feeling better, but was going to stay in bed for a good part of the day.

I went down for breakfast, and all in the tour group were happy to hear that she was feeling better. I found out that Susan, one of two sisters in their 30's traveling with their mother, had apparently come down with the same thing Marcia had. Her mother had antibiotics with her, and Susan had started taking them. Ironically, Susan had been most helpful on the trek from Machu Picchu to Cuzco, carrying my backpack several times when we were boarding trains, buses, etc., and giving Marcia a big bottle of Gatorade (to help replace electrolytes). Susan missed all the activities on Sunday. *Update...Susan did rejoin the group on Monday for the long bus trip to Puno.*

I spent the next hour trying to find an internet connection. The hotel staff were very helpful, and we finally got their wireless network working on my computer...it even worked in our room. So...I was finally able to send out the e-mails to you about some of the previous days on our tour, as well as downloading a bunch of e-mails from work (and sending the responses to ones that I had previously downloaded).

At 11AM, after checking in with Marcia, I walked towards the main square in Cuzco. They were having a huge military parade that I caught the end of. Then walked the beautiful square.

We are in Cuzco, which is a very old city (it was the Inca's capital) and one of the first cities conquered by the Spanish. This is a really beautiful city. 500,000 residents.

At 1PM left with the group on the tour bus (Marcia remaining behind) and we visited three historical Inca ruins in the Cuzco area, the main square back in the city, the main cathedral (an amazing building both in size and the beauty of the internal paintings, alters, etc). Then toured the Temple of the Sun, which is right next to our hotel (the Spanish built on top of old Inca ruins, but retained much of the Inca architecture as it was superb).

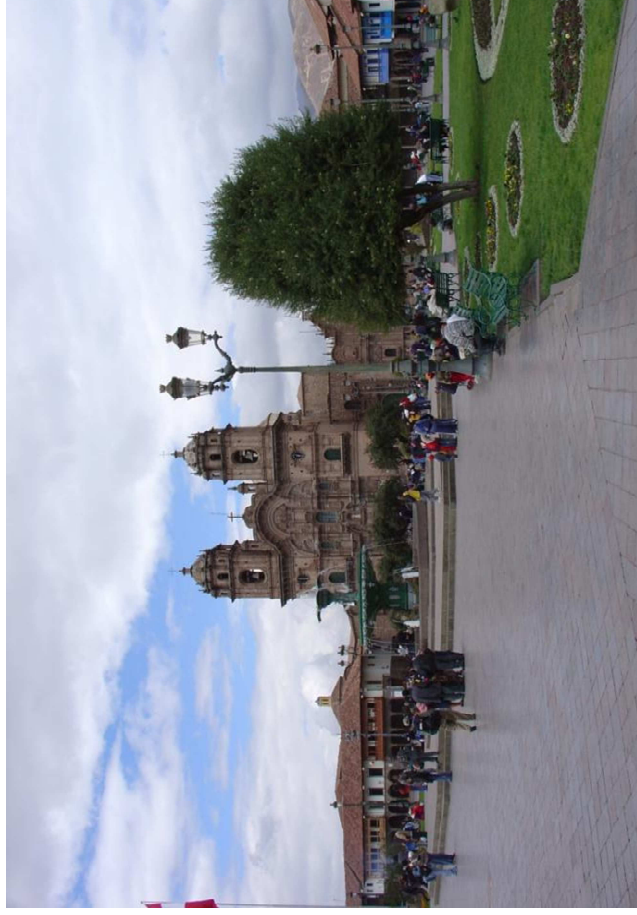
General Tours always asks each of their tours to support a worthy charity in the area they are visiting. So we next visited an orphanage for young girls in Cuzco run by a young nun from Malaysia and three other nuns. Their facilities, in old buildings, were spotless. We spent about half an hour there. First, the kids sang two songs for us, we were given a tour of the facilities, and then left gifts that some of us had brought from home (Marcia had bought coloring books and colored pencils that I left) and we all made a monetary donation. The whole experience was very sobering...much poverty and many children in Peru. Then back to the

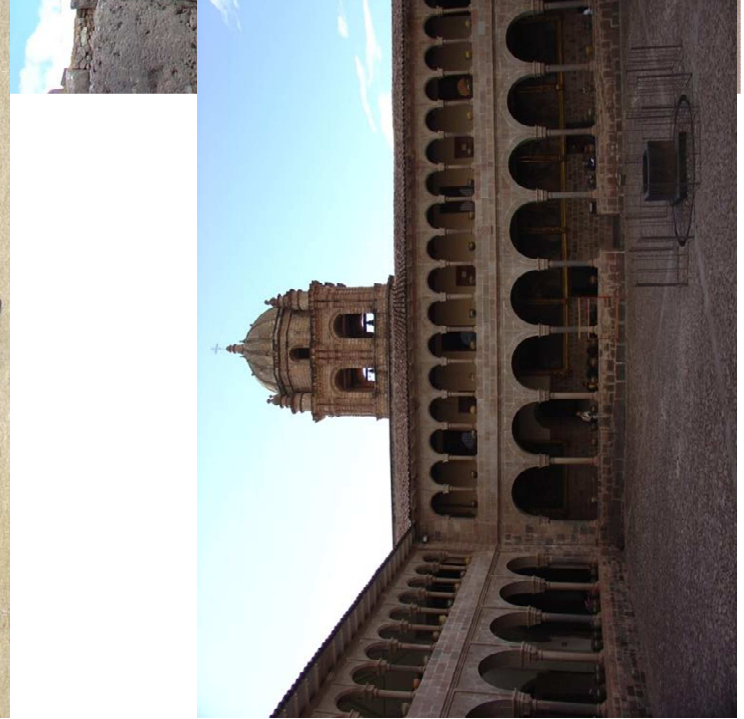
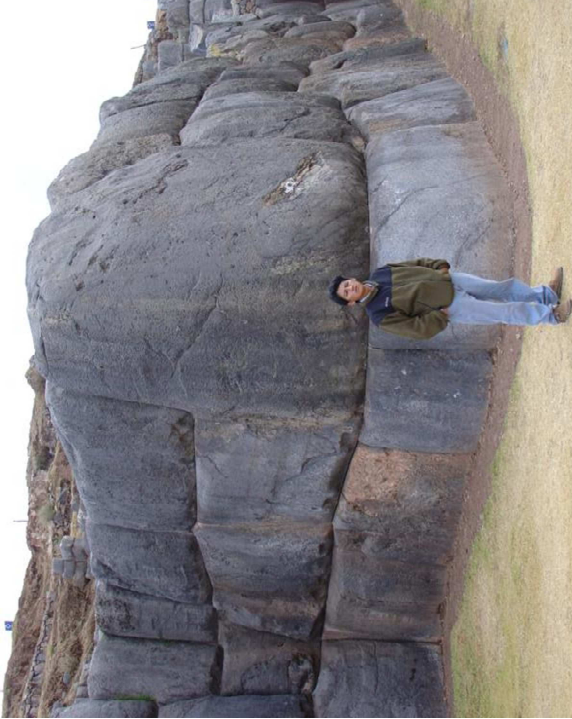
hotel, to be greeted by the souvenir vendors that we now know by name!

Back to the hotel at 6AM, and I was delighted to find Marcia up, showered, dressed for dinner, and feeling quite all right! She was working on the computer, downloading pictures we had taken with the digital camera.

Boarded the bus for our 7:30PM group dinner at a restaurant right on the main square of Cuzco. A very good dinner buffet, and we were seated right near the stage where they had a live band and four costumed dancers performing Peruvian dances. The music and dancing was excellent.

Off to bed...tomorrow a seven hour bus ride from Cuzco to Puno, where we will tour Lake Titicaca (the highest navigable Lake in the world at 12,500 feet) the following day.

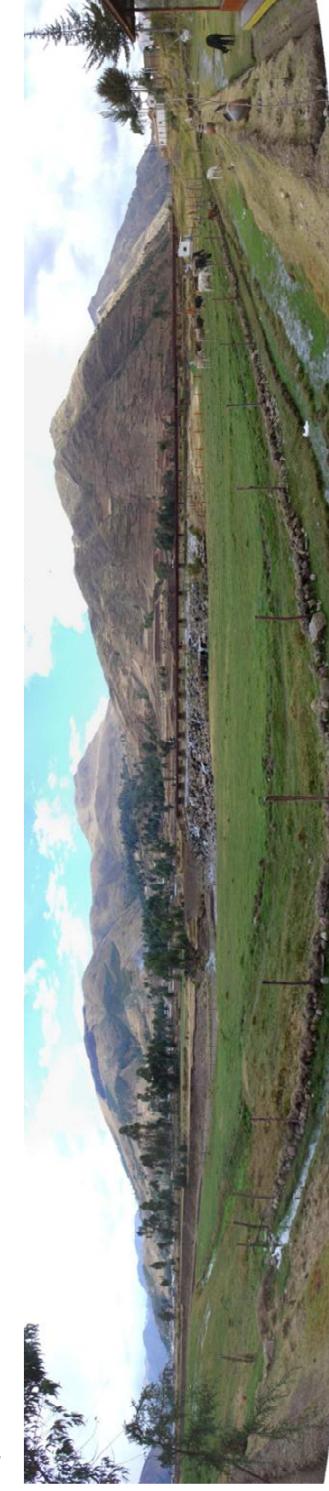




Monday - Our 9th Day In Peru

Boarded our bus in Cuzco at 7:30AM for the nine hour journey to Puno, in Southern Peru, on the shore of Lake Titicaca.

I was expecting rather drab scenery, but we found great views all the way...going from lush farming valleys with steep mountains on both sides, to a high pass with snow topped mountains, then down into an arid plane, still with mountains on both sides, then to Puno on the shore of Lake Titicaca.



We had lunch at a nice restaurant in the "lush farming valley" part...great views from the restaurant of the valley, mountains, and all the animals around the restaurant (Llamas, cows, and dogs). While we were eating, we were hit by a hail storm,

but it soon passed by. Then we continued on and stopped at the high pass (14,500 feet...the highest we will be in Peru) for pictures of the mist shrouded, snow capped mountains.

We were on a two-lane road all the way, so passed thru many towns. Very interesting to observe the head wear the Peruvian women wear. Each region has a different style head gear.....which the women wear all of the time.

Just before our 5PM arrival in Puno, our tour guide, Uri, announced that he and the driver would be leaving us and returning to Cuzco after we arrived at our hotel...he'd be turning us over to another local guide with his company that specializes with the Lake Titicaca/Puno area. Well...this was the first any of us realized he'd be leaving, so all were scrambling to calculate correct tip amounts and assemble them for Uri (and the driver), who all agreed had been an excellent guide (I don't know if I had mentioned earlier that Uri had told me he was 31 years old, received his degree from the university in "tour management", and had been doing this for ten years, specializing in the Cuzco/Machu Picchu area).

Our hotel is another "5 Star" (for Peru!) hotel...a Libertador hotel, like the one we stayed in Cuzco. It is built on an island in the bay, connected to the mainland by a narrow causeway (we found out later that not only was the hotel built on an Inca cemetery plot, but that it's also on the site of former prison.....some of the building is the original prison). It is a very nice hotel with water views from all rooms.....the reedy bay view on one side, and the "big bay" view on the other, looking across the bay at the city of Puno, running up the hillside. The Tinka's and us had rooms with the later view! We got to our rooms just in time to see the sunset over Puno...very nice.

Down the the lobby at 6::50 to meet our tour guide for the next couple of days. He is Elixio, a native of the area. He gave us a great overview of the next two days, and we could tell he was very well informed and funny (and his English was very good).

Elixio said that we are scheduled on a standard boat for tomorrow's activities on Lake Titicaca, and it will take 3-1/2 hours to get to the main island we are going to visit, and the same amount of time to get back, so bring a good book to read; we'd be leaving at 7AM and getting back at 5PM. However, if we wanted to, we could go on one of the new high speed boats (three times faster) that does the trip in 1 hour and 10 minutes; we'd leave later at 7:30AM, get back at 3:30PM, be able to spend more time on the island, but have to share the boat with six other people! The vote was unanimous...let's go in the fast boat!

Then, into the restaurant for a very good buffet dinner and on to bed (actually, I spent a hour in the hotel business center trying to hook up my laptop to the internet, with no success...so this and the day 8 and 10 e-mails won't be going out to you until we get back to the Marriott in Lima on Wednesday).



Tuesday – Our 10th Day In Peru

I was up early to catch (and photograph) the sunrise over Lake Titicaca...quite nice! Then Marcia and I went down for a buffet breakfast. One of our tour members passed out typed copies of the names of all of the folks in our tour, and our e-mail addresses, so that we can stay in touch and exchange digital photos that we've taken.

Met our tour group and guide Eleixo in the lobby at 7:30AM for a short walk to the dock (right in front of the hotel) where our "fast boat" was waiting for us. A very nice boat with seating for 28 in a totally enclosed cabin and seating for seven on top. Still quite cool at this time (probably 45 degrees) but a spectacularly sunny day. Would eventually get nice and almost warm.

We left the dock, and in a few minutes were in the middle of the famous floating islands of Lake Titicaca...the Uros Islands. These are island built up from layers of reeds. There are about 20 islands, with anywhere from 40 to 200 people living on them, full time, year round. We pulled up and "docked" at one of the islands...one with about 6 houses and maybe 35 residents. Our tour guide sat us down in a prepared spot, and gave us a great talk about how and why the islands were built, what the residents eat, schooling, etc. He had many actual objects to show us. Then it dawned on us...Eleixo was born on one of the floating islands, so we asked him many questions about his personnel experiences growing up on a floating island! He's now moved to Puno and earned his Masters degree (probably in Tour Management) and is working on his Doctorate. We were allowed to photograph the residents of this floating island (without giving them a tip), go into their homes (which were very nice). Also, as always in Peru, souvenirs to buy.

Then all 20 of us boarded a reed boat, and were rowed by a native for 15 minutes to another floating island. We got off and toured this island for 15 minutes before reboarding our "fast boat".

Now we had a one hour ride (would have been three hours in our original boat) to Taquile Island in Lake Titicaca. As we motored along, our guide explained that Lake Titicaca is the worlds' highest (at 12,500 feet) navigable body of water. It sits on the border between Peru and Bolivia. Current water temperature is 42 degrees F, but it goes all the way up to 50 degrees in their summer (in January, as Peru is in the southern hemisphere).

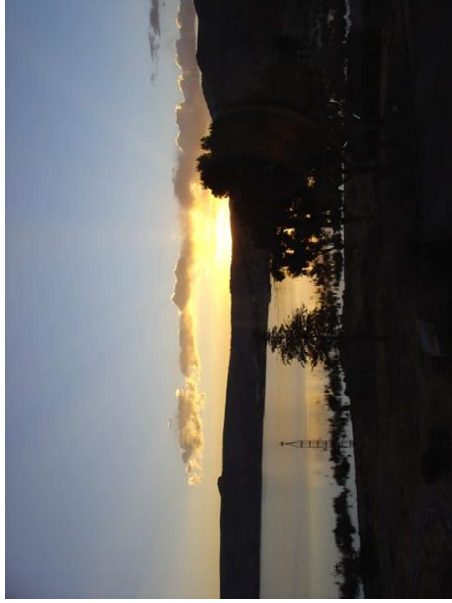
-We landed at a dock at Taquile Island. The island is about four miles long, one mile wide, and 800 feet high. We learned that it is populated by 2,900 residents who are of Quechua Indian origin, and speak Quechua. There is no electricity on the island, and it has a very male-oriented society...women walk behind their husbands and all women (even children) are not allowed to speak any louder than a whisper...the men's theory is that if the women are talking, they are not working!

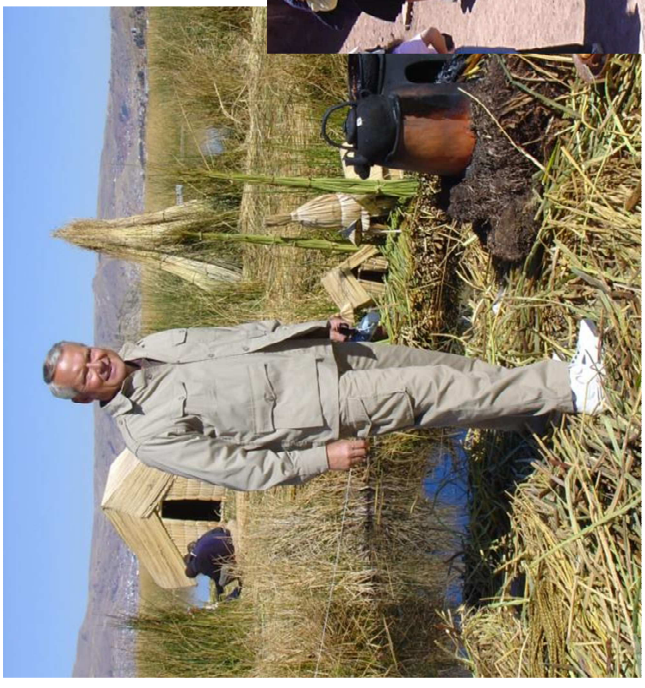
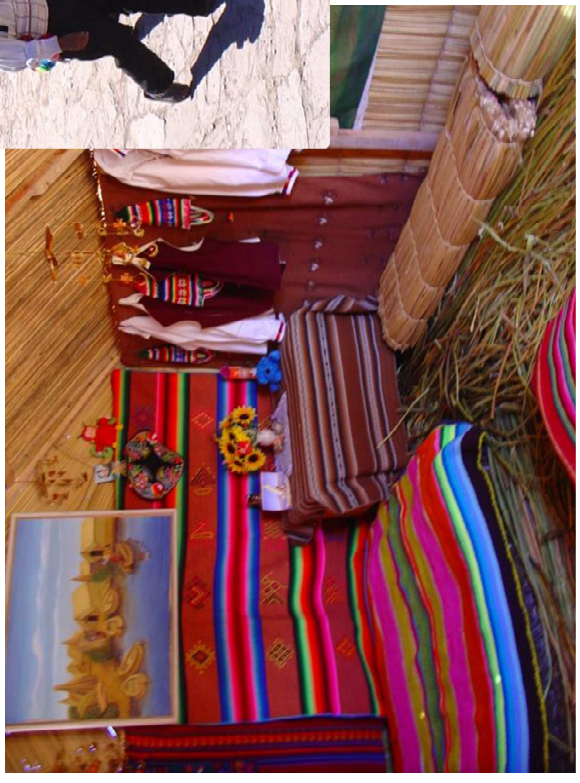
We started a long hike on a trail (steep at some points) that wound up one side of the island. The sights were incredible; Lake Titicaca had very clear, very blue water, and the island is pretty. Many compare the experience of being on Taquile Island to being the Mediterranean or on a Greek Island in the Aegean Sea...I would have to agree.

We had lunch at a restaurant set up for tourists at the town square, near the top of the island. Then we descended back down to another dock by another route....this one had 535 steps (of varying heights and lengths!) not an easy descent. Our "fast boat" returned us to the dock in front of our hotel before 3:30PM.

Now, this was an "open" evening for dinner, but our guide, Eleixo, set up something for us to do that night, and he accompanied us on it. 11 of us (who opted to go) left the hotel at 5:30 in a taxi Eleixo had arranged, which dropped us off in downtown Puno, a city of about 350,000 residents. Puno is not a very pretty place (except when viewed at night from our hotel, across the bay.....the lights are pretty). Eleixo gave us a quick walking tour of the downtown area, some quick shopping, then off to a restaurant that he had picked out. We all sat at one table and had a very nice dinner. One couple, who we enjoyed traveling with, was celebrating their 36th wedding anniversary that night! One thing Marcia and I were not crazy about was that a few of our folks ordered the Peruvian specialty Guinea Pig. We think of those animals as pets, but Peruvians see them as a delicacy! Everything is inexpensive in Peru...Marcia and my total bill for a big meal, drinks, desert, tip, came to \$20.

Off to bed early, as we have to get up around 4AM tomorrow and leave the hotel at 5:30AM.





Wednesday and Thursday - Our 11th day and our Last Day In Peru

Up at 4AM, quick buffet breakfast at the hotel at 5AM, then departed the hotel at 5:30AM on a large tour bus with our guide Eleixo. Watched the sunrise at 6AM as our bus headed for Sillustani. Got out of the bus (many of us somewhat reluctantly...it was cold...just above freezing) for a tour of pre-Inca burial/mummification towers at Sillustani. Eleixo did his usual good tour job, we got some good photos, and got back in the bus to drive to the airport at Juliaca (just a little north of Puno) for our 9:05AM flight to Lima.



Eleixo got us thru the airport process smoothly, and we boarded a big LAN Peru Airbus A320 that landed at Lima and hour-and-a-half later. Met by General Tour/Coltour representatives, and we were back at the excellent Lima Marriott by 11:30AM (many of us joking, as this would be the third time we would check into the Marriott during this trip, that it was almost like being home...at least we were back to sea level after a week at 10,000+ feet).

At 1PM Marie and Kal & Marcia and I left for the two mile walk to the Lima Artesian Market, that we had visited last week. Spent 2-1/2 hours finishing our souvenir shopping. We bought a bag (our second) to hold all the stuff going home (without exceeding the airlines' weight limit).

Left at 7PM for a special "goodbye" dinner at a five star restaurant that's located inside a Inca ruin/pyramid. A spectacular setting and excellent meal.

We will be leaving the hotel on Thursday at 7AM to catch our 10:15AM LAN Peru flight to Miami. It arrives in Miami at 5PM. We have two hours to clear customs, after getting our suitcases, and getting on our 7PM flight to Atlanta, then onto Albany, getting in a midnight. The Tinkas have connections straight from Miami to Cincinnati, and have about two and a half hours to make their connection.

We are all dreading the experience of having to go thru the International Terminal...ugly building, poorly laid out, surly workers, dirty, mass confusion, no one speaks english (and we are *not* talking about the Lima Peru airport, which is super, and all key people speak English... we are talking about the Miami International Airport).

Anyways, we will be home from our great visit to Peru on Friday at the latest.

-This has been an amazing trip; our motto from the beginning has been "This is an Adventure, not a Vacation"...and it has lived up to it's motto.

