

Arrival in Peru – July 31, 2000

Marcia and I left Albany at 1 PM on Saturday on a Delta commuter jet to Cincinnati, then on to 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 in July.

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 are going to meet in Miami. It was great seeing them again and we really enjoyed traveling with them.

We landed in Miami at 7 PM Saturday night. We had decided to check our suitcases through to Miami, then claim them, and then recheck them on to the LAN-Peru flight to Lima. The team has had check their bags all the way through to Lima, but they came with us as we picked up our bags on the carousel in Miami. Imagine Kal's when his bag came out (still with the tag on it, checked through to Peru) on Miami carousel! Marie's didn't come out, so it must've been checked through correctly. Anyway, 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 our checked baggage through the scanning machines. The light from Miami to Lima leaves at 1 AM Sunday morning, a six hour flight to Lima. Waiting in the lounge at the gate, it is 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 Signor Elving and Señora Elving 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 and their only USA partner is American Airlines. The only thing we can figure is that I was nice to the girl with the original check in counter who was having a rough day!

Anyway, Marcia and I had a great flight (big foldout 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).

It was a great flight on a big 767 – 300. We landed in Lima at 6 AM (they are far Eastern standard Time, one hour behind back home). We got our luggage, cleared customs, and met one of our tour guides that had a bus waiting. They drove the four of us to the Marriott in Miraflores, a suburb of Lima, and gave us a briefing on the bus about our group. Our group will be about 20 people all from the USA.

Wow, we are really surprised how nice the Marriott and its location are. Right on the Pacific Ocean, with an outdoor market and a shopping mall right next to it, in what is 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 walked down to the restaurant out on a pier, that the guide suggested might be good for us to try for dinner, tonight.

Tomorrow (Monday) we will all meet at 2 PM for our first event, a 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 Nasca etchings in a small plane, then overnight at the Ballestas Park and the boat trip the 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 second 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 Tinkas for breakfast at 8:30 AM and decided what we would do until our first planned group activity at 2 PM. We decided to do a little exploring and walk on the street towards the center of the city, to find the artisan market, where they would all kinds of souvenirs for sale. We chartered on our math on and started out on along a busy main street. Every taxicab recognized us as tourists and their horns at us on the chance we wanted a taxi. It was very noisy. A very popular “profession” was money changer. They walk the streets looking to convert our money to the local currency, obviously, we were prime targets as we do not look like the locals. Another popular job is police/security guard. There is 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 through 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).

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

We got on a big 40 seat tour bus (and there’s only 20 of us in the group, so a lot of room!) We drove all around Lima to get out and view the ocean, major buildings, etc. We took a tour of the downtown cathedral. Lima was the premier city on the Western Hemisphere from 1700 – 1850. Its 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 through the National Archeological Museum. Through all of this our guide, Hernando, was doing an excellent job of describing Lima, Peruvian history, and the ancient cultures.

We got back to our hotel at 6:15 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 planed over the Nasca lines.



Tuesday – Our 3rd Day in Peru

After breakfast our group of 20 boarded the tour bus at the Lima Marriott. 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 very 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 Picchu 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 to 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, travelling the whole way on the Pan American Highway, mostly along the Pacific Ocean. Most of the land we went through 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 were Indians have migrated toward the coast looking for work and have built small square houses of

woven reeds and say (which I guess you can get away with in a desert where it never rains! We drive through 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 and 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 burgeoning lower classes have had negative effects on schools and the whole infrastructure.

Half-way through 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 11 AM) we toured the museum with a local guide... strange museum, covering the earlier people. Actual mummies and skeletons of people who died of various illnesses, some with holes in the skull from brain surgery done with stones, were on display there.

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

Then, on to the highlight of the day, flying over the Nasca lines, which are huge pictures drawn on the desert plateaus by the resident in the 1200s. They are too large to be seen anywhere but from the air (they were not discovered until the 1920s when commercial airliners first saw them) and there is 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 plan and watching the instruments. We flew about 20 minutes (over desert) to Nasca, then over each of the 12 or so drawings. When we go to the lines, 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 got a perfect view. A great trip – up in the air about 1-1 ½ hours.

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

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

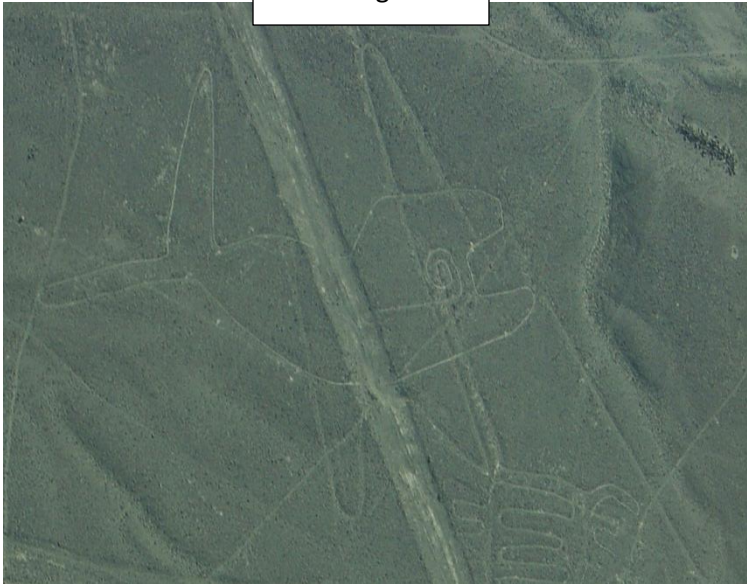
We checked into the hotel at sunset (smaller, rustic rooms). It was a beautiful resort right on a bay on the Pacific Ocean. We had a great dinner (not included in the tour) at the resort restaurant, overlooking the Pacific, at 8 PM. They had a great show during dinner which was very professionally done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



Hummingbird



Astronaut



Whale



Spider



Monkey

After a wonderful day viewing the Nazca Lines, we're off to bed, looking forward to tomorrow's boat trip to the Ballestas Islands.

Wednesday – Our 4th Day in Peru

We are at the Hotel Paracas Resort, located on the bay on the Pacific Ocean (inside of the Paracas National Wildlife Refuge) for only one night.

The hotel was built in 1944, and is all one-story rooms and bungalows, with many sports and recreation facilities, pools, etc. The rooms were rather spartan, nice. We discovered the rooms had no heat but it does get cool during the night during the winter! Fortunately, we had enough blankets and good shower in the morning, so all is well.

After a quick continental breakfast for our group (which I discovered later, means just read juice and coffee). I got in the wrong buffet line for another tour group and enjoyed my breakfast of eggs, sausage which I assure you I did not do intentionally!



lines. Other say it was drawn by pirates in the 1700s.

Then, we continued on our 15 mile trip to the Ballestas Islands.

At the islands, we cruised around (with the captain frequently stopping the boat and slowly swinging it around so all could see a special site and take pictures. The islands themselves are very beautiful (all rock and sand, but with many caves and tunneled passages right through an island). Apparently, the convergence of warmer Peruvian water with the Humboldt current, coming up from Antarctica, causes much plankton to grow. We saw many types of fish, birds, and 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) has 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, the lunch at 12:30 in the hotel restaurant.

We left at 1:30 for the 4 hour drive back to the Marriot in Lima. The Tinkas, and we plan on having dinner tonight at the fancy restaurant we walked to the other day. It is a seafood restaurant built at the end of the pier, down the cliff, below our hotel. It is 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 4:00 tomorrow, then depart for the airport at 4:20 AM for our flight to Cusco (we are catching an early flight so that we can spend plenty of time at the famous market in Pisca, which is only held on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays).

We got into one big powerboat, right at the dock in front of the hotel. 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 at full throttle). We went through the bay, stopping at the far point to view some wildlife and an unexplained drawing on the side of the mountain. Some



Thursday – Our 5th Day in Peru

Well, this was a busy day!

Up at 3:00 AM for a 4 AM pickup, then leave the hotel (the Lima Marriott) at 4:20 AM for our 7 AM flight from Lima to Cusco. 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 the domestic flights.

Our tour operators did a great job in getting us to the airport, walking us through 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 Cusco on a new Airbus A320, landing just after 8 AM. We were met by the new tour guide that will be with us through Cuzco/Machu Picchu, Puno, and Lake Titicaca. A nice young Peruvian fellow, Uri, who speaks English very well.

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 stay in next Saturday and Sunday night, the Liberator, to relax for a few minutes and have some refreshments.

Then, we were 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 products. Then we stopped at a cooperative that weaves fabric the traditional way. The main attraction here was their Llamas, 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 famous market area, and showed and described the food for sales, then let us loose to shop for a while.

Then (by now it was 1:30 PM) we were 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 Ollantaytambo, which our guide says some say rivals Machu Picchu. We 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 into. 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 very sad to see the way these good folks live in. They had electricity, but no running water or toilets, and they raised guinea pigs (for sale to restaurants) right in their house. There were 50 or so guinea pigs running all over!

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

The weather was perfect all day.

We are now getting ready for tomorrow's train ride to Machu Picchu and tour of the famous ruins.



Friday - Our 6th Day in Peru

We had a 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 are no roads that go there. The weather is beautiful, sunny and about 50 degrees but warming up by the minute!

We boarded our train (a beautiful "Vista Liner", with big windows as well as windows on both sides of the ceiling. We had assigned seats, but we got lucky and were on the left side of the train. The scenery on the left had the river view. I did not realize that we would be travelling 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 mountain start to be fully covered in vegetation...something we had not seen yet in Peru. Machu Picchu is part of the tropical rainforest/Amazon Basin, albeit the highest part!

It was about a 1 ½ hour trip to Aguas Calientes, the town right below Machu Picchu and the town where our hotel would be (the Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel). Incredibly beautiful sights all along the way, as the valley narrowed, the vegetation grew more dense. We spied snow capped mountains and even glaciers in the mountains.

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



We 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 incredible "switch backs". No guard rails, but incredible views as we ascended over 1500 feet to the ruins. We had a quick buffet lunch.

Then Uri led us on a tour of the Inca ruins. He did a great job. He 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 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 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. We left a little before 5:30 PM 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 onboard and get tips. It was actually raining a little bit when we got off the bus. It was the first rain we experienced in Peru.

We had a wonderful dinner with the group at 7PM in the Machu Picchu Pueblo hotel. Our tour guide handed out our tickets and Machu Picchu ruins admission for the next day, for those planning on going back to the ruins the next day. He also offered to lead anyone interested on a climb of Huayna Picchu.

Off to bed, with all thinking about whether they wanted to attempt to climb Huayna Picchu...whose walls appear to go almost straight up, so 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 she would not be going 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 7 AM to 9AM, then a nature walk through the ground from 9AM to 11AM.

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

We left at 7:30 for the ruins, with our tour guide Uri. Some of the group were to roam the grounds or climb up to the Sun Gate. Nine of us said we wanted to climb Huayna Picchu.

Off we went (Marie, Kal, me, and six others in our group) to Huayna Picchu. It was an incredible experience to

climb a trail (built by the Incas) that traversed the face of the mountain and rose at an angle of 75 or 80 degrees (the mountain face...not the trail). Steep drop offs were on one side. Sometimes we were climbing near vertical portions with the aid of permanent ropes or cables. I don't think any of us ever really felt frightened, but our hearts and chests were pounding much of the way due to the effort it was taking to climb and that fact that we were breathing air at over 10,000 feet high. Marie, Kal, and I 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. Have said that, Uri, our guide, had to stop often to let us catch up to him and catch our breath. Uri is 31 years old, in great shape, and he told me that he climbs Huayna 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. The climb down was also interesting as it was very steep!

We were back at the hotel for lunch about 2 PM. Then to the train station for the 5 PM train to Cuzco. The train ride back 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 Liberator, a five star hotel, about 9PM.

Now, I have to tell you that Marcia became very 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 the 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 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 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 have a wheel chair ready and to contact a local doctor. The bellman met the bus with a wheel chair, and we got Marcia up to the room. The doctor arrived within 5 minutes. He diagnosed that had a Salmonella infection. Her gave her an injection to control the nausea, and wrote prescriptions for an electrolyte solution, antibiotics, and two other meds. I said I had seen an open drug store and would run and get them filled. The doctor summoned the Bell Captain, who sent a Bell Boy to run out to get the prescriptions filled. Marcia started on the medications at 10:30 last night, and is getting steadily better. (I am writing this at 9:30 AM Sunday). She is resting, but feeling much better. The tour members were all very helpful through this experience, especially the Tinkas!





Sunday – Our 8th Day in Peru

Marcia was quite ill yesterday. She stopped moaning about halfway through the night, so I hoped she was feeling better, which was confirmed when morning came and she said she was feeling better but going to stay in bed for a good part of the day.

I went down to breakfast, all in the tour group were happy to hear that she was feeling better. I found out that Susan, one of the two sisters in their 30s travelling with their mother, had apparently come down with the same thing Marcia had. Her mother had antibiotics with her, and Susan 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, busses, etc., and giving Marcia a big bottle of Gatorade (to help replace electrolytes). Susan missed all the activities on Sunday.

I spent the next hour trying to find an internet connection. The hotel staff were very helpful. We finally got their wireless network working on my computer...it even worked in our room. I was finally able to send out emails about our previous days on tour, as well as downloading and responding to a lot of email from work.

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

Cuzco is a very old city (it was the Inca's capital) and one of the first cities conquered by the Spanish. It is a very beautiful city with 500,000 residents.



At 1 PM I left with the group on the tour bus (Marcia remaining behind). We visited three historical Inca ruins in the Cuzco area, the main square and the main cathedral. Then we 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 building, were spotless. We spent about a half hour there. First, the children sang two songs for us, then we were given a tour of the facilities. We left gifts that some of us had brought from home. We also made monetary donations. The whole experience was very sobering...much poverty and many children in Peru. Then we returned to the hotel to be greeted by souvenir vendors that we now know by name.

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

We boarded the bus for our 7:30 group dinner at a restaurant on the main square in Cuzco. We had 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 were 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.



Uri, our tour director in front of Inca Wall



Most Of Our Tour Group



Military Parade

Monday – Our 9th Day in Peru

We boarded our bus in Cuzco at 7:30 AM 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 high passes with snow topped mountains, then down into an arid plain, still with mountains on both sides, then to Puno on the shore of Lake Titicaca.



We had lunch at a nice restaurant in the farming area with 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 in Peru) for pictures of the mist shrouded snow-capped mountains.

We were on a two-lane road all the way, so we passed through many towns. It was very interesting to observe the head wear of the Peruvian women. Each region has a different style of headdress 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 would be turning us over to another local guide with his company that specialized in the Lake Titicaca/Puno area. This was the first that any of us realized he'd be leaving, so we were all scrambling to calculate correct tip amounts and assemble them for Uri and the driver. We all agreed he had been an excellent guide.

Our hotel is another five star hotel...a Libertador hotel, like the one where 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 is also on the site of a former 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. We all had rooms with the later view! We got to our rooms just in time to see sunset over Puno...very nice.

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

Elixio said that we are scheduled on a standard boat for tomorrows activities on Lake Titicaca, and it will take three and a half hours to get to the main island the we will be visiting. He suggested we bring a good book to read. We would leave at 7AM and get back at 5PM. However, if we wanted to, we could go on one of the new high-speed boats, (about three times faster) that does the trip in an hour and 10 minutes; we'd leave later at 7:30 and get back at 3:30 but have more time to spend on the island. But we would 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.



Market outside our hotel



Jim at Ruins



Sunrise Over Lake Titicaca

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 the buffet breakfast. One of our tour members passed out typed copies of the names of all 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.

We 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 spectacularly sunny. It eventually got 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 islands 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. This island had about six houses and perhaps 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, where the residents eat, schooling, etc. He had many objects to show us. Then it dawned on us...Eleixo was born on one of the floating islands, we asked him many questions about his personal

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 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 in the original boat) to Taquile Island in Lake Titicaca. As we motored along, our guide explained that Lake Titicaca is the world's highest (at 12,500) navigable body of water. It sits on the border between Peru and Bolivia. Current water temperature is 42 degrees Fahrenheit, but 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-dominated 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 would 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 in 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 3:30 PM.

This is an open evening for dinner, but our guide, Eleixo, set up something for us to do that night. He also joined us. Eleven of us left the hotel at 5:30 in a taxi which dropped us off in downtown Puno. It is 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 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. The bill for Marcia and me for a big meal, drinks, desert, and tip came to \$20.00

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



Visit to one of the Uros floating islands



Exterior & interior views of reed home on floating island of Uros



Views on the island of Taquile

Wednesday and Thursday – Our 11th and Last Day in Peru

We are up at 4AM with a quick buffet breakfast at the hotel at 5AM. We departed the hotel at 5:30AM on a tour bus with our guide Eleixo. We watched the sunrise at 6AM as our bus headed for Sillustani. We got out of the bus (many of us 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 on 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 through the airport process smoothly, and we boarded a big LAN Peru Airbus A320 that landed at Lima a half hour later. We were met by General Tour/Coltour representatives and we were back at the excellent Lima Marriott by 11:30 AM.

At 1PM the Tinkas and Elvings left for the two mile walk to the Lima Artesian Market, that we had visited last week. We spent 2 and ½ hours finishing our souvenir shopping. We bought another bag to hold all the stuff going home (without exceeding the airlines weight limit).



We left at 7PM for a special goodbye dinner at a five star restaurant that's located inside an Inca ruin/pyramid. It was a spectacular setting and an 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 to clear customs, after getting our suitcases and getting on our 7PM flight to Atlanta, then on to Albany, getting in at midnight. The Tinkas have connections straight from Miami to Cincinnati and have about two and half hours to make their connection.

We are all dreading the experience of having to go through 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).

Anyway, we will be home for 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.

