

IMPRESSIONS OF PERU AND BOLIVIA 2013



**BY
SERGE KAHILI KING**

EXPERIENCES IN BOLIVIA and PERU 2013
by Serge Kahili King

This is a journal of a trip with Vantage Tours to Bolivia and Peru in February and March of 2013 by myself, my wife Gloria, and our colleagues and friends Susan Pa'iniu Floyd and Sharon Malie Montgomery. Almost 500 photos are accessible from the links at the end of each day's journal from the date of arrival in La Paz. These links often lead to more photo links for the same day.

Wednesday 2/13



Left Hilo for an early morning flight to Honolulu with no time to spend in the Hilo lounge. This might be one of the most unique public airport lounges in the world, so I'll take space to describe it. Right after security you come into a huge, high-ceilinged room with dozens of colorfully upholstered couches and easy chairs scattered around, accompanied by coffee tables and end tables. In the center is a big display case honoring part Hawaiian General Lyman after whom the airport is named. A little shop with great souvenirs at one end and a tiny eatery at the other end are like afterthoughts. The gates are in narrow hallways upstairs.

In Honolulu we made it to our Hawaiian Airlines flight barely in time. The plane was an A330, very nice and comfortable. We were in economy and had great service and a decent snack box, and just before landing we got a bag of sweet Maui onion kettle chips and a free Mai Tai.

In Los Angeles we stayed at an old favorite (30 years), the Hacienda Hotel in El Segundo. Malie was already there. The hotel along with the attached restaurant used to be a lot better than they are now, but the prices are still good. Our son Chris and his wife Petra drove up from Laguna Niguel to have dinner with us at the Olive Garden in Manhattan Beach. The OG is a great Italian restaurant. Gloria had delicious salmon and Serge had a scrumptious "Seafood Bisdotto," a kind of bouillabaisse with shrimp, tilapia, mussels, and mushrooms in a tasty tomato-based sauce.

Thursday 2/14



Valentines Day! Gloria had a card and tiny box of chocolates waiting for me when I woke up and she received an e-card on my iPad. Off to the airport where we boarded a LAN Chile 767 for an 8-hour flight in economy. Comfortable seats, good service, decent food, good Argentine wine. After landing in Callao Peru we met up with Susan and two cars that took us to the SM Hotel and Business about 7 km from the airport around midnight. At one stoplight there was a bank of all red lights. The car waited until one of the rectangular red lights

showed a flashing running puma and then it went forward. It's the only time we saw one like that, so maybe it was an experiment. The hotel was in a residential neighborhood and looked like an apartment building from the outside with two garage doors on the street. Our driver, Florinda (very aggressive driver, very good bluffer, not intimidated by big trucks, but a nice person) clicked open the garage door and we entered into a bright, open, tiny lobby. Small twin double room with TV, air conditioner, free wifi, shower, and the kind of toilet that you don't put used tissue into. The antiseptic smell was almost unbearable, but the bed was comfortable.

Friday 2/15

Very, very early flight from Callao to La Paz airport. Landed in the early afternoon and I got the dreaded red light going through Bolivian customs, but they were understaffed and after a cursory two-minute check they let me through.



La Paz is a very strange city in many ways. For one thing it occupies a steep, deep, narrow valley within a much larger valley called the Altiplano (high plains) that sits between the Andes Mountains, second only to the Himalayas in height, and a range of active volcanoes. The altiplano is between 13,000 and 14,000 feet high. The airport of La Paz and a huge suburb of 1,5 million people called El Alto (the high place) are on the Altiplano with buildings and construction as far as the eye can see. The homes and buildings of El Alto, mostly of red brick spill over

and down the sides of the steep valley of La Paz and merge with better and better buildings and homes all the way to the ritziest places at the very bottom, about 10,000 feet. This topsy-turvy situation has to do with the weather. It gets way below freezing where the poor people live, and never below 50F (10C) where the richest people reside. As a Bolivian article stated, "The poor of El Alto aspire to someday reach the bottom."

We stayed at the Hotel Europa which was downtown, about two thirds of the way down the valley, a nice hotel with friendly staff. That first evening was for orientation by our Vantage Tour guides, mostly dealing with altitude sickness. As it was, Susan, Malie, and Gloria were quite affected right away, and even I got a mild headache at first. All of us had trouble sleeping in La Paz, and we quickly learned to walk slowly all the time and be very careful about exerting ourselves in any way. In addition to lots of water, we were introduced to coca in the form of commercial tea bags that are legally sold and served everywhere and were told to drink a lot of it to help alleviate altitude problems. It smells herbal, not like anything we've had before, it's taste is not sweet and not bitter. It seems to act like a mild stimulant and helped all of us a lot. Oxygen was also available in hotels and buses and the ladies used it to good effect.

[La Paz 1](#)

Saturday 2/16



The second morning we started off for the administrative center of the city at Plaza Murillo, named after Pedro Domingo Murillo, a hero and martyr in the fight for independence from Spain. During the drive and there we saw that the architecture of La Paz was a wild hodge-podge of styles, some European like the French/Flemish legislature building in the administrative plaza and scattered examples of leftover Spanish colonial style, but mostly an exotic array of individual creations in a city free from building codes or city planning. We learned that Bolivia

has 36 ethnic groups and a new flag with 49 different colored squares representing 49 Andean regions (including other countries). The plaza had a lot of people in it and walking around it. I noticed that everyone walked in slow motion and learned that it was because of the altitude. Turns out that even the locals can get altitude sickness if they are not careful. There was one beautiful spot in the plaza like a little garden hideaway with a big birdhouse in it. Originally, we were told, all the buildings around the plaza were residences done in colonial style, but after getting free of Spain, all those buildings were torn down except for part of one building in a corner. What was left, apart from the government buildings, were very bland structures. Nearby we saw our first "cholitas" (Bolivian women wearing bowler hats and colorful woven scarves and multiple skirts and often gold earrings and teeth who are usually merchants).

After the main plaza we visited the Museum of Ethnology and Folklore, housed in an old Spanish Colonial residence. We saw beautiful examples of ancient and modern weaving, ancient and modern festival masks, and pottery styles from different ethnic groups.

Then we made our way through horrendous traffic with cars, trucks, people, and vendor stalls battling for prominence to the Coca Leaf Market (which we didn't get to visit) and the Witches Market and the Tapestry Market (which we did). The "cholitas" were everywhere. The Witches Market was a trip. Everything you need for ceremonies and rituals and healing and love and money, from dried llama embryos to endless amulets to charms and potions galore. One of the stalls had a sign that read "Esoteric House of the Earth Mother; incense burners, essences, incense, massage oil. Offerings to the Earth Mother for health, money, and love with llama fetuses. Coca products in the form of liquor, pomade, tonic, and caramels; amulets, talismans, love potions, quartz and energetic stones; alpaca sweaters, shawls, ponchos, and handicrafts in leather, wood, and ceramic." And in a corner of the sign was "Ayahuasca, Chacrona, and others." Ayahuasca, as many know, is a hallucinogenic brew, and chacrona is one of the principle ingredients. We saw all those things and more as we browsed the shops and some of us bought "souvenirs." In one shop Marcello showed us what looked like a male doll in traditional Andean dress and covered in currency and bags and objects. This was a representation of Ekeko, ancient god of good fortune and prosperity, and we were told that most households had one. This Ekeko had an open mouth where a cigarette could be placed and Marcello lit one and put it in the doll's mouth. Apparently, this is a modern ritual that has to be done once a year to ensure Ekeko's continued

largesse. Outside, on the street, we saw a plastic tarp underneath which a fortune teller was advising a client, while more clients waited outside. From here we walked further to the textile market and on to the Church of San Francisco where our bus picked us up.

Lunch was next at La Tranquera Restaurant in the ritzy section at the bottom of the valley. Lunch is the main meal for Bolivians and this was a good example. We started with a Singani Sour (made from white grape brandy) and a large salad bar. The main dish--with no sides--was a choice of meats from the Bolivian pampas or fresh fish from Lake Titicaca. I turned down the 16 oz (440g) garlic steak and picked the 12 oz (330g) filet with Bechamel sauce and mushrooms, while Gloria picked the grilled trout. Both were excellent.

We ended the tour day with a visit to Moon Valley, a short distance outside the city. This is a sandstone geological formation that resembles the Badlands of South Dakota or the Stone Forest of China, except that it is a lot smaller than either of those and has residential areas adjacent to it. Everyone was exhausted and dinner was on our own, so we had snacks and went to bed early.

[La Paz 2](#)

Sunday 2/17/13



We began leaving La Paz early, graced with our first view of Illimani, the very impressive 22,000 foot Andean peak that overlooks La Paz like a guardian god. We climbed the switchback streets through very heavy traffic to El Alto on the plateau above, and then through even heavier traffic through miles and miles of half-finished buildings, mostly made of unpainted red brick. It was very odd, seeing so many upper-story empty windows and often roofless structures that frequently had little shops on the ground floor.

Once in a while there would be a completed building with eye-smashing colorful facades in fantastic or abstract designs. A few of these had penthouses on top within intriguingly out-of-place architecture. It turns out that so many buildings are unfinished because finished buildings are taxed at a higher rate, so the owners keep building more stories as long as the money holds out, rent the bottom floor to shopkeepers, and live in the unpainted finished floors that are furnished very nicely. And, because it gets very cold on the Altiplano and no one has insulation, the penthouses are only there for decoration by those who want to show off their wealth. A scary sight that we saw a few times were dummy effigies hanging at the entrance to small subdivisions with a sign that said something like "If you steal or assault anyone here we will hang you!" With crime on the rise and not enough police to keep order, these communities had taken the law into their own hands and created vigilante groups that actually did hang criminals in their areas.

Finally, the buildings petered out and we entered rolling farmlands. After quite a while of this we came to the flat area of the town of Tihuanacu, the train station of Tiahuanaco, and the ancient ruins of Tiwanaku, a city state that flourished between 300 AD and 1000

AD. Tiahuanaco is the name of the train station and Tihuanacu is the name of the nearby town. Most of the buildings of Tiwanaku are so old that they look like low grassy hills, but some parts of the ancient walls were visible and were plundered by the Spanish to build a church in the town. Some years ago several universities participated in an excavation and reconstruction project, but the funds to continue mysteriously disappeared so the universities stopped work and left. Then political changes put the responsibility for the care of the ruins in local, untrained hands and things are gradually falling apart. We visited two museums with very interesting artifacts, including pottery and gold and monoliths, but no photos were allowed for some reason and the roof was falling in on one of them. On a walk around the ruins we saw remains of original walls next to reconstructed walls and the difference was like comparing the work of a master mason to a child's piling of blocks. I looked closely at several loose blocks and the precision of the cutting was astounding, considering the tools they were supposed to have used on granite and basalt. One guide said they used a combination of sand and obsidian to grind down the stone, and another said they drilled holes in it (somehow), then put a wooden rod in the hole and soaked this combo in water for weeks until the wood swelled and split the rock. Fine work, said the guide, was done by cutting the water-soaked stone with another type of stone containing hematite. Once you look closely at the finished product, however, these ideas seem laughable. Not only is the cutting amazingly precise, but so are the angles along whole sides. In other words, a rectangular block of stone here is truly rectangular. We don't have an answer, but so far no other answers seem to fit the facts, either. While at the ruins we also saw the famous Sun Gate, an observatory, and a strange pit with 64 carved heads inset in a ring around the inner wall. One of the heads, in white stone, does look like an alien or a ghost.

As we left Tiwanaku we had to stop a couple of times because the road was blocked by costumed dancers. Today was the last day of Mardi Gras celebration, called jokingly "La Dia del Soltero," (the day of being single), because so many men use it as an excuse to go out and have affairs. The dancers were men, women, and a few children. The men were mostly dressed in exaggerated cowboy costumes, with a few clowns thrown in. The women wore bowler hats and brightly-colored skirts. After dancing they celebrated with beer.

Our next destination was Lake Titicaca, and it was a long drive. The name is interesting. In Aymara, the language of the region, "titi" means a mountain cat like an ocelot, and "caca" means stone. "Stone Ocelot" would be a translation, but it's unclear. However, a space photo shows part of the lake to have the shape of a mountain cat, so maybe that's a clue. On the other hand, Titicaca is also the original name for Sun Island, which we were going to visit. We arrived at the Inca Utami Hotel right on the lakeshore and had a very late lunch at the Sumac Untavi Restaurant. The only thing of note was that Serge tried llama steak and found it bland, but fairly tender. After lunch, most of our group just collapsed in our rooms. We were now at 12,500 feet and a lot of us had altitude symptoms to some degree. Even those who didn't had to be very careful, because simply rearranging one's pillows too quickly could result in shortness of breath.

Lake Titicaca is the highest navigable lake in the world and the fourth largest. It is about 1000 feet at its deepest and 3-50 ft on the edges. It receives water from five rivers and has one outlet to Lake Popo in the south. Most of its water leaves by evaporation. It

supports a wide variety of birds and fish, including several introduced varieties of trout, of which we ate not a few. And it's very cold.

Around 6 pm, after a soup dinner, those of us most interested followed our guide on a short tour of a small museum on the hotel grounds dedicated to the mystical side of Andean cultures, and particularly to the Kallawayaya shamans. The tour was so fast that we couldn't take photos, but we remember a stuffed mountain cat, a section on herbal medicine, information on the Kallawayaya shaman healers who still do healing around the world today, and a display of miners worshipping the devil. This was because the miners learned from the Catholic Church that Satan rules Hell and Hell is in the underworld, and since they worked in the underworld they thought it would be best to worship the one in charge. The main feature of this tour was sitting in a darkened room and receiving a blessing from a genuine Kallawayaya shaman. Unlike most Peruvians he wore a dark poncho and a dark, broad-brimmed hat. The shaman sat facing us in a separate section with a fire on his right and a flat basket in front of him scattered with coca leaves that he could use for divination in private sessions. It was emphasized that he did not foretell the future--that was for fakers. Instead, he interpreted current conditions and gave advice. For us he delivered a long verbal blessing, sprinkled the leaves with muscat brandy and finished by tossing the rest of the brandy into the fire, which flared up impressively.

By this time it was dark outside, so our guide Marcello took us to the Alajpacha (Sky God) observatory, also on the grounds. My iPhone flashlight came in very handy to find our way. We climbed stairs and sat in a long room while Marcello told us about Inca and Pre-Inca constellations and star names. Then to our great surprise he pressed a switch and the whole thatched roof slid back to reveal a partially clear sky with the moon, Jupiter, and several constellations, including Orion all visible. He set up a 20-inch telescope so we could look at the moon and Jupiter. I helped out by using my iPad Star Walk app to pick out constellations and stars. I had the advantage when it clouded over, because my app could see "through" the clouds. It was a great day, but everyone slept badly, still not used to the altitude.

[Tiwanaku](#)

Monday 2/18/13



This morning we visited the Altiplano Museum, also on the hotel grounds. On the way to the entrance we had a close encounter of the third kind with a small herd of llamas being taken out for a walk. The museum had an abundance of artifacts related to the cultures of the Altiplano, plus dioramas and full-scale scenes. One diorama showed the ancient operation of trepanation--the surgical cutting of holes in the skull--for what reason no one is quite sure.

Thousands of such skulls have been found and about 60% seem to have survived the operation.

There was a full-scale scene of the first Inca, Manco Capac, and his twin sister rising out of the lake and telling the people how to live, another showing Pizarro capturing the

last Inca, and one that showed rich Spaniards on a balcony watching commoners dancing in fabulous costumes, not realizing that they were being made fun of.

Next to the museum was the Andean Roots Eco-Village. Inside a pen we were taught the difference between llamas (long muzzle, long neck and long legs), alpaca (short muzzle, short neck, short legs, much more shaggy), and vicuña (smaller, slimmer, vicious). The llama is the sacred and pack animal, the alpaca is mostly for wool, and the vicuña is only for its short, very soft, and very expensive fur/wool. We were also told not to trust labels in the markets and shops. The most interesting part of the visit was meeting Dimitri, one of several brothers who helped Thor Hyerdahl to build Kon Tiki and Ra II and sailed with him. In the yard was a smaller version of Ra II, and Dimitri showed us how the reed boats were made and displayed models of all the boats he had worked on, including one reed boat that sailed the Tigris River and was capable of tacking.

Then we left for a traditional shaman ceremony to honor Pachamama (Mother Earth) and to bless all the people, for whom we were the representatives, with good health and good fortune. The ceremony was held on a point overlooking the lake. The morning was quite cool with a light breeze and overcast except for a bright line on the horizon that lit up the snow on distant Andean peaks. This was an Aymara shaman, dressed in the traditional mostly red and yellow woven Bolivian cap (like a ski cap) and poncho, and he was waiting for us with a circle of stones, each one covered with a small woven cloth for us to sit on. Once we were seated, he also sat down on the ground in front of a beautifully woven mat. On this he placed a flat white sheet of what appeared to be butcher paper, and on that he prepared the offering to Pachamama. As he added bits and pieces it began to look a lot like the pre-made offerings in the Witches Market in La Paz. Every thing he placed there was symbolic of some positive good. There were beans and corn and quinoa for abundance of food, lots and lots of flat sugar cakes imprinted with symbols of every imaginable kind of good luck, confetti and candy for beauty and fun, much more, and, of course, coca leaves for physical and spiritual strength. When the offering was ready he stood up and said some prayers to the "Apu" (mountain gods) and then everyone was given three coca leaves to use for their personal offering and wish. In turn, we each walked over to place our leaves on the offering pile after blowing on them three times. Then we formed a standing circle. The shaman sat down, wrapped the offering in the white paper, and stood to bless each one of us by having us blow on the wrapped offering three times before he passed it over our head with a prayer. Finally, he laid the offering on a woodpile behind him. We gathered around as he set this on fire and threw white grape brandy on it for show. When it was burning brightly we each expressed our thanks and left. Marcello told that once we were gone the shaman would clean up, wait until the offering was burned to ash, and close the ceremony by burying the ashes in a hole in the ground. After the ceremony we stopped for a while in the little town of San Pablo that had a ferry service to the peninsula where the big town of Copacabana was located. Then we returned to the hotel.

Now it was time for a "native lunch" with Dimitri and his wife (dressed as usual in her bowler hat, etc.) at the Choza Nautica, a round lakeside restaurant at the hotel. We picked our food from bowls of purple and regular potatoes, fresh crunchy cheese, cobs of hominy corn, fried chicken, hard-boiled eggs, fava beans, hot sauce, and fried

sardines. Later that evening the tour guides gave us a party with wine and a lively group of traditional musicians, playing pan-pipes and drums and guitars.

[Lake Titicaca](#)

Tuesday 2/19/13



By 8:30 am we boarded a hydrofoil, waved to Dimitri who was paddling a reed boat standing up, and zipped off across the lake to Moon Island (that makes the trip sound a lot shorter than it was). Many islands in the large lake have been inhabited since 2000 BC. Under the Inca, this one was the location of Inak Uyu, the palace or temple where the "Virgins of the Sun" were chosen, lived, and worked, except when they were needed for personal services by the Inca lords and priests. The girls, as young as 8, and young women were chosen annually among the

subject peoples on the basis of beauty and intelligence, and were trained in weaving and other womanly arts. When we arrived the water was too rough to dock, so we only got a glimpse of what might have been the ruins of dormitories. Across the lake behind us the clouds lifted a bit and we also got a glimpse of the snow-capped Andean peak, Illampu.

So off we hydrofoiled to the southern end of the much larger Sun Island. It was here that the creator god Viracocha emerged from the lake, followed later by the first Inca, Manco Capac and his twin sister, Mama Oclio. Docking was easier this time, so we climbed an ancient stairway to a temple site built among rocks that looked like they had been formed underwater with great pressure and heat. The temple itself featured typical trapezoidal doors, windows, and niches and was probably Polko Kaina. At the back (inland) of the temple we found a door with the remains of a lintel and a marker stone on top that faced towards a distant Andean peak that might have been Illampu. Heading down the other side I went into a room with a deep niche with a small opening at the end. Curious, I crawled in and discovered that the the small opening framed a pyramidal peak directly to the north. We left that side of the island and landed at the port of Yumani where there was a marina and a park. We were given a choice of going directly to a restaurant or by way of the "Fountain of Youth." Well, that was a no-brainer, but we almost died on the way to it. The path up began between big statues of the first two Incas and consisted of broad, uneven stairs that followed a small waterfall at a steep angle for what looked like a long, long way. After many rest stops along the way we ended up at a spring pouring out of some rocks maybe 500 feet above the 12,500 foot lake. The water did taste good, though. Then it was back down a ways to a path through some woods to a clearing where the Uma Kollo Restaurant had set up a long table for us outdoors sheltered by umbrellas. Lunch was good with a nice big slice of watermelon for dessert. We were also served a hot cup of coca leaf tea, using leaves instead of tea bags.

Let's talk about this a bit more. Both Bolivia and Peru are upset with US attempts to get them to destroy all their coca plants. Chewing coca leaves is a millennium-old tradition

among both their peoples. They see it as something like destroying all the corn crops in the US accessible to Amerindians because some people know how to make corn liquor from it. Like corn among the Amerindians, coca also has deep religious significance to the Andean Indians.

However, there is a huge amount of misinformation on coca leaves floating around. First, chewing the leaves by themselves or drinking the tea produces an effect that might be compared to a very weak cup of coffee, and no more. There is no numbness as some report, and there is virtually no taste apart from a sort of woody/herbal one. The locals in Bolivia and Peru don't even bother. Coca leaves contain various alkaloids that have to be released by various "activators" or catalysts. These can be lime (as in limestone) and/or vegetable ash (anise, quinoa, banana flowers, etc) in VERY tiny amounts and carefully wrapped and inserted into a wad of leaves stuffed into the side of the mouth. The leaves are just held there for a long drawn-out effect or chewed lightly or vigorously for stronger effects. Most commonly reported are a numbness of the jaw, depending on the activator, more energy, a pleasant buzz, or mild euphoria. The abomination of cocaine requires processing with kerosene, methyl alcohol, and sulphuric acid, among other things.

We made a brief stop at Copacabana Village (the Spanish version of its real Quechua name). This was a fairly busy little port whose main feature was the Basilica de Nuestra Señora de Copacabana, built in 1550. It's a very unusual kind of church famous for an unusual kind of blessing given by the priests there. People come from all over, even Peru, to have their cars, trucks, and taxis blessed. The church is on the main plaza and in front of its wall was the tackiest selection of religious souvenirs we have ever seen. We had heard that Copacabana was full of hippies from other parts of South America, but we didn't see any. Oh, there was one short-haired young man in the plaza who juggled clubs for about a minute and left. Maybe he was one. Everyone else looked local, including a Bolivian girl who sold cups of that red and yellow jello.

From Copacabana we had a long crossing to Puno on the Peruvian side of the lake. On the way Marcello introduced us to Chufly (pronounced "shoo-fly")--muscat wine, lime slice, and ginger ale. Not one we'd care to try again. He also performed a special water-sprinkling ceremony for those of us who had reached and drunk from the Fountain of Youth. In English, my certificate reads: "I, Manco Kapac, King of the Incas, Master and Lord of the Sacred Lake Titicaca, hereby certify that Serge Kahili King has crossed my domains, has drunk from the sacred waters of the Island of the Sun and has received the blessings of the Inca gods."

Marcello, a Bolivian Aymara, left us at Puno, and our Program Manager, Washington Farfan, a Peruvian Quechua, took over as main tour guide. We settled into a Casa Andina hotel, right on Puno Bay in very nice rooms with a great view. Soup was all we wanted for dinner.

[Sun Island](#)

Wednesday 2/20/13



Up early for a boat ride to the Uros Floating Islands at the outer edge of Puno Bay, a real highlight of our trip. The original Uros people came down from the highlands (Note: 12,500 foot Lake Titicaca is their idea of lowlands) to avoid the Inca wars, and in order to maintain their independent way of life they created floating islands to live on. Most descriptions say that the islands are made of totora reeds, the same reeds that Dimitri used to build boats, but this isn't accurate. Actually, thick sections of totora roots, looking like meter-thick pieces of peat, are cut

away and bound together as a base. On this base are piled thick layers of reeds, and on the reeds are built reed houses and other structures. The reed houses last about 6 months, unless there is a bad storm (one resident described a storm during which reed houses went flying everywhere); the reed flooring has to be refreshed frequently; and the base might last up to two years. The islands are anchored to the bottom of the lake, which in the Uros areas runs about 3-50 feet deep. However, the lake water is extremely cold, and we couldn't get a clear answer as to how they did the anchoring in deeper water. About 15-20 people lived on Qhantati, the island we visited, and all were members of one family plus spouses. They showed us how they ate totora pith, what kind of fish they caught in the lake, and what kinds of potatoes, beans, and grains they grew in their tiny gardens. We also saw their pottery cook stove. A past Bolivian president had donated solar-powered TV sets. I climbed a wooden watchtower and estimated that this island was about 50 yards wide by 25 or 30 yards deep. A lot of islands were fairly close to each other and groups or "suburbs" were separated by wide channels of open water. Our visit ended with a shopping spree as the islanders laid out their wares of beautiful woven clothing, amulets, and cleverly-made miniature reed boats. We boarded a large, double-hulled, dragon-headed reed boat as these islanders sang a farewell song to us: "My Bonnie Lies Over The Ocean."

We had quinoa soup for lunch in Puno at a nice little cafe bar, wandered around the pretty dull main plaza, and left for a visit to the Sillustani Burial Towers. These are Pre-Inca and Inca stone cylindrical towers called "chulpas" on a high point above Lake Umayo where only the highest of the highborn were allowed to be buried with their favorite treasures that the Spanish of Pizarro's time stole like everything else. We had to walk through the town and up a very long promenade lined with souvenir vendors to get to the hill where the chulpas were. Just before reaching the towers we passed stone circles that our guide said were built by the Incas for sun worship. A prominent, partially destroyed Inca tower about twenty feet high had very fine stonework. It became clear throughout the trip that the Inca reserved their best stonework for their most important and most sacred buildings, and this came close to matching the work at Tiwanaku. A second level of stonework was wonderfully fitted, but not very smooth, and a third level for ordinary buildings was basically roughly cut small blocks held together with mortar and sometimes combined with adobe bricks. No one knows who the master masons were, but they may have been descendants of the Tiwanaku builders. The climb up the hill had been tough, so our guide distributed pieces of a plant called muña growing there with an amazingly refreshing fragrance that helped us breathe easier. All during the climb

there was distant thunder that gave a nice sense of significance to the adventure. We had a nice dinner of chicken curry, pyramidal rice, and delicious desserts at the hotel.
[Puno](#)

Thursday 2/21/13



Today we left Puno and the lake and drove up to and across a high, dry plateau for quite a while, occasionally glimpsing snow-covered Andean peaks and herds of llamas and alpacas. Eventually, we stopped at the edge of the plateau by a sign that said we we now at 14,222 feet (4335 m) and had lunch at the Feliphon Restaurant in the little dual village of St Peter/St Paul. That's where we had our first Inca Kola, a bright yellow, very sweet concoction that gives a fast buzz like a modern energy drink. Actually, it reminded me a lot of the US soft drink Mountain

Dew. Rumor has it that Coke is going to buy them out and introduce it to the US market.

From there we descended into the Cusco Region to the small village of Raqchi. The village itself seemed to be mostly a church with adjoining buildings and a marketplace. The real reason people stopped here was the Temple of Viracocha, so different from all other ancient temples in Peru that it's very hard to describe. It's a large complex, divided roughly into the Temple area, residences for pilgrims and food storage towers. The temple was unique in all of Inca architecture, featuring round columns among other things. It and the residences were made of stone and adobe and originally had large, steeply-sloped thatched roofs. They were arranged in long, orderly rows with a street down the middle. A long stone wall separated them from the food storage bins. These were made of stone and circular, maybe 20-30 feet in diameter and 10 feet or so high, with a conical thatched roof. The Inca had these complexes all over their empire, sometimes on flatlands like this one, and sometimes up high on very steep slopes. They served as resources in case of famine, rebellion, or attack.

From this point we descended further into deeper valleys where scattered farms gave way to scattered villages of better construction, including tile roofs. On many of these we noticed the curious grouping on the middle of the peak of the roof of two pottery bulls and an iron cross... Sometimes there would only be a cross and sometimes only the bulls. Our guide said that the only cross ones were Christians, the only bulls ones were pagans, and those with both were not taking any chances.

At last we entered the Sacred Valley proper, a steep, fairly wide valley formed by the Urubamba River. This river runs from the Andes to the Amazon, undergoing name changes along the way. The Upper Urubamba is calm and slow, and here we stopped at the village of Pisac for a well-needed restroom break. One restaurant there featured beautifully-carved wood doors with traditional Incan symbols of sun, moon, snake, puma, and condor. Another featured "cuy chactado," pressed guinea pig, which we'll talk about later. Our guides treated us to snacks and a cup of wine on the sidewalk. After a toast we went on to Yanahuara and checked into our Casa Andina hotel. This was a

very nice hotel with a lovely courtyard, great views, and comfortable rooms that were way too far from the lobby and restaurant and often required umbrellas for the trip.

[The Sacred Valley](#)

Friday 2/22/13



The morning began with a visit to the village of Chinchero and a weaving demonstration by Jessica, university graduate with a tourism degree who had returned to help the villagers learn the business. With Jessica maintaining a continuous dead-pan monologue that kept us in stitches every few minutes (Example: she holds up a bone used in weaving and says, "Who knows what kind of bone this is?" After some futile guesses she says, "This is a tourist bone, from the last tourist who didn't buy anything before he left!"), the women showed us how

cotton was washed, how yarn was spun, how a rainbow of natural dyes were made, with dramatic changes in color made possible by adding something as simple as salt, and how weaving designs were perpetuated. The last demonstration was how to wrap a live baby in a shawl for carrying on the back, like Bolivian and Peruvian women do.

After that was a pottery demonstration in the shop of a man who specializes in reproducing ancient designs. The main thing we learned there was that the hardest work is kneading the clay well enough to eliminate air pockets. After kneading a large hunk of clay quite vigorously for a while he cut it open to show us the air pockets that were still there.

Lunch was at a former hacienda overlooking the river and it was fabulous (both the food and the hacienda). There was a sign that said "Arco Iris del Puerto" as we pulled off the road and onto a dirt road that didn't look promising, and our schedule said "Tunupa Restaurant," and maybe it was. The guides felt free to change the order of things and delete or add things if they thought it would enhance our experience. Anyway, our bus parked in a large bare lot that was empty except for a Spanish-style chapel. But a few steps to the right took us into a walled courtyard that was blazing with a multitude of tropical flowers, rich with scents of which we could only recognize honeysuckle, and echoing with the sounds of parrots and a macaw. We made our way through this into a massive room with an arched colonnade giving onto a vista of green terraces stretching down for about a quarter of a mile to the river where llamas, alpaca, and vicuña grazed peacefully. In the center of the top terrace was a fountain, and by it two men in traditional dress played soulful music on panpipes. In the center of the big room was a long buffet filled with dishes that looked so good you wanted to eat them no matter what they were made of. Our group was seated in a glass-ceilinged wing at a long table like you generally only see in historical movies. There were gorgeous frescoes and artifacts on all the walls except the open one that faced the top terrace. I visited the other wing and found one of the real curiosities of Peru: a Last Supper fresco featuring grilled guinea pig as the main dish.

That was a tough place to leave, but with the help of determination, will-power, and threats from the guides, we made it back onto the bus. The next leg of our trip took us through more countryside to the town of Ollantaytambo. This town is usually associated with the fortress or pilgrimage site of the same name on a terraced hill next to it, but we had neither the time nor much inclination to climb up there. Instead, we admired the construction of the stone compounds that the town was divided into and visited the inside of one that had been maintained in a traditional manner. Here at last we got see the guinea pigs at first hand. We had been told that people kept them in the kitchen to feed on scraps and certain plants that were brought in for them, and here they were, munching on some green reedlike things and looking as cute as you would expect them to. However, we were also told that they were a favorite festival and special occasion food, and for this reason they were never given names nor treated like pets. Some festivals required as many as 400 to be roasted, but they reproduced quickly. Trying to ignore the guinea pigs around our feet we looked around the room, seeing a mix of old and new. At one end of the windowless room there were niches with candles and flowers and photos like a kind of memorial. Looking closely beyond the flowers we could see ancestral skulls crowded onto a narrow ledge. Little statues and doodads were stuck into crevices like good luck charms and a rack of dried fish hung from a center beam. In a dark corner at the other end a condor wing hung from a beam in isolation. This is as good a time as any to mention that although the Inca gave prominence to the sun and moon in their cosmology, throughout the highlands of Bolivia and Peru the condor, representing the Upper World, the puma, representing the Middle World of man, and the snake, representing the Underworld, take precedence.

On the way back to our hotel, Washington gave us a treat by stopping at a "Chicheria" in Yanawara where he knew the proprietor. Chicha is a traditional corn beer loved throughout Bolivia and Peru, and a Chicheria is a place where it is made and served, and can simply be the residence of a farmer. Places that serve it put up a stick with a red blob made of cloth or plastic at the end to show that it is available. The place we visited was very organized like a regular bar and run by a woman. In a small courtyard she had two games set up, consisting of a wooden table about three feet high and two feet square. There was a drawer in front with slots inside representing different numbers from 1000 to 5000. The top of the table was covered by a board with holes in it, and the back had a high arched piece, also with holes. In the very center on top was a brass frog with a slightly open mouth and in front of that a sort of brass rotor set in a hole. Each player was given 5 thick brass "coins" to toss. The frog's mouth got the most points and the rotor got the next. Usually people paired off and the loser paid for the chicha. The game is called "sapo," which means "frog" in Quechua. Our whole group tried it, including Washington: Gloria got 1000, two people got 2000, and one person got 3000. Washington had great form, but didn't score. Inside the bar the owner told us how chicha was made and offered us two variations: regular, made from yellow corn; and frutiyada, regular with strawberries added. That one tasted pretty good. There is a third variation that she didn't serve, but that we tried later, called "chicha mojada," a deep purple brew made from purple corn.

[Weaving, etc.](#)

Saturday 2/23/13



This morning we had to rush to get to the train station in Ollantaytambo, but our bus was too big to fit down the narrow streets to the station, so our whole group had to split up and take two-person, 3-wheeled motocabs from the plaza for a wild ride down winding cobblestone streets. We got two nicely-decorated business-class cars that came with snacks and beverages and leather seats and we followed the river down steeper and steeper canyons until it's name changed to Rio Vilcanota and it became the wildest river most of us had ever seen. When we reached

Aguascalientes, also known as Machu Picchu Pueblo, we dropped our bags off at the Machu Picchu Hotel, grabbed our hiking sticks and back packs, and hopped on a bus for the long ride uphill.

Gloria and I had been here with our son Chris in 1969. At that time we had to take an old cog-wheel train through the mountains from Cusco for a couple of days, and as soon as it stopped here we had boarded a VW van for the ride uphill. A few hours at the top and we had to come down and board the train for the return trip to Cusco. Then there hadn't been much of a town, and only one hotel at the top.

The road up seemed familiar, though possibly a little wider: cobblestone at the bottom and dirt the rest of the way, winding through the jungle with occasional peeks at the wild river below. There were a lot more buses to pass on narrow bends, too. Finally we were at the top, at a regular little bus station. Once past the turnstiles we walked a narrow trail for a short distance before it opened up to a grand vista--and there it was! The Lost City of the Incas!

We stood about midway between the city proper in front of us and the so-called Caretaker's hut above and behind us at the top of a steep set of terraces. Visually, the roofless ruins of the city before us spread over a sort of saddle between lush green conical peaks with very steep sides running down to the river, which made a great bend around those peaks before continuing down to the Amazon. From our point of view, the upper left end of the city still had an unfinished quarry area. In the far center was the highest point of the city proper, with stairs going up to what is called the Sundial. This was right in front of the smaller of the two peaks that are in almost every photo of Machu Picchu. Our guide Washington had specialized in Machu Picchu and promised to take us to every corner of it, which he did over the next four hours.

For those of you who may have heard of it, but don't know anything about it, a little history might be useful. First, "Inca" is really the title of the king--and later emperor--of a group of Quechua-speaking people who founded a dynasty in the 14th century based in Cusco. For about a hundred years they were just one of many kingdoms in the Andean region, but during their second hundred years they created a far-flung empire that stretched from Columbia in the north to Chile in the south, from the Pacific Ocean in the west to the Amazon in the east. They employed master craftsmen from all the people's they conquered to build roads, cities, palaces, and holy places of pilgrimage. Although

Machu Picchu has long been thought to be either a jungle fortress or a pleasure palace of the Inca, the latest research shows it to clearly have been a holy place of pilgrimage. No one knows for sure why it was abandoned, but it may have been due to the civil war that was raging shortly before the Spanish arrived in Peru. It had truly been forgotten by the time that Hiram Bingham, an explorer who might have served as a model for Indiana Jones, struggled up through the jungle to see it in 1911. Except for the fisherman on the river who told him about it, and the farmer who was still using the terraces to grow his crops.

As Washington promised, we did explore the entire city, but it would be boring just to give you a list of rooms we looked at. There will be plenty of photographs available later, so we'll just give a few highlights. For one thing, we could now tell which buildings were considered sacred, and which were just lodging for the pilgrims, by the quality of the stonework. We saw lots of temples, but the most impressive was the Temple of the Condor. This was actually a cave, and at first Washington showed us a large, flattish rock on the floor that had a definite point with markings that could be seen as a condor's head, while the rest of it could be wings. However, Washington then had us look up, and now what we had thought might be wings became the ruff around the condor's neck, and the wings were two huge, black concave sections of the cave roof. That was very impressive. At what might have been the remains of a rock quarry we saw a Guayaquil squirrel, the only free wild animal we had seen so far.

Another area is worth noting as well. This was the sun dial mentioned earlier, also known as the observatory, because the solstices and equinoxes can be lined up with various peaks from there. A fairly broad and steep set of stairs leads up to the platform where the Sundial rests, but it was nothing to give us any hesitation, and therein lies a strange tale. I have a very clear memory of the first time that Gloria, our young son Chris and I came here in 1969, and in my recall the path leading up to the observatory was very long and winding and narrow and steep and led all the way up to one of the peaks above the city. I remembers wanting to do it, but deciding that it was too dangerous, and so we didn't. But that memory doesn't correspond at all to what we encountered on this trip. So, a trick of light and perception that gave a false impression the first time? Simply bad memory? An alternate reality? I like the latter idea, but I'm not a fanatic about it.

The clouds came in during the late afternoon and we had to put on ponchos for a light drizzle. but the bonus was a series of stunning rainbows laid across the green peaks. We took a bus back to the hotel and the only memorable thing was that our room overlooked the roaring river that sounded pleasantly like the surf at Kapoho in Hawaii.

[Machu Picchu 1](#)

Sunday 2/24/13

Washington offered and we accepted to make a second visit to Machu Picchu this morning. Now we focused on the big terraces to the south and above the city. They were grassy and served as pasture for llamas and alpacas. One curious thing we saw were a couple of llamas resting flat out on their sides. Even Washington had never seen this before. The view of the city from the Caretaker's Hut was incredible, and even better views were had from terraces higher up. These terraces were quite broad, but the

Inca were known for building terraces far up a mountainside where they were very narrow. They solved the problem of moving from terrace to terrace very neatly by including flat stones built into the walls and projecting out about two feet to serve as steps. We tried some and they worked fine, but on very narrow terraces high above a valley ascending and descending without a handrail could get very scary if you weren't used to it.



From an upper terrace we could barely see the "Sun Gate" where two columns flank a rising sun point and mark an entry to the area along the Inca Trail used by pilgrims. To the south we could see the high peak that is actually named "Machu Picchu," and to the north beyond the city we could see the peak whose real name is Huaynapicchu. It was a perfect morning, a delightful blend of sun and clouds and coolness and wonderful views of the lost city that made it a real effort to stop taking pictures. At last we did, though, and rode the bus back down to Aguas

Calientes to wait for a group lunch at Totos Restaurant on the river. While waiting, we took pictures of the interesting little town, browsed shops (a surprising number of mystical books on Machu Picchu in Spanish), visited the old plaza with its Spanish-style church and a life-sized image of a black Christ on a cross wearing dreadlocks and a golden skirt, wandered the stream coming from the hot springs that split the town in half and featured side channels in the form of snakes that fed a fountain with an abstract sculpture of a condor, and bought very inexpensive trinkets and coca candy from artisan market vendors. After lunch we boarded the train back to Ollantaytambo and a bus over the mountains from there to Cusco. Machu Picchu was about 8000 feet, the pueblo about 7000, and now we were back up to 11,000 feet. There we checked into a Casa Andina hotel, the worst hotel of the whole trip. The best room we could get, after multiple tries, was a cave with a window on a stairwell. That beat out all the others, whose windows were on the hallway. And the place was constantly cold and uncomfortable. To its credit, the staff were friendly and as helpful as they could be, and there was good wifi access at the computer stations.

[Machu Picchu 2](#)

Monday 2/25/13



Today we had a Cusco City Tour. First was the "Convento de Santo Domingo del Cusco," also known as the Dominican Monastery. What was truly impressive was the fact that it had been built over and around Qorikancha, the original Inca Sun Temple, and that much of the original stonework had not been torn down, as had been thought, but instead had just been plastered over. When this was discovered not too many years ago, many of the walls were restored, and now we could see the outstanding stonework that did rival what we saw

at Tiwanaku. We saw inside parts of the stone blocks that had balls and cups carved into them to hold them solidly in place in case of earthquakes. and some corner stones that had been carved so perfectly to go around a corner that it was hard to tell even up close. One outside wall had very odd carvings scattered over it, like irregular pimples. It was very unlike the normal, well-shaped carvings, and no one had figured out what it was. To me, however, it looked like a relief map of volcanoes and peaks of the Andes, each one carved in individual detail.

After the monastery we visited the main plaza and the statue of the great Inca leader Pachacuti (or Pachacutec). Roman spelling of Quechua words is problematic. Then we went to the Great Cathedral, but all we could get were outside photos, and it's hard to remember a quick visit without photos. We do recall, however, another black Christ with a golden skirt, and gorgeously-dressed Madonnas. From the cathedral we went up into the hills above Cusco to see the famous Saqsaywaman Fortress (or storage center or pilgrimage spot). This place is extremely difficult to describe. It's like a series of terraces with walls made from blocks of stone so big they boggle the mind. They are jagged and not straight, and that's probably why it was thought to be a fortress. However, it doesn't really guard anything very well. It's a mid-level of stone technique--well-fitted, but not smooth--on a gigantic scale. Some pieces are seventy tons and up to 30 feet high. People who say they used stone rollers and ramps to get them there and in place haven't looked at the terrain. Whether it's here in Bolivia and Peru, on Easter Island, at Baalbek or elsewhere, the ancients had some kind of technology for moving huge stones that we are missing today. Unfortunately, we only got to walk along the walls and didn't get to visit the vast complex on top of the hill. Next we stopped at shops and learned how to tell the difference between llama, alpaca, cotton, and polyester (secret hint: llama and alpaca, which contain lanolin, are cooler to the touch), and then we headed to the home of the Izquierdo family for a hosted lunch. This was a middle-class family that had once owned a restaurant and had set up their home to host tour groups with home-style cooking. The food was great and the featured item was roasted cuy! No, it didn't taste like chicken. It was more like rabbit.

You'll notice that we haven't described a lot of meals in detail. That's because most restaurants served pretty much the same menu. For a lot of meals on our own we simply had chicken or quinoa soup. Restaurants often had buffet-style meals. "Lomo Saltado" (sauteed beef with potatoes and onions) was a popular dish, as was Aji de Gallina (chili pepper chicken), Arroz Chaufa ("dirty" rice), and Pernil de Cordero (lamb shank). Sometimes the rice was made into the form of a pyramid, and that was cute, but not worth getting excited about. Peru is supposed to be famous for its ceviche, but I found it too tart and not very tasty, although the rest of our small group loved it. Tiny shrimp were called prawns, and langostino were actually nice-sized shrimp. Once in a while we ordered room service pizza which wasn't too bad. When it's interesting enough, I'll write about it.

[Cusco](#)

Tuesday 2/26/13

I stayed at the hotel to write, so Gloria, Susan, and Malie went on an optional tour to see the local cemetery, the produce market, and to attend a cooking class. The cemetery was quite unusual, with people placed in open-air, mausoleum-type wall

niches for as long as they could rent the space, then moved out to a common grave so others could take their place. Gloria noticed a very curious thing there. All the niches had gifts or symbols of some sort. but among the most popular was one identical to a gift we had received from a friend of ours in Hawaii. It was a little plastic solar-powered flower that bobbed and weaved as long as there was sunlight. It's made in China and is a small example of how widespread Chinese products are.



The market was like most local markets, although the flowers were exceptional. Gladiolis are very popular here as religious offerings. At the end of this tour they were taught how to make an appetizer with mashed potatoes spread out, layered with chicken avocado, onions, and red peppers, and rolled up to eat cold. Near the end of the day Washington arranged for a Quechua shaman to do a healing ceremony in one of the small meeting rooms of the hotel. It was a lot like the one at Lake Titicaca, but inside without a fire. We all received an individual blessing. I would

like to interject an observation about Andean shamanism as I experienced it. Not once at the Witches Market in La Paz nor during the Kallawayo, Aymara, or Quechua shaman ceremonies was there any mention of evil spirits or the need for spiritual protection. The potions, amulets, talismans and ceremonies all had to do with promoting positive qualities and beneficial blessings. I'm very familiar with many kinds of shamanism and that impressed me a lot. Dinner that night was at the Don Antonio Restaurant and featured Pisco Sours and a unique panpipe/guitar band called "Arcoiris" (Rainbow) that played Mozart, Beethoven, and Bach very well indeed.

[Cemetery](#)

Wednesday-Sunday 2/27/13 - 3/3/13



Today we flew to Lima and had a city tour that concentrated on the old colonial buildings around the main plaza. Inside the cathedral we saw the final resting place for the bones of Pizarro, who had brought down the Inca Empire (not all by himself, of course). That evening we had our farewell group dinner at the Rosa Nautica, an elegant restaurant on a pier off the coast of the Miraflores district. Our little group of four stayed on in Lima for a few days. Originally, Gloria and I had intended to take a day trip to see the giant "candelabra" carved into a big cliff in the Paracas

National Reserve and the Nasca Lines, but we were unable to guarantee a flight over the lines so we decided not to go. Another factor was that we were all still recovering from the effects of fast altitude changes. Instead, we explored a bit of Lima, including the Larcomar Commercial Center on the coast, the 7th of July Park with its outdoor art show and the crowded mini-arena where couples danced in the center to recorded music, the John F. Kennedy Park with its mini-fleamarket and playground, and the

Rafael Larco Herrera Archeological Museum that has the largest private collection of pre-Columbian art in the world, a seaside country club in Barranco, and the Inca Market in Miraflores. We ate at three places of note during this time: the Cafe Cafe at Larcomar (a great pile of ceviche served with sweet potato and hominy corn--but I had mozzarella sticks), Saqra Restaurant near our hotel (chicken on polenta with blue cheese sauce plus great steak brochettes and a wonderful dessert called "Picarones"--fried donut with pineapple drizzled with honey), and Cafe de la Paz across from Kennedy Park (ceviche again, scallops, and a maracuya [passion fruit] sour).

[Lima 1](#)

And so ended our tour of Bolivia and Peru. It had been very exciting and very exhausting and it was a slow recovery from both. Coping with AMS (Acute Mountain Sickness) was our greatest challenge, aggravated by rapid changes in altitude. It doesn't affect everyone in the same way, and it doesn't affect some people at all. I recommend that anyone planning to travel to the highlands of Bolivia and Peru directly from lower altitudes do some research on symptoms and remedies before doing so. My companions and I had a rough time during and after our trip. but we all agree the adventure was worth it.