



# Peru Andes & Amazon

for Families

*Trip Review by Florine Herendeen*

*July 2005*

## *Introduction*

I had always wanted to go to Peru and had been seriously considering it for summer 2005. When families started to sign up with kids my daughter, Kellyn's age (11), I decide to join them. JOURNEYS wanted me to go and to take my child so that I could experience it with a child in order to help sell and develop the program for other families. It turned out to be a fabulous idea. I have always been intrigued by Machu Pichu and the Andes, not realizing that the Amazon portion turned out to be a highlight as well.

It was my first trip to South America but I have traveled in other Latin countries. This particular trip consisted of a visit to the Amazon and to the Andes mountains. July is their winter or "dry season" as it is called. Almost everyday was very sunny but temperatures were rarely over 80 degrees, and even cooler in the Andes. At times, you wanted long pants and a fleece jacket. The trip consisted of myself and Kellyn my 11 year old daughter, Donna with her 11 year old son and the Lynn family with their daughters ages 12 & 14 and their grandma, Mimi.

*July 7*

On arrival in Lima, we were met by a representative of Explorandes, who transferred us to our hotel. We were only spending one night here and our arrival was late. We checked into our rooms and found them quite comfortable. We crawled into bed and tried to get some sleep. We had an early morning departure for the Amazon.

*July 8*

On the drive to the airport the following morning I was surprised at how modern Lima was. It had many American franchise restaurants. However, Lima was very poor. Our flight check-in was simple and uneventful. Our transfer agent took care of all check-in formalities. We only had to pay our airport departure tax of approximately \$5. The flight departed for Puerto Maldonado on time. We had an amazing flight over the Andes. It was the most awesome views I



have ever seen, from rock formations to snow capped mountains and glaciers. Our flight made a preliminary stop in Cusco and gave us a taste of what was to come later in our trip. The continuing flight to Puerto Maldonado was equally amazing as we followed the meandering rivers and saw the lush rain forest below.

*July 9-13*

On arrival in Puerto Maldonado, we were meet by Gilbert, who we would later find out was the most amazing guide. We repacked our gear so that we only brought what we needed into the Amazon and left behind our cool weather gear for later in the trip.

We boarded our boat for the one hour ride into Posadas Amazonas Lodge. Our guide made sure each person in the group had a flashlight. Hmmm, what was I getting into? After disembarking from our boat, we hiked through the forest for about 20 minutes to get to the lodge. Don't worry, someone else will magically get your bags to your room before you get there.

Having worked for JOURNEYS for several years, I knew that the rooms only had 3 walls with one side facing to the jungles so I wasn't surprised. However, faced with actually being there makes you wonder what might visit you during the night?! The rooms were rustic but provided all the amenities including a private bath with shower. Although, not a hot water shower. There is no electricity but lighting is provided by kerosene lamps that are lighted by the staff. That afternoon, our guide Gilbert took us on our first walk through the rain forest. We saw a few birds and monkeys and he explained the rain forest vegetation. Our dinner that night was buffet style and included soups, fresh fruits, meats, and always a desert. The food was delicious.

The following morning we continued on further into the rain forest to the Tambopata Research Station. It was a long ride in our boat but there was opportunities to stop along the way and our group was luckier than most....we spotted a jaguar as it swam across the river in front of us and

climbed up the river bank. Some Peruvian students who were traveling to the lodge for research had never seen one and I think were more excited than us. What a treat this was for us. Our accommodations were similar to those at Posadas Amazonas but without a private bath. However, modern, clean bathroom facilities are available. After the excitement of the day and seeing a jaguar, Kellyn did her best to move her bed as close to mine as possible. Still yet a little more unsure of what would enter our room.

Our days at Tambopata consisted of rising at 4:30a.m. every morning, grabbing a quick snack and a cup of coffee or tea and heading by boat to the clay lick to wait for the sun to rise and the birds to make their way to the lick for their morning feeding and social hour. As the sun rose, the macaws began to arrive with their loud screeching. We sat quietly supposedly hidden in our blind and watch the activity unfold in front of us. One morning, the macaws that were raised at the research station and let loose in the wild found us and decided to pay us a visit. They landed on our heads and wanted some of our snacks. This thrilled the kids and allowed us the opportunity for some fun photos.

In the afternoons, we went for hikes in the rain forest, saw lots of different kinds of birds, and lots of different kinds of monkeys. I felt the group really came together with our guide when we were at Tambopata Research Center. We knew at this moment that we had truly had a very special guide. We had a day with some down time. Gilbert produced beads for the kids and they spent the afternoon with him making necklaces, bracelets, and earrings out of seeds found in the rain forest. These simple pieces of jewelry quickly became prized possessions by all the kids. After that, we boarded a boat with the staff at Tambopata and headed to their private riverside beach where they invited us to join them for a game of soccer. The entire staff, the kids, and us moms on the sidelines enjoyed more laughs than ever. At the conclusion of the game, the kids and Gilbert went for a swim in the river.

Posadas Amazonas Lodge operates in partnership with the local Ese'eja Native Community and Tambopata Research Station houses research scientists, students, and tourists alike. Both lodges philosophy is to lessen the impact of tourism on the environment yet provide an educational experience for all.

I was surprised at how much I enjoyed my time in the rain forest. To pinpoint exactly why it was so wonderful would be hard to do. Although awesome to see, it wasn't the jaguar or the macaws, or even the monkeys we saw. It was the experience more than anything, the rustic accommodations, the room that open to the rain forest, the wildlife. It was especially our guide and the staff we left behind because they made us feel so welcome. It was like leaving family.

*July 13-19*

Having been so isolated from the world while at the rain forest, I was surprised to learn upon arrival in Cusco that there was going to be a strike the next day. A lot of things were going to be shut down for the day, no trains or planes were going to operate and they were anticipating pro-



tests. Our guide safely tucked us away in the small town of Ollanta. We stayed at the very lovely Pakaritampu Hotel with its beautiful views of the mountains and lovely hotel grounds. We had the full day to enjoy ourselves. We wandered through the town and back and forth through alleys. We hiked along the railroad tracks. We enjoyed a scrumptious lunch in the town square. We spent the afternoon hiking the ruins of Ollantaytambo. The markets were still open and the kids souvenir shopped. Since there was no movement of tourists there were very few people around and the kids were safe to shop a little on their own.

The following morning we boarded our train for the 1 1/2 hour ride to Aguas Calientes. We met back up with our guide, checked into the lovely Pueblo Hotel and headed by bus up the curvy mountain to the awesome Machu Pichu. You forget the harrowing bus ride up the mountain as soon as you get your first glimpse of Machu Pichu. It is certainly one of the most awesome views I have ever seen. We arrived at about noon and our experienced guide knew it was one of the busiest times so he took us for a hike through an uncrowded section of the Inca trail. After our hike we had a little lunch and then visited the main ruins as everyone else had left for their lunch. Our guide gave us an in depth description of what everyday life for the Incas must have been like.

One of my favorite days was our free day at Machu Pichu. The full group departed early for Machu Picchu in order to avoid the crowds. We all wanted to do the hike to the Gate of the Sun. We went at our own pace. Gary had brought with him a Machu Pichu guidebook and we stopped along the way and educated ourselves on the ruins. The kids were all getting along very well. It could be a little steep with scary drop offs here and there but it did help me deal a little with my fear of heights. We arrived at the gate about mid-morning for the most spectacular view of Machu Pichu. At the conclusion of this some of the group departed for another difficult hike to the Gate of the Moon, others just wanted to wander around Machu Pichu and reflect. Myself, my daughter and the other 11-year old boy decided we were going to hike all the way back to Aguas Calientes. I had wanted some time to enjoy the quaint little town square. The hike down left us on a trail with hardly another soul. It was peaceful and quiet and it was nice to be away from the group and hustle and bustle of Machu Pichu. To me and to the two kids it was a major accomplishment to look up at the mountains and see how far we had hiked. We enjoyed a great lunch at the town square.



During our stay in Aguas Calientes it was the festival of Virgin del Carmen. There was continuing parades and festivals going on the entire time we visited. We were lucky enough to be in the town square on Sunday as the Catholic church ended its services and began the parade that was an accumulation of the weeks festivities.

We enjoyed a day of white water rafting. The local rafting guides took one look at us, kids, grandma and thought, no way can this group handle this. In the end, we proved them wrong as all of us made it through all the rapids and had the best time. We had walked along this river many times during our stay at Ollanta but never did we think that was were your rafted.

This was a great trip that offered a wide variety of experiences and contrast from rain forest to mountains. If you enjoy wildlife, experiencing different cultures and ruins and hiking this would be a wonderful experience. This trip is great for just about any age. Although, under 8 years of age may make the long travel days or hiking difficult. It was surprising to me that it was so modern and many amenities were available.