

PERU TRIP
June 14 – June 29, 2011

Mike picked Peru for this year's adventure trip. Johanna Turre of Kensington Tours made our travel arrangements and we were quite pleased with our guides, drivers, excursions, meals and sleeping choices.

Mike planned a week stay at the Amazon Yarapa River Lodge, flight over the Nazca Lines, Ballesta Islands excursion and a relaxing train trip to Aguas Calientes where early the next morning we would catch a bus to Machu Picchu and get our ticket stamped to climb Wayna Picchu.

A big celebration is about to resume in Peru. On July 24th 2011 Machu Picchu, one of the New Seven Wonders, is having its 100th anniversary of rediscovery by the American explorer Hiram Bingham. A century after this historic finding, Machu Picchu has become one of the places that millions long to visit at least once in their lifetimes.

We arrived in Lima and stayed at the Ramada Costa Del Sol Hotel directly across from the airport. The next morning we flew to Iquitos and were picked up by our guide and driver that drove about an hour to a village where we were met by the Yarapa River Lodge boat and staff. We spent the next week having fun at the lodge with its surrounding rainforest and plenty of trips up and down the Yarapa river. The lodge is owned by Dr. Charles Mango and his friend Victor Serrubio.

During our stay several visitors came and went. We enjoyed the company of Paul, Carol and their son Mark. Henry and Heather celebrating their honeymoon and Bob and Ann a couple from California.

We were the only guests at the lodge the first day. The staff made us a late lunch and we were shown our room and unpacked. After lunch we had our first rain forest jungle hike led by Neiser and local guide Plas. We all had on rubber boots provided by the lodge as the ground was pretty muddy, pools of water still remained from the rains. We are visiting in what is Peru's winter time when you can walk in the jungle. Other times of the year the area is flooded and the rain forest is only acceptable by boat. Neiser informed us that the trail we would be taking had not been cleared yet this year. So Plas was pretty busy with his machete clearing the path. Neiser would stop to show us several different trees that the locals use for medical purposes. The white sap from the trees could be used for medicine and also poison so you needed to know which trees supplied the sap for the purpose intended. He also showed us the forest flowers, fruits, seeds and barks gathered by the local people. Plas found a land snail that he explained was a tasty find, he put it in his pocket to take home. We saw some beautiful butterflies and colorful spiders. I was happy to see my favorite iridescent blue Morpho butterfly. Back at the lodge we took a needed nap, cold shower and had a nice dinner.

Day two we went for an early river boat ride up the river. Neiser pointed out a tree where a brown-throated three toe sloth, nature's couch-potato, was perched on a branch. They

are the world's laziest creature, spending 80% of their lives asleep or dozing in the forest canopy. Easy prey for predators, sloths are well-camouflaged. Their grooved fur encourages algae growth creating a greenish hue. They only leave the canopy while making their weekly trip to ground level to defecate where they could be attacked by the rainforest cats. They often suffer aerial assaults from eagles so their first line of defense is to avoid being seen; their color and ability to remain motionless for hours protect them from predators but also make them hard to find in the canopy. Our guides had sharp eyes and could find the sloths for us on many occasions. One was a mother with her baby. Another sloth we saw was in plain view high up in a Cecropia tree posed with his head on one branch and his legs crossed on another branch...only raising his head when the guide made a whistle like a Harpy Eagle was approaching.

Day three we were introduced to Paul, Carol and Mark, guests of the lodge. Mike and I were led on a early morning jungle hike opposite the lodge. We saw several birds, honeycreepers, kiskadees, hummingbirds, as groups of green parrots and blue and yellow macaws flew over our heads. The guide found us a wood toad and some mating armored millipedes. After breakfast our group went red-bellied piranha fishing. Across from the lodge is a seasonal lake where the guides took us to a potential fishing spot. We had some primitive stick rods with a homemade hook, we baited our hooks with pieces of raw steak and plunged them into the water. We watched the guide swish the water first and then throw in the bait and hook. Don't think that helped me much. But after several tries we all started catching some piranha. Of course not many of us wanted to get the fish off the hooks once Neiser showed us their sharp teeth. We took the biggest fish back to the lodge and the staff cooked us some for dinner. The piranha was tasty but boney.

Back at the lodge we encounter two wild and crazy primates, one was a baby brown capuchin the other a baby howler monkey. Capuchins are intelligent, noisy monkeys and this one was sure living up to his reputation. We were warned not to let the capuchin on you as he would not let go and follow you to your room. I love monkeys so eventually I let the capuchin crawl up on my arm and sure 'nuf he didn't want to let go. Mike never let the capuchin too close to him as hard as that monkey tried. He jumped and screamed and even tried to sit still for a second and whistle for Mike to convince him he could be trusted but Mike never fell for it. The baby howler was very curious but didn't like you to try and hold him. If you got close to him he would fall on his back and spread out his arms in a death pose and stare at you. I think these wild and crazy guys got in a lot of trouble at the lodge especially when they would get into the kitchen or tear some of the screens at the lodge. They had some birdie friends that hung out in their tree, a blue and yellow macaw and a scarlet macaw. We saw a few robust and black hairy Peruvian pink toed tarantulas around the lodge. One night we got a good photo of a short nosed bat that landed on the roof of the walkway. Mike thought one night it was the same bat that flew in his path some nights but it ended up being a small brown owl that flew away before we could get a picture. At the lodge was a large room that students from the Cornell University used as a lab for their research on rainforest plants. In the room was an injured Harpy Eagle in the rafters. His wing had been injured and he was recovering to be released later in the jungle when better.

Day four we went to visit a local fishing village. The residents didn't know we were coming till we got there. Several men and boys were working on a new thatched house. The boys were braiding the large leave stalks onto wood bases for the roof. Busy at work and not stopping to observe the visitors I handed the boys some gummy frog candies I had put in some ziplock bags. I noticed one of the boys shyly looking around and opened his bag and placed some of the candy in his mouth and smiled at the others. By this time the rest of the village realized they had company. Neiser was at the center of the village showing the locals some color photos he had of a previous visit to their village that a tourist had sent to the lodge to give to them. This is the only photos they ever receive of themselves and family. They were busy laughing and sharing the photos when we turned the corner and saw them. The children ran over to me....how did they know I had some goodies for them. I had in my pack, gummy frogs, pixie sticks, raisins, whistles, small stuffed animals, toys and stickers. I was glad I had enough for all the children. I picked out a few of the shy and smaller kids to give the stuffed animals too. The mama's started asking for their children to have the toys. The guide had all the kids gather inside the school house and Mike, myself, Paul, Carol and Mark had to sit in the desks at the front of the room. The kids sang for us their national anthem and then we sang ours. They laughed as we took photos of them. Then Paul surprised us all when we stood up and started playing his harmonica and dancing to his jazzy tunes. Everyone had fun. Then we were led outside where the ladies had blankets laid out with their crafts for sale. I had brought some old jewelry from home to give to the ladies and young girls. I wanted to buy something from everyone but had to choose a few bracelets and baskets. Mark was busy playing a soccer game with the local boys. The girls stood around looking pretty and giggling. On the way back from our village visit we saw a large group of squirrel monkeys swinging from the branches of ever tree close enough to see their handsome coat colored gold-green, and yellow-orange forelimbs. Ringed kingfishers flew across in a zigzagged pattern across the river in front of us. After dinner that night we all went on a night boat ride looking for wildlife. We had a nice view of the night sky even though the moon was full. The big dipper was very low to the horizon and the southern cross was near. The milky way was gorgeous. We saw a few men fishing at night as a small light shown in the dark from their dug out canoe. Neiser took us to the lake and had a spotlight that he used to find caiman, snakes, birds and frogs. We saw two red beady eyes in the reeds and had the driver pointed the boat into the reeds. Neiser laid belly down on the front of the boat and grabbed a small caiman and brought it into the boat for us to see. He then put it in the hull to take back to the lodge pond. We saw some nightjars, potoos and night hawks. The lake was live with the croaks, whistles, trills and grunts of the abundance of frogs. Plas caught us a tiny translucent green frog from the reeds. We saw the horned screamer, a large goose-sized bird perched on top of a large tree. Its very loud call sounds a bit like 'Yoo-hoo' that echoed across the lake. Fireflies were lighting up everywhere.

Day five Paul, Carol, and Mark left and the honeymoon couple Henry and Heather came to the lodge. We were lucky that they arrived after Mike and I went exploring on our own around the lodge. We asked Dennis a staff member if we could have some rubber boots to go exploring. We put on our boots and headed out in front of the lodge. Mike wanted to get a picture of a group of birds at their nest in a tree by the edge of the muddy

bank in front of the lodge. We took a few steps towards the nest when I realized that I was sinking in the mud with each step. Pretty soon we were both sinking fast and steady up to our knees passing the top of our boots. As we had the discussion on how to get back on solid ground without crawling on our bellies we saw several of the staff come out of the lodge. Where are you guys going they laughed....you can't go that way! They laughed and took our camera and took pictures as one staff member got a plank and to our surprise gently walked out to us and placed the plank. My boots were loose enough that I stepped out of them and got on the plank and out of the mud. After that we stayed pretty much under the lodge that is on stilts and looked for butterflies and hundred of miniature black cane toads. The plank and foot holes stood as a shrine for other guests to see as the staff jokingly told other about our adventure. That afternoon Mike and I were taken to a different lake to see the giant water lilies, the mother of all water lilies. In permanent swamp, the pads grow up to two meters across. The pad's underside and stalk bristle with spines to deter herbivorous fish. Its network of supporting ribs is said to have inspired the design of the Crystal Palace for London's Great Exhibition in 1851. We explored this lake in a dug out canoe and stopped for some more fishing. We met Henry and Heather at dinner and that night went on another river boat ride. The night sky could not have been any better...the moon was not out and the stars were dazzling. The stars reflection in the river was the best fireworks you could want. Shooting stars were in every direction. Our guide even found us a yellow spotted tree rat and a sloth with his spotlight. As we traveled down the river fish would hit the sides of the boat, once a fish was hit and flew into the boat, it was a good catch so Plas kept the fish.

Day six Mike, myself, Henry and Heather were taken for a full day picnic trip down the Yarapa river. Where the muddy water met the black water we had a great time floating among the pink river dolphins. When they leap, their body does not clear the water, giving the impression that they are less agile than their saltwater relatives, therefore making it very difficult to get a photo of them. I had a few chances where I could see the pink skin on the dolphins. On occasion several grey dolphins jumped out of the water. When they jump, their bodies clear the water, reminding me of marine park performances. We passed two big luxury tourist cruise ships. Several boats were along side them taking the people on excursions. We went down a branch of the river and passed some villages and in the trees we had a fast encounter with a pair of monk saki monkeys which I only saw disappear in the canopy. We got good looks at large green iguanas lounging on tree branches. We saw summer tangers, festive parrots, roadside hawks, turkey vultures, yellow-headed caracara, yellow-hooded blackbird, oropendola, red-capped cardinal, motmots, paradise tanager, trogons, tiger heron, white heron & several lined woodpeckers. Swirls of yellow and white butterflies screamed pass us and on the bank other butterfly groups were on the mud banks with their wings closed looking like masses of miniature sailboats. The guides put the boat in a sheltered area on the bank of the river and served us a lunch of fruit, and a native dish of a mound of yellow rice with an egg and chicken meat in the center. On the way back we stopped so anyone that wanted to go swimming in the river had the chance. Everyone jumped in for a splash except for myself, wasn't in the mood. That night we got to have a close encounter with a friendly kinkajou, its thick golden fur, wide brown eyes and docile manner endeared us all as we took turns holding it.

Day seven we met Bob and Ann who had just arrived. It was their second trip to Peru and this time they wanted to do some jungle hiking. Neiser had to go home because of a family emergency so our new guide was Julio who told us he had 15 siblings. That morning we went for another jungle hike in a different direction. We took the boat down the river and embarked on the mud bank next to the Shaman lodge. On this hike Julio took us to a large tree with nice deep twists perfect for the home of a family of night or owl monkeys, the world's only truly nocturnal monkey. Night monkeys have enormous eyes to enhance night vision, and lack prehensile tails. Plas rapped on the tree trunk and one monkey jumped out and looked around to see what was happening. Another one came out and ran around the top of the tree. We continued down the path when Plas spotted a tree with several pygmy marmosets. Despite often being referred to as monkeys, are placed in a different family from true monkeys. They are small, with non prehensile tails. Unlike monkeys they have claws instead of fingernails. Its tawny-yellow to reddish color and mane around its face gave rise to the local name *leoncito*, meaning little lion. These little creatures were busy sucking the sweet sap from holes in certain trees....quite exciting to see them.

That afternoon we had some fun pulling a joke on Bob and introduced him to the wild and crazy capuchin. The monkey was so gentle with his wife Ann as she let him crawl up her arm. We didn't tell Bob not to let the monkey on him as he watched Mike dodge and avoid the capuchin. I said he likes you Bob and he trusted us as he let the capuchin crawl up his arm ...then the monkey started crawling up his back to his neck and Bob became concerned that something wasn't going quite right. Bob started screaming that the monkey was biting his neck and his wife said don't you get aids from the creature. Bob started to panic...Mike and I couldn't stop laughing! I told Bob to get low on the ground and then the capuchin would jump off him. He got low and couched down... the monkey would not let me take him off Bob. I said lower Bob lower! By this time Bob was on all fours and practically on his stomach on the deck. I got the monkey to let go and of course it started running after Mike and jumping and whistling....of course Mike ignored him like he would his wife and the monkey gave up. Bob was so relieved that he ran into the lodge to the bar for a beer. Earlier that night his wife Ann was quite concerned that a tarantula was in her shower and Bob had brought a dung beetle from his room to dinner to show us. The next day Bob said he couldn't sleep because something was pacing under his room that night. The staff said they did find panther tacks the next morning. I had heard on several nights sounds of something walking around the lodge but never seen anything. That night we went out at night with two guides to go frog hunting. We saw several pink toed tarantulas, a tailless whip scorpion, monkey frogs, cane toads & a large smoky jungle frog. Of course getting stuck in the mud was evident. It was intriguing to see the white water lilies in bloom....apparently they only open up at night, that explained why we never saw them in bloom during the day. We spent some time in the hammock room and enjoyed reading and taking a nap in the hammocks before heading back to our room to pack up to leave the Yarapa Lodge the next day.

Day eight we said our goodbyes to the staff at the Yarapa Lodge and boarded the boat and our driver Vitter took us to the port where a car was waiting to take us to Iquitos. We

were going to spend the morning exploring downtown Iquitos and the local market. Vitter took us to a restaurant owned by Victor one of the owners of the Yarapa Lodge to store our luggage. Vitter put us in one of the many motorcycle taxis which is essentially a modified motorcycle with a cabin behind supported by two wheels, seating three and we rode to the city square. There was much activity on the city streets, many many people and motorcycle taxis everywhere. We walked a short distance to a local Belen market and took in the sights. The locals were selling all kinds of vegetable, fruits, chickens, fish, eggs and local harvest. Many sellers were cooking dishes of local fare to sell. People gathered at their favorite spots and were eating lunch or bargaining for items. One alley took us to the local fish market where large groups of turkey vultures were perched on top of the building just waiting for a chance to swoop down and get a fish head or scrap left over from the garbage. My thoughts went to the movie 'The Birds' by Alfred Hitchcock and I hurried along. You name it it was at the market. As we left the produce section we went down an aisle selling all kinds of medical concoctions...every bottle had some kind of herbs inside. There were baskets and jars full of herbs, seeds, barks and liquids to cure what ails ya. One lady was laughing quite loud and talking to our guide about a portion...it turned out to be a homemade Viagra. Some jars had snake, frog or animal parts in them. I was told the snake jar was put in your home for good luck. The red and black seeds from in the rainforest were also sold as jewelry for good luck. I saw pelts of rainforest animals, snakes skins and bird feathers in one stall. All Mike brought was some hot little peppers he had at the lodge he liked. We went down one street selling home items, shoes, clothes and hardware...what ever you needed. People were everywhere going about their business. Their children hot and tired were asleep on bags of corn or under the dealers tables. It was getting very hot and humid, so we caught a mototaxi back to the restaurant and had a nice air-conditioned view of the river and harbor as we ate a nice lunch of fish and rice.

We boarded our direct flight from Iquitos to Lima to spend the night back at the Ramanda Costa del Sol. After a refreshing hot shower and good nights rest we were met by Caesar and our driver to go to Paracas. For the next two days we were staying at the Doubletree Guest Suites for our Nazca Lines flight and Ballesta Islands Excursion. We drove directly to the airport for our Nazca Lines flight by Aerodiana (www.aerodiana.com.pe). The plane sat about a dozen people each having their own window. We left from Pisco and flew over the Nazca lines considered by the UNESCO as cultural patrimony of the humanity. In the Peruvian Desert, about 200 miles south of Lima, there lies a plain between the Inca and Nazca (sometimes also spelled *Nasca*) Valleys. Across this plain, in an area measuring 37 miles long and 1-mile wide, is an assortment of perfectly-straight lines, many running parallel, others intersecting, forming a grand geometric form. In and around the lines there are also trapezoidal zones, strange symbols, and pictures of birds and beasts all etched on a giant scale that can only be appreciated from the sky.

The figures come in two types: biomorphs and geoglyphs. The biomorphs are some 70 animal and plant figures that include a spider, hummingbird, monkey and a 1,000-foot-long pelican. The biomorphs are grouped together in one area on the plain. Some archaeologists believe they were constructed around 200 BC, about 500 years before the geoglyphs.

There are about 900 geoglyphs on the plain. Geoglyphs are geometric forms that include straight lines, triangles, spirals, circles and trapezoids. They are enormous in size. The longest straight line goes nine miles across the plain. Though discovered by Peruvian archaeologist Toribio Mejia Xesspe who spotted them while hiking through the surrounding foothills in 1927, the forms are so difficult to see from the ground that they were not widely known until the 1930's when aircraft spotted them while surveying for water. There is still speculation about the purpose of the Nazca Lines which you can read about on the internet and books on the subject. After our flight and lunch at the Doubletree Hotel our driver took us an hour away to visit the Ica museum and Huacachina. At the museum were diagrams of the Nazca Lines and the theory of their construction. The museum had pottery, textiles, and various items found in the area from the past civilizations. One of the rooms housed several preserved mummies. The deceased were put in large pottery jars for burial, so the mummies shown were in a sitting position with the knees drawn up toward the body. Several skulls from the Andean Paracas culture were on display. Tribes used to practice cranial modification so their heads were elongated. As we left it was already dark outside but our guide wanted to take us to a beautiful area that had an oasis surrounded by desert hills. A nice relaxing spot with an old hotel and walk ways circled the water oasis.

Next morning we went on an exciting 3 hour speed boat excursion to the Ballesta Islands. As we approached the docks we were led through beautiful flower gardens surrounding a brand new hotel near the docks. Lots of sea birds, pelicans and cormorants were swimming in the water. Mike and I took a back seat in the boat for a good view. As we approached the islands we passed on the side of a mountain a very large figure of a candelabrum similar to the figures we saw on our Nazca Lines flight. Ballestas Islands is the name of the islands meaning "Crossbow", so named according to local fishermen. The group of three islands has narrow shorelines and cliffs that rise to span areas that cover an area of 3.2 square kilometers. In the breeding season this is where birds build their nests with their own droppings. These droppings, the famous guano fertilizer, are harvested every 4-7 years. The boat trip to Ballestas Islands provides an opportunity to easily watch resident and migratory birds, including flamingos, red-legged cormorants, Inca terns, boobies, as well as playful sea lions, and amusing Humboldt penguins and see the beautiful landscapes of the Peruvian coast. It was quite a magical trip as literally thousands of assorted birds were crammed together on the cliffs claiming their territories. In the mist of the birds were my favorite species, the Humboldt penguins hopping around in small groups on the cliffs. After exploring all around the islands close up the speedboat sped out into open water to an area where the birds were diving, hundreds at a time, grabbing fish out of the water. It was a mass confusion of orgy eating. As we looked back at the islands an unreal sight met our eyes. Thousands of birds were flying in swirls that looked like black smoke leaving the islands and heading out to open water to feed. It looked like some mystical painting done from the imagination of an artist...one of the few spectacular experiences of nature I had ever seen on water. As we returned to the dock groups of dolphins appeared and our captain lingered for all to see them. After our boat trip we left Paracas to return to Lima and on route we stopped to have lunch at a famous local restaurant known for their preparation of local sea food. We

had a short visit at the archeological site of Pachacamac. We were then taken to the airport for our flight from Lima to Cusco.

We arrived at Novotel Cusco Hotel and after some coca tea to help with the high elevation we were taken by car to the Pisac market nestled in the Sacred Valley of the Incas in the Andes, heartland of the Inca empire. It was one of the empire's main points for the extraction of natural wealth, and one of the most important areas for maize production in Peru northwards from Pisac. We were told that Pisac had one of the better markets to find local wares. On the way we stopped at a roadside park that had several different species of lama and alpacas for us to see and feed. These animals produce the soft wool used to make clothing of all kinds in Peru. We passed several Inca ruins along the route and then approached the Pisac market through very narrow cobblestone streets. We only had about an hour to shop, barely enough time to adjust my eyes to all the wares for sale. We finally found a lady selling ceramic buttons with Peruvian designs and I purchased a handmade baby alpaca shawl, some copper items, two felt purses decorated with yard flowers and an inlaid ball of native stones from the area. Mike bargained for a red alpaca poncho. Could have spent lots more time at this market but we had to leave to make the lunch schedule. As we left to go back to Cusco we drove through many local villages with the backdrop of mountains and farmed land. Some mountains were snow-capped and one had a glacier. We passed several towns where the ladies still wore the colorful traditional dresses and hats. I tried to no avail to purchase a traditional hat at the markets. Each region had their own traditional style of dress, hats and dresses worn native to the area. Ladies styled their hair long and in braids. If you were single the braids were loose on each side, if married the braids were joined together. The men wore ponchos and beaded knit hats with long side ties.

We returned to Cusco and had a leisurely rest and dinner at our hotel. Next morning we ventured into downtown Cusco and visited the main Catholic Cathedral. Morning mass was being conducted so we quietly entered the church to have a look around and see what the locals were up too. We left and sat on a bench in the town square and people watched then left to sit upstairs in a coffee shop overlooking the square. I had a delicious hot chocolate with orange cream and Mike had (2) Sambuca and coffees. We were heading back to our hotel when I stepped into a store to see the sweaters. I asked where to purchase buttons and the lady told me about a street 10 minutes away. Mike and I had about an hour before our hotel picked up so we rushed down the street. We never found the buttons I wanted but we ran into a local market and saw lots of things they were selling and cooking up for the holiday that was going on in Cusco. On the way back to the hotel we hear the sounds of a parade coming down the street. As the band approached we saw groups of dancers in colorful dresses and outfits. Some of the people were holding up a stature of a priest or religious person on a platform and were throwing paper confetti as they marched. Little children were dressed in local costume and one man and his son were in gorilla suits. The cathedral nearest the market was ringing its bells and a girl was throwing confetti out the bell tower. Roasted guinea pig, small boiled eggs, fried potatoes and chicken with rice, sugar cane juice, and assorted food was being sold on every corner. We got back to our hotel in time for a cup of coca tea and retrieved our luggage. We were driven to the station to board the train to Aguas Calientes for our

excursion to visit Machu Picchu. It was a pleasant ride on the Vistadome train through the countryside that bordered the river. As you viewed the scenic route a small snack was served by the staff.

We stayed at the Hatuchay Towers in Aguas Calientes for two nights. We had passes for the bus ride and entrance to Machu Picchu for two visits but Mike wanted to see it in one day so we explored the town of Aguas Calientes. We had lunch in town and people watched. Mike had local beers and pisco sours, I stuck with orange Fantas and water. We walked to the hot springs for a look. I might of ventured in the hot springs if they would have been more native looking but the water was piped into tiled pools with people all crammed in together. The setting was nice by the rivers edge and the bar at the pools was quite interesting. The bar was decorated with lots of local fare and mystical drawings, candles and incense, sort of like a nice hippy den. We did some shopping at the market in town but it was not as nice as others we had seen.

Up by 4:00 a.m. the next day to catch the early bus to Machu Picchu. We wanted to be the first to arrive that morning to avoid the lines and crowds. To our surprise we weren't the only ones with the same idea. We arrived at the bus station to see lines blocks long already forming. We walked to the end of the line and waited till 5:30 for the buses to start loading. You can walk the trail to Machu Picchu from Aguas Calientes instead of riding the bus...but I think it would of taken me hours to hike to the top and I was saving my energy for hiking up Wayna Picchu if we were lucky to get our ticket stamped as only 400 are allowed to hike the trail each day. We thought we were not gonna get our tickets stamped as we saw some many ahead of us...but we ran to a booth that we heard whispers about being the place you got your ticket stamped and we think we were some of the last visitors allowed. With no signs ... but using a map I got at the entrance station, Mike figured out how to get to the Wayna Picchu entrance. Several people were in line and some were there and had not gotten their tickets stamped...in horror they hoped that someone with a stamped ticket did not show up so they could hike up the mountain. You had to sign in and out at the station and then enter the trail to Wayna Picchu. It started out with jackets on to stripping to your t-shirt as the day got hotter and you started exercising to get to the top. I can say that the trail was steep and treacherous....I had to watch each step and I have broken my left ankle twice and didn't want that to happen again. We let the young crowd pass us several times...was in no hurry to get to the top. Only at a few areas was there a steel cable to help you pull your way up. Breathing is still an issue as the air seems thinner but if you take your time you will make it....everyone is laboring to an extent even the buff young guys. As we approached a sign it said 25 more minutes to Wayna Picchu summit....oh yea maybe for the seasoned mountain rock climbers. A time later we approached some pretty steep steps as I had to crawl up them one by one. I met a 72 year old man from Columbia that asked how old I was and where I was from...I think that was his extend of English as I learned later. We made it to the summit after going through a cave and climbing a homemade ladder. We were surprised at the top greeted by hot sweaty faces of the first climbers. They were all jocking for a position on the top boulders of the mountain...Mike and I tried to squeeze in for a spot. As the mist of the morning blew away the sight we all labored for appeared...Machu Picchu. Among moans of

accomplishment of the climb or the thrill of the view we all shared the experience. I saw a perfect spot being vacated by a hiker so I made my way to the boulder. I felt a little dizzy like falling off the top of the mountain so I held on to the boulder and told Mike to make his way over. We took in the view and caught our breath and enjoyed the moment. Others wanted the spot so I was going to move out and let them have it. I saw the 72 year old man from Columbia I met earlier stumbling among the crowd...I offered my spot. He muttered for me to sit by him. He said something in broken English about women being pregnant and being in pain and then having baby and being happy. What the hell is he talking about I thought! He wanted our picture taken...so Mike took our picture as he grabbed my hand and held on tight. He then handed Mike his video camera and said 'take movie'. I was ready to get up when he grabbed my hand again in both of his and Mike started taping. The man held my hand tight and started screaming to the top of his lungs groaning and moaning while everyone around was laughing their butts off. It seemed he was coming to a climax when I felt my blood pressure return to my right hand he was squeezing. He screamed out once more and let my hand go and asked Mike for his video camera which he then replayed the erotic scene for us. I immediately removed myself from his grasp and high tailed it out of the area....he was on his own from now on. Guess I will never know what that was all about but I think I was abuse in some manner but will survive... ha ha!! I think I was glad Mike was there but then again he was the one video taping the whole thing...hummm!!! Hope I don't show up on You Tube as the Columbian harlot of Wayna Picchu. Of course in my hasty retreat to get away I chose the least traveled path back down the mountain...the one Mike read to me that I did not want to take. The steps were very small and treacherous with no handrails at all. I chose each step with death in mind of falling to the next terrace. We finally made our descent down the mountain and continued to explore Machu Picchu. A lady pointed out some wild chinchillas on the rocks which we watched for some time and rested. We then made our way to the watcher lookout gate and viewed the scene of Machu Picchu that you usually see in the postcards....with Wayna Picchu in the background. We took a much needed rest from our 5 ½ hr. trek up Wayna Picchu on one of the terraces overlooking Machu Picchu. As we laid under my umbrella for shade we realized how nice the day had been. Several people sat in a yoga pose mediating while lovers hugged each other. We enjoyed just looking around and commenting to each other about the climb we just did. We boarded the bus with not much of a wait and had lunch back down in Aguas Calientes at a place in town where we watched the locals carting everything imaginable to the hotels and restaurants in the town.

The next day it was back on the train to be met by our driver to go back to Cusco for the night and then our long journey back home. This completes our fourth time to South America and our second time to Peru and we enjoyed every minute of it. We have not decided on our next designation for 2012 but I am sure it couldn't beat the good times we had in Peru.

Audrey & Mike Lambert