Tour Code
PE2

ADVENTURESABROAD

PERU & BOLIVIA

Incan Secrets & 'The Tibet of the Americas'

14 days

Created on: 29 Mar, 2024

Day 1 Arrive in Lima

Today we arrive in Lima, Peru.

In recent years, this city has undergone some wonderful restorations of the plazas, ornate facades, and wooden balconies for which it is famous. Named the 'City of Kings' by the Spanish Conquistadors, Lima is the capital of Peru. Founded in 1535 by Francisco Pizarro, where the River Rimac meets the Pacific Ocean, this was the most important Spanish city during the colonial era with a population of about 100,000 inhabitants. Today the city is home to more than 7 million people.

Overnight in Lima (Miraflores).

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Lima: City Tour

This morning we start our tour with a visit to San Francisco's Church to visit the extensive catacombs that lie underneath. We then continue to the Plaza de Armas, the most important plaza in Lima. The oldest surviving part of the plaza is the impressive bronze fountain, erected in 1650. Surrounding the plaza is the exquisite Archbishop's Palace, the cathedral, and the Government Palace where handsomely uniformed presidential guards are on duty all day. We visit the cathedral where the great conquistador Francisco Pizarro's tomb lies.

We then proceed to the Larco Museum, which showcases remarkable chronological galleries and an excellent overview on 3,000 years of development of Peruvian pre-Columbian history. Located in a unique vice-royal mansion of the 18th century built over a 7th century pre-Columbian pyramid, is surrounded by beautiful gardens. Features the finest gold and silver collection from ancient Peru and the famous erotic archaeological collection, one of the most visited Peruvian tourist attractions. For an unforgettable experience, Larco is one of the few museums in the world where visitors can also choose to enter the storage area with its 45,000 classified archaeological objects.

Later we head to the trendy area of Miraflores where people stroll along the cliff tops and watch the sun setting on the Pacific Ocean. The best location is the new "Love Park," with its magnificent monument to lovers at its centre. We continue to the Hacienda Mamacona for an exhibition of beautiful Peruvian Paso horses, accompanied by a delicious dinner of Criollo food and a folkloric show.

Overnight in Lima (Miraflores).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Lima - Fly to Cuzco - Urubamba Valley - Ollantaytambo - Yucay

Early this morning we fly to Cuzco, located in a fertile valley at 3354 m (11,004 feet). This is the archaeological capital of the Americas and the ancient capital of the Inca Empire that, at its height, stretched from Colombia in the north, through Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, and down to central Chile in the south. Although the empire already existed in the 12th century, it remained small until the mid-15th century. Over the next 100 years, it expanded massively but declined due to the civil war and the conquest by the Spanish conquistadors under Francisco Pizarro in 1533.

On arrival we will travel by road into the Urubamba Valley, or "Sacred Valley of the Incas," along one of the most scenic drives on our trip, to the Inca ruins of Ollantaytambo located on a spectacular ridge with deep valleys on either side. We can admire the carefully constructed and maintained farming terraces on the surrounding hillsides.

We continue to the town of Yucay on the bank of the Urubamba River (2300m / 7,590 ft). This is an attractive little town of particularly fertile lands whose name translated into Spanish means "deceit" or "bewitchment". According to legend, in the middle of the 15th century, the Inca Huayna Capac was captivated by the incomparable magnificence of Yucay's setting and decided to settle here.

Overnight in Yucay.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Yucay - Machu Picchu Area

Today we take the early morning train* from Urubamba to Aguas Calientes and Machu Picchu. The train journey to Machu Picchu is a highlight of any trip to the Andes; the scenery is simply spectacular, and the train allows you to enjoy it in comfort. The +/- 3 hour trip takes us through a changing landscape with wonderful vistas of the mountains and, deep in its dramatic canyon, the beautiful Urubamba River. Our early arrival from Urubamba ensures that we are at the site before the tourist throngs arrive on the train from Cuzco later in the morning.

Upon arrival at the Aguas Calientes train station, a bus will take us on the 6 km (4 mile) twisting journey up the mountainside to the site of Machu Picchu. Having already dropped our baggage at our hotel, we proceed immediately for a guided 3-hour walking tour of the ruins (please be prepared with all that you need for our tour). We will enter the site through the House of the Terrace Caretakers, which flank the agricultural sector. Once on the site, we will see, among other features: the Temple of the Sun, the Fountain Caretaker's House, the Royal Sector, and the puzzling Temple of the Three Windows. We will also see the Common District, the Sacred Rock, and the prison-like Temple of the Condor.

Machu Picchu, popularly known as the 'Lost City of the Incas,' is an ancient city of stone palaces, towers, temples and staircases. It is a very mysterious place, and to this day our knowledge of it remains sketchy. There are no records or artifacts on the site to indicate what any of the buildings were used for. Archaeologists have ascertained that the site was most likely a ceremonial centre and possibly used for administrative purposes for the populous region.

After our tour, you may choose to proceed to the hotel or remain on the site for some independent exploration (your ticket is included and good for the day), and return to the hotel on your own using the return portion of your bus ticket.

* PLEASE bring an overnight bag for this one night at Aguas Calientes as the train enforces strict luggage limits. Our larger bags will be transported back to Cuzco for us. Please also note that, due to group size limits, groups exceeding 15 participants will be split between two guides for today's site tour.

Overnight at Agua Calientes (near Machu Picchu).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Machu Picchu Area - Cuzco

A large part of the beauty of Machu Picchu is created by its setting on a mountain top surrounded by deep valleys. By staying for a second day to visit Machu Picchu, rather than visiting as a day trip from Cuzco, we are able to savour the atmosphere of this very special place.

In the early morning of our second day at Machu Picchu,* most group members choose to take the bus back up to the site with the weather-dependent hope of seeing the mist-clad mountains greet the morning sun. Weather notwithstanding, the best thing about going up the second day is being there early when there are fewer people, allowing time to "soak it in," as well as the opportunity to climb Huayna Picchu and/or to the Sun Gate.

During our time at Machu Picchu, we will also include a visit to the Manuel Chavez Ballon Site Museum, which focuses on the "discovery", excavation, and history of Macchu Picchu. On display are historical photos, including photos of Hiram Bingham at Machu Picchu shortly after he came across the ruins, informative write-ups on the construction of Machu Picchu and the life of the Incas, and artifacts found at the site. Outside the museum is a very lush botanical garden running along the river; some plants are labelled and there are a few short trails. This is a nice shady area to rest on a hot day and is an easy 25 minute walk from Aguas Calientes down the road leading to Machu Picchu.

Later in the afternoon we board the VISTADOME train from Aguas Calientes to Ollantaytambo Station (1.5 hours) from where we bus back to Cuzco.

* DUE TO strict limits on the number of visitors daily, if you elect to visit again today (optional - at your expense), you will need to book well advance online via www.ticketmachupicchu.com. You will need to choose the EARLIEST options for Machu Picchu only OR Machu Picchu & Huayna Picchu if you want to hike Huayna Picchu.

Overnight in Cuzco.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Cuzco Area

This morning we visit some of the most important Inca sites in the Cuzco area.

Sacsayhuaman is an impressive complex which, like so many others of that time, had both a religious and military purpose. The fortress known as the 'storehouse of the sun' incorporates some of the largest stones ever used in a building. The zig-zag walls represent the teeth of the sacred puma and provide an excellent defensive structure. The stones fit so perfectly together without mortar that not even moss can grow in the cracks!

In the afternoon we return to Cuzco and enjoy a tour of the town. We visit Coricancha, the temple of the sun which was the most important location in the Inca empire. Entombed in the closed cloister of the Sto Domingo Church, these sacred walls were hidden from modern civilization until the colonial walls were brought down in 1950 by a powerful earthquake. We also visit the church of San Blas with its fabulously carved pulpit. Wandering the narrow streets of the San Blas artisan region we make our way to the cathedral which towers impressively over the Plaza Mayor. Inside we find precious paintings from the Cuzco School of Art, one of the most prolific of its era.

This Inca city was laid out around a great central square in the shape of a puma, the god of lightning. Today, stone walls built by the Incas line most of Cuzco's central streets and form the foundations of colonial and modern buildings. The Inca buildings were so well built that the Spaniards simply knocked down the upper parts of the Inca temples and palaces and built their churches and mansions on top of the Inca walls. Shortly after the Spanish conquest, the capital was moved to Lima on the coast. Thus Cuzco has retained a wonderful, untouched colonial atmosphere. The culture is also very much alive here, and is evident in the music, clothing and handicrafts of the people.

We have dinner at a local restaurant where we can try some typical Peruvian dishes. One may wish to try the "Pisco sour", a powerful drink made with a Peruvian liquor distilled from white grapes.

Overnight in Cuzco.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Cuzco & Pisac

This morning we visit the ruins at Tambo Machay, Puca Pucara and Qenko. The latter is an Inca sacrificial site carved with inscriptions.

We continue to Pisac with its lively market where you will encounter traditionally dressed locals with whom you can barter for colourful craft items. You will see many unique Andean musical instruments as well as dazzling textiles. Peruvian woolen items are justifiably famous for their imaginative designs, based on Inca art and the local flora and fauna. You can buy sweaters and caps made from the extremely warm wool of alpacas and llamas.

We return to Cuzco with balance of the day at leisure.

Overnight in Cuzco.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Cuzco - Pucara - Raqchi - Puno & Lake Titicaca

Today we travel by road to Puno on the shores of Lake Titicaca (+/- 7 hours, with stops).

From Cuzco, we head south-east, through green fields dotted with willow trees and eucalyptus groves, passing outlying communities gathered around colonial churches that conceal their artistic treasures behind crumbling adobe facades. The first half of the journey is dominated by magnificent Andes followed by the gentler, rolling Andean Plains, where vicuna and alpaca are often seen. This is a wild, high, windswept and sunburned prairie of isolated communities of shepherds and cattle farmers, wedged between the two distant branches of the

Andes visible occasionally on either horizon, when not melting completely with the giant cumulus clouds that dominate the skyline.

Along the way we visit Pucara (aka Pukara), where we visit the ruins of the Pucara culture and its museum, located at the breathtaking elevation of about 3900m (almost 13,000 feet). This town is known across Peru for the archaeological site of Pukara and a vibrant modern pottery-making tradition. The fort is made of large walls, terraces, and staircases and was part of defense of Cuzco in particular and the Inca Empire in general.

We then stop at Raqchi and the ruined Temple of Wiracocha, named for a deity believed to be the giver of all life; the temple was thought to be built to to appease him and honour him. The temple is said to be specifically built so that people had to walk in a zigzag motion, which is related to the relationship between Wiracocha and Inca cosmology.

Finally we will pay a visit to the district of Andahuaylillas with its Baroque church, known as the "Sistine Chapel of South America".

Puno, at 3830m (12,562 feet), is the main settlement on the Peruvian shore of Lake Titicaca and the highest place on our tour in which we will spend some time. Puno is the greatest centre of Peruvian folk dancing and traditional instruments; the markets and streets of Puno are bustling with the brightly-coloured costumes of the different groups of the region.

Overnight in Puno.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 9 Lake Titicaca: Floating Islands

This morning we travel north and east to Sillustani, situated on a wind-swept peninsula on tiny Lake Umaya. The burial towers of the nobles of the Colla civilisation are up to 12 metres / 40 feet high. However, it is not known exactly when they were built. Known as chullpas, it is thought that whole families were buried in the towers.

Returning through the stark landscape to Puno, we take an afternoon boat excursion to the floating islands of Los Uros. The Uros people began their floating existence centuries ago in an effort to isolate themselves from their rivals, the Collas and the Incas. Today, about 300 people live on the islands. The islands are constructed from many layers of floating tortora reeds which grow in the shallow waters of Lake Titicaca. The reeds rot away from the bottom and are replaced at the top, so the ground is soft and springy as you walk over it. Even the buildings on the islands are made of tortora. The whole life of the Uros people revolves around the reeds. They even eat the lower stalk and root, which is supposed to taste like celery.

Today the Uros live mainly from fishing, including catching the giant pejerray which can grow up to 13.5 kg / 30 lb.

Overnight in Puno.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Puno, Peru - Copacabana, Bolivia

Today we travel round the Peruvian side of the lake and cross into Bolivian territory. The village of Chucuito is built over an Inca settlement and has an Inca sundial on display which was assembled in the mid-1800s using colonial, Inca, and modern era stones. The turbulent history of the lake region can be seen in the many Inca and pre-Inca sites as well as Spanish colonial churches dotted across the area.

We drive along the western shores of the lake taking in various small towns which are famous for their colonial churches and architecture. One of the most unusual towns along the lake is Juli, which has four huge churches and yet is a small town. The town was originally the Spanish capital of the lake region and the Spaniards hoped to convert most of the indigenous population to Catholicism. While building the Church of Santa Cruz the local stonemasons incorporated Inca motifs into the Christian decorations.

This afternoon we will enjoy a relaxed walking tour of Copacabana. For centuries, Copacabana has been a site of religious pilgrimage, beginning with the Incas. We visit the Cathedral of the Indian Virgin, built between 1605 and 1820. It is a brilliant Moorish structure with mudejar domes, colourful azulejos (decorative tiles), and a beautiful church courtyard decorated with wonderful flower gardens. Every year, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims travel from distinct parts of Bolivia and other Latin American countries to take part in religious festivals in Copacabana. Legend says that if the statue is removed Lake Titicaca will rise up and flood the whole Altiplano region.

For the energetic, there is a walk up to Cerro Calvario (Calvary Hill) for beautiful views of the town and lake. Pilgrims pass the 14 stations of the cross to reach the top but once there they encounter, as so often in Bolivia and Peru, a fusion of Catholic and pagan beliefs.

Overnight in Copacabana.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Lake Titicaca

Today is spent exploring Isla del Sol in Lake Titicaca by boat. This is the most important of the thirty-six islands in the lake. Lake Titicaca, South America's largest lake, straddles the Bolivia-Peru border and is said to be the highest navigable body of water in the world at an altitude of 3810 m (12,497 ft). Lake Titicaca was once much larger than the 8560 sq kilometres (3,305 square mi) it occupies today. The great city of Tiahuanaco was built at the edge of the lake, but today it is more than 25 km (15 mi) from the lake. This reduction in the lake size has had a tremendous effect on the climate of the Altiplano region over the past 1,000 years and has made this cradle of cultures able to support far fewer people today.

The cleverly terraced slopes of Isla del Sol contain numerous ruins and small traditional villages. We see the Inca steps where water from a natural spring runs through three stone channels. The sacred water is supposed to cure ailments and bring long life. The three stone channels represent the three commandments of Inca life: Don't Lie, Don't Steal, and Don't be Lazy. The Inca society was highly organised and industrious; laziness was punishable by death.

We return to Copacabana for dinner. This evening you may like to take a stroll along the lake shore at sunset.

Overnight in Copacabana.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Copacabana - Tiahuanaco - La Paz

This morning we drive towards La Paz. We take first a ferry across from the peninsula on which Copacabana sits to the Bolivian mainland and drive to La Paz, one of the world's highest major cities.

En route we stop at Tiahuanaco. This flat, desolate landscape would not seem capable of supporting life, and yet this is where the majority of Bolivia's population live. Here we may see llamas and alpacas, the only surviving relatives of the camel found in the Americas. Tiahuanaco is an ancient ceremonial site constructed around AD 700. After about AD 1200 the Tiahuanaco people disappeared, becoming another 'lost' civilisation. We know little about the people of Tiahuanaco but it is believed that their civilisation developed over a period of 2,000 years and then mysteriously vanished.

Our destination is La Paz, located at 3686 m (12,090 ft) above sea level. La Paz is situated in a bowl-shaped canyon in the Cordillera Real (Royal Range) of the Andes. As we travel across the Altiplano, the ground suddenly drops away 400 m (1,312 ft) to reveal the city hidden in a bowl in the mountains.

Overnight in La Paz.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 La Paz: City Tour

The mountains surrounding La Paz soar to an average of 5500 m (18,040 ft) above sea level. The most spectacular views of the city come on a clear evening when one can see the twinkling lights of the city stretching up the hillsides, under the the snow-capped triple peak of Mount Illimani at 6402 m (20,999 ft).

Today will explore the Spanish colonial quarter of the city and visit the Archeological Museum of Bolivia, which has a special exhibit dedicated to the site of Tiahuanaco visited yesterday. We also experience the colourful markets of La Paz. The markets are a great place to

observe the colourfully-dressed native Quechua and Aymara-speaking people. The women wear many layers of petticoats covered by a colourful dress, and over their shoulders they sling a multi-coloured striped blanket called a 'phulla' in which they carry their groceries or babies -- or both! On their heads they wear a bowler hat (which always appears to be too small) at a jaunty angle. The British brought the bowler hat to Bolivia when they were building the railway and somehow it became part of the everyday dress of Andean women.

We finish our day with a visit to a great place to buy some of the handicrafts, such as colourful sweaters woven from sheep's wool or from the light-weight, very warm wool of the native Andean animals. We finish at the unusual Mercado de los Brujos, better known as the Witches' Market, where you will see all sorts of potions, herbs and folk remedies used to guard against evil spirits.

Overnight in La Paz.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Departure

Departure from La Paz.

BUEN VIAJE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast