

A South American Adventure Cuzco, Machu Picchu & The Amazon



Despite conducting in depth research in the planning phase of my Peru trip I was still relatively unprepared for the rugged and remote beauty of a culture and country steeped in history. Arriving into the historical capital of the Inca Empire, Cuzco, quickly showcased a modern city that complimented the temples and ruins from centuries ago that dot every corner and monument in the city. Cuzco is often seen as the perfect base to acclimatize to the altitude before adventuring into the lost city of the Inca's, Machu Picchu. What surprised me however, was just how much Cuzco had to offer as a destination on its own. The quaint Inca-temple lined cobble-stoned streets weave an intricate maze that open out into Spanish influenced town- squares dwarfed by cathedrals and street parades.

Travellers from all over the world flock to trek the Inca trail from Cuzco to Machu Picchu. This strenuous 7 day trek visits historical archaeological sites, Inca ruins and snow capped mountains. For those of us that are more limited in time (or left our run too late for the months of training preparation required) the best option available is the luxurious 4 hour train journey that winds along a meandering track through the mountains and villages before arriving in the beautiful village of Aguas Calientes. This became my base to explore the fascinating, Inca ruins of Machu Picchu. A bleary-eyed 4am start the following morning was my introduction to what was a day of spectacular sights, and breathtaking experiences. The climb to the top of the mountain encouraged me to push my boundaries beyond what I believed was my limit but this paled in comparison to the thought of the Inca people creating an entire village of stone on top of a mountain almost 8000 feet above sea level. The journey back to Cuzco was eerily quiet with travellers reflecting on what most would describe as an awe-inspiring feat.

Next stop on my trip-of-a-lifetime was a trip up the Amazon River and deep into the jungle. After a private car, two plane trips, a local bus (with no windows) and a leaky wooden boat, I arrived at the lodge that was to be my base for exploring the Amazon Jungle. The sheer remoteness of this area was one of the first things that I noticed. Well, that, and the 5 metre Anaconda that slithered across my path! What unfolded over the next week was a jungle experience that exceeded my wildest dreams. I fished for piranha (and ate our catch for dinner), I got up close and personal with more than 15 species of monkeys and cuddled a baby sloth that the local village children kept for a pet. I spent the day in a traditional village with the local Yasawa tribe. None of whom spoke any English (and of course my knowledge of the Yasawa dialect left something to be desired!). It did however; prove to me that a smile really is a universal language. I laughed, I cried and I finally lost those last few kilos as I endured hours of jungle treks in the elusive search for the poisonous dart frogs, a search which eventually resulted in finding the little creatures less than 10 metres from the lodge. As my Amazon adventure drew to a close, five rare and mysterious pink dolphins surrounded our boat as if to bid farewell to me and remind me that nature really does get the last word.

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Kerry Moss wrote this article after one of her recent trips to South America. Kerry is a member of the **Quadrant Travel & Journeys** team located within the C.ex building in Vernon Street, Coffs Harbour.

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