

Lima, Peru City Tour

[Back to ...](#) [main...](#) [photos...](#) [year-2004...](#) [peru](#)

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Left Austin on Monday October 11, 2004 in the morning. Turns out the bank was closed due to Columbus Day. Had a little trouble getting spending cash.

Many sites on this trip are pre-1492. Arrived in Lima late Monday night (same time zone as Texas, during our winter). Spent Tuesday touring Lima.

Flight from Houston to Lima was luxury unbundled I got bumped to First Class! Note that First Class on international flights is nothing like first class on domestic flights. The seats have leg rests, ninety controls for the power seats, personal 5 inch television sets, etc. Served roasted nuts, then bread and salad, then salmon and shrimp scampi, then ice cream sundae. And all the drinks you could handle. My legs couldn't even reach the seat in front of me!! Peruvian lady next to me (old, grumpy, chubby) spoke no English at all. Saw lots of lightning out the windows over the Pacific Ocean.

Lima Airport is pretty bad. People lined up 5-10 deep looking for people coming off the planes. I had a little trouble finding my greeter, German, even with my name on his placard. A hundred people asked me if I wanted a taxi in 100 meters.

It was a half hour ride from the airport to the hotel. Not a very nice city in parts. 8.5 million people live here (imagine Dallas, Houston and San Antonio all in one city, then double it!). 1/3 of the whole Peruvian population in one city.



[Hotel room in Lima, the Faraona Grand Hotel.](#)



[The bathroom at the hotel](#)



[I was on the fourth floor on the left. Picture taken from the computer \(with free internet, of course\)](#)



[What a lovely view!](#)



[The other direction from the window](#)

Hotel room is quite small and clean. It'll do. No view at all, just an alley.

Haven't really talked to anybody yet, just the fellow from Enjoy Peru (named German) in the taxi. He told me about the tour group, etc. I guess there are going to be 12 to 20 people for the Lima City tour. And who knows about Cusco. Might be different people.

Supposedly it never rains in Lima, just always humid. They get less than 1 centimeter a year of measurable rain.

Woke up this morning and went downstairs for breakfast. It is a little buffet. They asked me my room number and that's it. You better be sitting down to hear what I ate. They had lots of fresh fruit (no way), cereal (nope) and bread with bologna. I thought I was in Germany with brotchen und blutwurst. At least I won't starve. And I had some bread with strawberry jam. No eggs or bacon or sausage or anything. And, wait, there's more! I didn't want to drink the OJ, so I drank some tea! I figured it would be safe since it was boiled.

A liter of bottled water in the room cost 5.50 soles, which is under \$2. So I've been sipping that today.

After breakfast I took a stroll around the hotel to get my bearings then headed over to Central Park. There is a nice, old Catholic Church on the edge of it, with Mass in session when I peeked inside. En Espanol, of course. Because it is springtime here, all the flowers were in bloom in the park. Very nice.



[Lima's Central Park. Just a block from the hotel. Between the McDonalds and the Burger King.](#)



[Central Park in full bloom. It is spring time here.](#)

I did a one mile or so walk to some pyramids in downtown Lima. They're called Huaca Pucllana from about AD 400. It is open six days a week. Guess which day it is closed? Yep, today :(The pyramids fill a couple city blocks and are about 30 feet high. Lots of renovation under way.

The walk was interesting. Every bank (lots of them) had 2-3 armed police in front with Kevlar vests on. Very few anglos. I know I stick out, but I don't really care.

There are McDonalds, Burger King, Pizza Hut, and Dunkin Donuts within 400 meters of the hotel. Probably more too. I'm on my own for lunch and dinner today. I'll probably snack for lunch then find a steak for dinner. Lima city tour starts at 2:30.



[Huaca Pucllano](#)



[Some kind of dingo or wild dog guarding Huaca Pucllano](#)



[Huaca Pucllano again](#)

I bought a little notebook before I found the internet computer here. It cost about 50 cents. First, I carried the item to the register. She printed up a ticket. Which I carried to a cashier, who printed up two more tickets. One was a receipt for me and the other was a receipt to go to yet a third person who gave me the little notebook! You can tell that paper time is worth nothing here.

I have no idea about Cusco starting manana. The city is at 11,000 feet. German told me to drink Coca Tea or chew on coca leaves. He said it is legal, not narcotic and makes altitude sickness go away quickly, along with rest. I dunno.

So far, I've been extremely cautious with the water, and knock on wood, my stomach is fine. I wash my hands with soap and hot water and dry them thoroughly. I feel like a doctor.

Went on a Lima City Tour today. Eleven people on the bus, plus driver (crazy John) and gregarious guide (David). 3 from Argentina, 1 from Uruguay, 5 from Brazil, 1 from Haiti, and 1 from Texas. Me. El Vaquero de Tejas! The guide asked me if I was in the rodeo. Hmm. No. Two people from Brazil (mother-daughter) spoke passable English and the lady from Haiti spoke perfect English. Nobody else spoke any. And I was the only one who spoke no Spanish at all. Well, I do, but not enough to bother with. So poor David had to say everything twice, once to 10 people and once to me. So I gave him a nice tip at the end of the tour (20 soles, about \$6).

Oh yeah, the tour. First stop was a Lover's statue looking over the Pacific. It was cool, but not spectacular. Next we drove through some nice parts of town. Huge amounts of European influence here. So the rich Europeans built rich European houses. With steep pitched roofs for the snow and rain. Except Lima gets zero snow and less than 1 cm of measurable rain per year. And tons of ugly old olive trees.



[Parque del Amor, looking out at the Pacific Ocean](#)



[See the hang glider?](#)



[Parque del Amor statue](#)

We drove by tons of big government buildings, all Spanish or French or Italian in style. Quite odd really. Walked around the St Martin Square where the center of Lima (and of Peru) is. Nice. Except for all the armed soldiers. I guess the President's approval rating has gone way up lately. All the way to 15% now. So, there are some unhappy Peruvians.



[Plaza San Martin](#)



[Plaza San Martin](#)



[See the two guards in red at the door?](#)



[Plaza San Martin](#)

The third and final stop was by far the coolest. It was a St. Francis of Assisi monastery, called San Francisco. Started in the 1500's and finished in like 1724. It was awesome. Huge cathedral room, still in use. Choir area for 120 choralists. Amazing library with some 20,000 books from 1500 to 1900's. Many handprinted. Many printed on lamb's skin. Extremely fragile and off limits. Took like 150 years to build the place because so much was done by hand. Ceilings made of wood in intricate patterns with no nails or glue or anything. Just tongue-and-groove. Millions of hand-painted tiles.

Ah but wait, that is the bright side. There is also a dark side. For 300 years, all burials were in the catacombs under the grounds. We got a tour. Millions of human bones, skulls, etc. Quite macabre. These were not ritual killings or anything. This is just how they buried their dead. Reminded me of the castles in Europe, except there were no prisoners or jails here. There are still some 40 Franciscan friars on the grounds in a secluded section.



[Awesome Cathedral San Francisco](#)



[Spooky place. One lady \(from Haiti\) bailed out.](#)



[Bones in the Catacombs](#)



[Boxes full of skulls. Another box full of femurs.](#)



[Thirty feet deep. Full of human bones. I don't understand the litter ...](#)

On the drive back, we went through La Victoria, where David (the tour guide) said I would not last three blocks. No guns or knives. Just brute force assaults. The bus didn't stop there.

Total tour lasted 3-4 hours. I was not bored and got a couple pictures. The two Brazilians who spoke English will be on the same flight to Cusco tomorrow, but they are staying at a different hotel. Maybe all eleven will be there tomorrow, who knows.

The taxi leaves here at 5:30am, so I've gotta get to bed early. I still have to pack, eat breakfast, shower, eat, etc. Probably do some of that tonight (pack and shower).

Place is a bit smoggy, my eyes get a little watery. It's funny that every, and I mean every, taxi that passes me on the street honks. I guess they want me to signal them for a ride. In a mile walk, that amounts to at least 100 honks. They are persistent!

Last Updated on 12/17/2004

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