

Machu Picchu!

Back to ... [main](#) ... [photos](#) ... [2year-2004](#) ... [peru](#)

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Friday, October 15, 2004

4:20am. Time to get up. Note that "Do Not Disturb" means nothing here. They still cleaned my room here in Cusco and attempted to in Lima (I kicked 'em out).

DID IT! Machu Picchu was totally awesome. More than I expected, which was quite a lot. Terrain was much more vertical than it appeared from the pictures. Quite steep in places, like up to 1,000 feet of vertical drop in places. Surrounded by very high, verdant mountains.

It was HOT when we started, then rained during lunch, then sunny again. Rain was ok because it brought with it some awesome mists and fast moving clouds. Very mysterious! Quite a bit of hiking / stairs in the rain, but not really dangerous or scary.

Only one spot got me for a moment. On a flat rocky floor, the route down is a stairway that you can't see until you get near the edge. It felt like I was going to walk off the edge, until I got right up to it. I kind of sidled on over slowly. Probably 1,000 feet dropoff, but the stairs were plenty wide.

Ok, starting the journal back at the beginning of the day. Breakfast was like the day before, except it was so early, 4:45, that the crepes weren't made yet. Still good though. Sleeping headache went away again after second dose of Advil.

Tour guy, Percy, took me with a group to the train station in Cusco. I thought we were going to take a half hour bus ride to get to the train station. Oh well, better this way. He also took my suitcase over to the next hotel that I stay in, here in Cusco. There is a night in Aguas Calientes (at Machu Picchu) in between.

Train station was a madhouse of people trying to get on the 6:15am train. Six cars, maybe 100 people in each. I was in car A, seat 20. Three and half hour train ride with a couple stops en route.

I had never heard of a train doing switchbacks, but this had to do quite a few. Forward then reverse, repeat until up the mountain.

Scenery was gross in town. Litter all over; I guess they don't have trash pickup twice a week here with recycling bins.

Scenery was awesome as we followed the Urubamba river (through the Sacred Valley again). The river was full and powerful from the melting snow. Near Machu Picchu, it was a rain forest.

Sat next to a friendly lady named Jayne, seat 19. Semi-retired. Used to own a restaurant in Bermuda, now doing condo management in Tampa, FL. Divorced (separated?) because her Italian husband (Bruno) wants to stay in Bermuda and she did not. Amicable as she still does the books for the restaurant business. Yesterday was her birthday (age 38 in base 17), and she planned this trip to be at Machu Picchu for her birthday. Thwarted by the travel agent. She has travelled the world and has some very nice, very heavy, camera equipment. Definitely gregarious.

Train stopped at Aguas Calientes and we immediately got on a bus 1/4 mile away. Most people had a bag to check, but not me.



[The Orient Express Train](#)



[A capybara \(the largest rodent\) at the entrance to Machu Picchu.](#)

The bus ride was an adventure! Probably 20-30 switchbacks up the mountain. One dirt lane with an occasional place to pull over. At least 10 times we had to back up to let another bus go by. Frightening when you are on a cliff. Ignoring elevation change, probably only 100 meters away. But the ride took half an hour. Hmmm.

Arrival at Machu Picchu was mayhem again. People everywhere. Joined up with Jayne and another couple (Dave and Marit, in their 70's) for most of the tour.





[See the little white bus on the switchbacks?](#)



[Machu Picchu in the mist](#)



[Tour guide, Darwin, with the red cap](#)

Tour was interesting but hard to follow. So many people in the group and other groups. Dude (Darwin) was interesting and wrote a book on Machu Picchu. Average age of the group was 60+ so we moved very slowly. Didn't learn much from him and didn't remember much from the book I read, but the scenery is incomparable. Surrounded by mountains, no snow, and deep canyons on two sides. Breath taking.

Machu Picchu itself is huge with many many rooms and terraces. Supposedly, built around 1400 to 1500, occupied from 1500 to 1536 only. Discovered by locals in 1900 and re-discovered by Hiram Bingham in 1911. Only 500 permanent residents, probably all royalty. Like a nice little summer cottage.



[Machu Picchu](#)



[Machu Picchu, great shot](#)



[Got quite miserable for a while.](#)

At first, it was hot, then it got worse and worse until I actually used (tried to) the fool poncho. Nuisance, but it helped. Couldn't figure out how to snap it. Tour went from 11am to 1pm or so, which was when the rain was coming down pretty hard. Marit and Dave had had enough and took the bus back to Aguas Calientes.

Jayne tried to buy my lunch since I carried her camera and bags so much. It was \$22 but we had a \$4 coupon from Darwin. I finally relented and let her buy lunch, but then I turned around and bought her a leather-billed cap for \$18 in return. I hadn't planned on lunch there, since I had brought some granola-like snack bars for lunch. But it worked out perfectly because the rain stopped during lunch.

Lunch was very nice. High quality buffet with many courses. Jayne ate some papaya that would later prove to be a major miscalculation. The trout was good, but not as good as salmon, which it looked like. Best of course was the apple streudel, of which I had to have two. Seats were full at the large table. Somebody tried to take our seats and somebody else left a nice woman's jacket behind. I had Coke to drink. First beverage other than tea or water on this trip.

Luckily, the rain stopped so Jayne and I went back into Machu Picchu to go up to the Sun Temple. Took lots more pictures and took the bus back to Aguas Calientes.



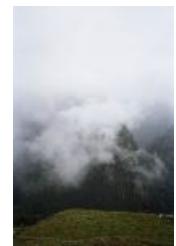
[Ate at the lodge in Machu Picchu. Fairly expensive.](#)



[Clouds moved very fast. Spooky.](#)



[See the alien spaceship on the left?](#)



[Machu Picchu](#)



[Careful there, buddy!](#)



[Machu Picchu from the upper](#)



[Machu Picchu](#)



[Careful there, buddy!](#)



[Machu Picchu from the upper agricultural area](#)



[Machu Picchu](#)



[Llama at Machu Picchu](#)



[Como se llama, llama?](#)



[Photo exactly like the postcard. This llama is the Boss!](#)

Story was that a lady slipped and fell off the Inca Trail just a week before. She died. It was raining then also. Postscript: One week after my trip, a tour bus crashed in Peru and killed like 17 people.



[Travel buddy, Jayne Fiocca, wearing the infamous hat.](#)



[Goodby, Machu Picchu!](#)

Checked into Hotel Inti. Very nice, 5th floor with windows on three sides. Really nice tile floor and wood beamed, vaulted ceiling. I jsut noticed that there is no TV. So? Great view of Aguas Calientes.



[Inti Hotel. Very nice room.](#)



[View looking over the whole city of Aguas Calientes.](#)

Met up with Jayne, Marit and Dave for dinner, of sorts. They all stayed at hostels, but somehow they lost a room and Jayne got moved to a dumpy place off the end of town next to the train tracks. I had some fun with this, boasting about my first class flight to Lima, nice hotels, etc. All in fun though.

Dinner was at one of the 10,000 pizzerias in the town of 2,000 people. Marit and Dave "shared" a cheese pizza. I think Marit had 1 slice and so did Jayne. Marit returned the Margarita she ordered. Dave also had a Margarita and Jayne and I shared a cool beer, Cozqueno I think. I also had a bowl of mushroom soup that was perfect, after such a large lunch at Machu Picchu.





[That's a headless Marit and Dave on the left.](#)



[Tame moth](#)



[Shopping again!](#)



[Writing a postcard to home. I swear I didn't even know that dog was there.](#)

No Plans really for tomorrow or the rest of the trip for that matter. Train leaves at 3:55pm. I have a voucher for lunch at Toto's, other three are together down the street for lunch. No earlier trains are available because they are used by students.

Found out the all the army people on train were here because of the elections on Sunday. Uzis, M-16's, AK-47's, who knows. Lots of 'em. Two mayors in Peru were murdered just a week before! I guess corruption is epidemic here. Hotly contested mayoral election in Aguas Calientes, ergo the army / police.

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