

Saturday, August 31 – Bus tour from Puno to Sacred Valley/Urubamba Valley

Up at 5:00 am for another hearty breakfast before our bus trip from the Altiplano down to “only” 8,000 feet high at Urubamba. We’re picked up at the Libertador at 6:30 am and the bus departs exactly at 7:00 am from the Puno bus depot. The planned agenda is for five stops along the way to visit various attractions and archaeological sites ranging from old pre-Inca through Spanish Colonial, and one at the highest elevation point of the tour . . . and of course lunch.



There is almost no one at the bus station and we locate our bus easily and get our luggage loaded. It’s only partially filled, probably 20-25 people total, all tourists like us.

There is a guide travelling with the group so we will get some direction and information about what we’re seeing at each of the stops. When the bus gets started it’s a pleasant first hour of riding, with little traffic in Puno as we leave town.



We’re on the same route we took yesterday since we need to go back through Juliaca in the opposite direction, so we’re not all that attentive to the passing scenery. When we reach Juliaca, and it still looks like a nasty place, even more so than when we came through from the airport two days ago on our way to Puno. This time we are in the central city, and now we see just how big and how messy the city is.

When we drove through two days ago it looked bad, but we just assumed we were driving through the “slums”. Today it all looks as bad and worse.



The only new, clean, fully completed buildings we see are the University campuses. Roads often turn from pavement to dirt in the middle of town; lots of road construction work and detours. But we never saw any nice, new road surfaces until we left the city behind. Lots of slow traffic, but after another hour of this terrible, bumpy, dirty city driving we get clear of Juliaca.



Then we come out on the Altiplano and suddenly it's clean, clear and quiet! And very dry. The Altiplano (means high plains in Spanish) countryside looks like the high plains in the USA, in Wyoming or Montana, but it is much higher ranging from 12-14,000 feet in altitude. The high grassland is called *Puna* . We've been hoping to see llama and alpaca, but all we see are sheep and cows again.



Between the Mercedes Benz bus, the great Peruvian highway and lull of the drive, we read and doze between stops. We see lots more farming activity, cattle, ladies in crazy hats, adorable children who look like dolls, everyone working all the time. If the women are watching the sheep, they are spinning. The men are building walls or cultivating. Because of the steep terrain, oxen are used when possible, one man leading them, another handling the plow behind. On the steepest slopes, they use an ancient plowing tool with which one man or woman can turn the soil. Most work of this sort is done as a community . . . you help me plow mine, and I help with yours. Same with maintenance and harvest.



According to our guides, the Indian spirit is one of “do not stand out, be part of your community” rather than “push to excel”. This sounds like it could be China under Mao, only it is not an enforced approach but an ancient tradition of the Andean native peoples, who are most comfortable with this attitude.

Our first stop is the small town of Pukara, known as *Puka Pukara* in Quechua (*puka* meaning red, *pukara* meaning fortress; "red fortress"), a site of ancient military ruins. The fort today consists of large walls, terraces, and staircases. It is a pre-Inca site, but was later part of the defense of Cusco in particular and the Inca Empire in general after the Inca dominated the area. The name probably comes from the red color of the rocks at dusk. Pukara is an example of military architecture that also functioned as a settlement and an administrative center. It reached its peak between 200 BCE and 200 CE. There is not much to see here in terms of the ruins, most would require a bit of a walk to go see and the tour just doesn't have that much time available. What we see is just a nice small colonial town.



We visit a small museum there that features a few mummies. Since the Indians believe that death is only a passage to another type of life, they keep the family, living and dead, around them. It was usual to mummify remains in a sitting, fetal position with head bent down and then place them around the house. Farmers still dig them up today, perfectly preserved in the Altiplano dryness. These were tiny people, so their mummies don't take up too much space.



Left: *Hachapapa*,  
“The Great Decapitator”



Frogs were very important to these ancient people. Water is so critical to life on the Altiplano, and since frogs can't exist without water, the people wanted frogs present, even in stone or pottery form.



We see some Vicuñas in a pen. The locals today keep these for their fine, soft wool. These have been recently sheared, and it takes them several years to re-grow their wool to the point where they can be sheared again.



There is an old colonial church there. The square is lined with vendors, but this is Saturday so we're not sure if it is like this every day or only weekends. Ann likes to explore all the churches we come across in our various travels. There is a small wedding going on here so we aren't really supposed to go in, but Ed sneaks a photo at the door. The ceremony ends shortly, so we do get in for a very quick "look-around". And Ann did get a great photo of what she called "Our Lady of the Cake". Mary is regally robed looking for all the world like she is sitting atop a lavishly decorated cake.



Now we cruise through the Altiplano countryside. It's really "big sky" country. So bright and clear, sky bright blue with fleecy clouds. Amazingly beautiful! Livestock is rare and vegetation is much more sparse, but healthy-looking and a little greener than what we've seen so far. Since the mountains are so close we assume the area gets some good "mountain water" from streams and springs, in spite of very low rainfall.



We still see livestock at times, the occasional farm and a few tiny villages. We have been going up in altitude also, and La Raya, our second stop of the trip, is the highest point we visit today, at an altitude of 14,225 feet.



It is a typical tourist stop. A great view of the mountains (and a good, clear view of Chipuya glacier, which is almost 18,000 feet in altitude), a tiny Indian village and Indians selling knit goods, many of them very high quality with wonderful craftsmanship. Stacks and stacks of good things to buy, piled as high as Chipuya.



It's all very nice, but we are generally not buying "stuff", no matter how nice. The merchandise is all excellent quality, but it somehow seems out of place in these majestic surroundings. That's probably our American "elitist" attitude . . . the Indians need to make a living; this is where and how they must do it.



Also children standing around with llamas and alpacas and their babies, waiting for someone to photograph them . . . and give them a Sole for a tip. Yeah, we did it too!



Lunch is in the town of Sicuani, a place apparently existing only to provide tour bus lunches. The town is just a few homes and the restaurant. The restaurant is big and designed strictly for the tour busses. It is actually a very nice place and the food is excellent, a wonderful buffet. Nice vegetarian selections for Ann, and Ed has his second taste of Alpaca, tender medallions in rich gravy. We also have Quinoa soup again, for which we've quickly acquired a taste. And our first taste of Chicha Morada, a purple soft drink made from blue corn, and it's tasty. There is also an alcoholic Chicha, like beer made from corn, which we tried later on during the trip.



Ann had a "regular" beer, but could only drink half. Really alcohol is not too good for those unused to high



altitude. And though Ann didn't know it then, she was coming down with a head cold. But so far we have not had any adverse reactions to the altitude, let alone true altitude sickness. The only way we seem to "suffer" is that we often feel a bit winded. We walk for a few minutes and don't notice anything different from Arizona or Chicago, but then it's like we can't quite catch our breath and need to stop and hyper-ventilate for a bit. If we do anything that requires exertion, we just do it slowly and take breaks.



There's a little market for "tourist goods" behind the restaurant and I believe everyone from our bus went out after lunch to shop except us. By the time we left several more busses had arrived and the restaurant had gotten crowded. We got in and out just before the rush.

As entertainment they had Indian musicians. We enjoyed them until they played Guantanamera!





Our fourth stop is the town of Raqchi and the *Temple of Wirochoa*. We are now at “only” 11,300 feet elevation. Raqchi is important as an archaeological site. It is a very old pre-inca city and has had many functions over its 2,000 years. Raqchi has existed as a place occupied by humans up through Inca times. It was a much larger Inca settlement than Machu Pichu, and was a prominent part of the “Inca trail” system. Raqchi is seldom visited by tourists because it is off “the beaten path” of Peru tourism, and not mentioned in many travel guides.

The majority of the construction is from the Wiracocha period, from around 200 BCE. They have found much pottery and many other artifacts here related to the various cultures that have lived in this location. Later Pachacuti Inca rebuilt the place beginning approximately 1431. Construction was continued under Tupac Inca and Yupanqui Inca, until 1471-1493



The most prominent structure is the *Temple of Wiracocha*, an enormous rectangular two-story (formerly) roofed structure that measures 302 feet by 84 feet. Its structure consists of a central adobe wall some 60-70 feet high with an

Andesite base of the characteristic andean fine stone-work almost 6 feet thick and extending up about 10-12 feet. Windows and doors allow good interior light and easy access. It is flanked on each side by a row of eleven huge columns. Prior to its destruction by the Spaniards, the temple had what is believed to be the largest single roof in the Inca Empire, having its peak at the central wall, then stretching over the columns and some 82 feet beyond on each side. The tiny roof you see in the pictures was built by archaeologists to reduce weathering of the adobe.



There are some good drawings explaining the structures and reconstructing how they would have looked when they were first built.

Perú
Ministerio de Cultura
Ministerio Regional de Cultura Cusco

**THE TEMPLE OF WIRAQOCHA (s.XV d.c)**

The chronicle writer Garcilazo de la Vega wrote about this temple in his book "The Royal Comments of the Incas": this temple was built by orders of the Inca Wiracocha in order to worship the Invisible God of the Andean People: Apu Kcon Tiki Wiracocha. (The Creator of Universe).

This temple is unique of its kind in the genre of Kallancas "rectangular ground-planned and pitched roof constructions". Externally it is 91 meters long by 12.30 meters wide with an approximated height of 12.30 meters, its base is made of polished stone which presents the classical "padded" finish of the Inca period. The walls are made of adobe and plastered with clay. The temple presents doors and several trapezoidal windows with eleven columns on both sides of the wall.

According to Santiago Aguilaro an investigator who made an hypothetical reconstruction of the Temple of Wiracocha, it originally had reached 16.60 meters long. Its lateral walls were 1.20 meters wide with an approximated height of 3 meters. Its roof must have been an impressive cover of almost 2500 square meters with an inclination of about 50 degrees. As a support for the roof there were circular columns whose bases can still be seen between the central and the lateral wall which presents a diameter of 1.60 meter and a height of approximately 9.80 meters.



Raqchi reconstruction. You can appreciate the art that may be used to roof the Temple of Wiracocha.

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The complex includes the temple, homes, storehouses, military facilities and the quarters of the Chasquis (“mailmen” who delivered messages along the 25,000 mile “Inca trail” system). The God Wirachoan, to whom the temple was dedicated was a messenger for Viracocha the creator God, so this was a center for the Chasquis or messengers of the Inca. It is thought that this site was also used for the training of the Chasquis.

Near the temple to the north are twelve living quarters, which would have housed both priests and local administrators. The living areas are divided into separate squared spaces, the largest of which is roughly 14 x 20 feet. All have niches in their walls which might have been used for storage, though some of the niches have cover posts, suggesting they may have held sacred objects. The homes are aligned so that on the summer solstice, the sun rises on a line that shines straight down the main path through them.



To the eastern side of the temple are some 100+ round qolqas (storehouses) in parallel rows, each measuring some 33 feet in diameter. These storehouses were used to hold grains, such as corn and quinoa that would have been used by the inhabitants for food and also for ceremonial purposes. These storehouses are unique because unlike any other structures throughout the empire they are not square cornered. The reason for this is unknown.





To the west of the temple is a large field, now used for farming that might have been a market area or for overflow worshipers from the temple itself. On the far western edge of this field is a set of baths similar to ceremonial baths at important sites throughout the Inca

On the hills are the remains of old, pre-Inca walls, some sections of which are almost 20 feet high and over 6 feet thick. Quite a fortress it must have been in its day. Since the Spanish conquest it has been systematically razed to build and repair other structures as have most of the ancient sites in the world. It's difficult to know what it must have looked like at its peak. Many archaeologists believe that by the time of the Spanish conquest it may have been one of the largest settlements in the Inca Empire, only Cusco being larger.



*left:* Some of the old "stairs" built right into the walls.

*right:* And of course, a place to buy things!



Our next and final stop before we reach Cusco is Andahuaylillas, an important market town. Lovely colonial houses and narrow streets surround the square. At the head of the square is the most splendid church built, of course, on top of the Incan temple to the Sun God, their most important God.

Religion here is a fascinating mixture of polytheism and Catholicism. Unlike Mexico where you see a church every block or so, in Peru, so far we have only seen one major church in each town and sometimes it is not so major. The government no longer supports Catholicism, so they must make it on their own, but the town maintains this church





Today is the last day of August, the month when the Indians “give back” to *Pachamama* , Mother Earth by burying their finest products in the back yard, smoking a cigarette to take the offerings to the sky (just about the only time you would see a Peruvian with a cigarette; no one smokes here). It is also the best month to be married, so many weddings are crammed into the last week. We were fortunate to see a wedding from outside the Church.



The dog is not as excited as the other wedding guests.

After the wedding we went into the church and there were more “wedding cake” statues, this time for Mary and for St Michael. A few candles were available so we lit some for Ann’s niece Tara in front of Our Lady of the Rosary and St Michael, because he is fierce like Tara.



There is also a tiny museum with some old pottery shards and a few mummies. No information on them so we had no idea how old they might be . . . but they look authentic, that is: real mummies.

Back to the bus and a tired but stimulated group of tourists heads down the last leg of this all-day (LONG day) journey. Water is everywhere as we descend still lower, as are magnificent views of the Andes from which the water flows.



As we move down from the Altiplano, the agriculture is more abundant, water more available, so it stands to reason the local Indians would be wealthier and more of them. Higher up it is almost exclusively grazing land with very little crop land.

Habitation is now non-stop. Unfinished houses everywhere to delight the eye, piles of trash and dogs, dogs, dogs. These evidently are family pets but generally looking like someone unleashed a herd of various mutts and said "Increase and multiply". The dogs spend most of their time investigating and ingesting garbage. They are not exactly feral; they seem friendly to a point. We doubt that any are neutered, but then again we don't see any puppies, so we may be way in the wrong on this.

Most all of the towns we pass through as we approach Cusco are dismal, dusty and dirty. So bad they make rural Mexico look like Switzerland. Even much of Cusco that the bus drove through is dirty. The central area is nice and clean though, and that is where the tourists go.

Cusco is a big city with a population of almost 750,000. It's full of tourists who want to see Machu Picchu and the Sacred Valley, but Cusco itself is a beautiful Spanish colonial town and an important pre-Columbian site with a multi-millennial history. We will spend six days there later in the trip, but tonight, it's find our driver and hurry away to Urubamba and the Sacred Valley. On our way we ask our driver to stop at a small grocery/convenience store just off the main square. We are so tired and it is so late we know we aren't going to be cooking any dinner tonight. We have no desire to go to a restaurant either, so we stock up on bottled ice tea, chips, slim Jims, etc. for snacks until tomorrow.

We're dropped off at K'uychi Rumi, just outside the town of Urubamba, and taken to the casita we've rented. We're at "home" here, even if for only a week. Wheeeee, we can REALLY unpack! One of the staff comes with us to build a fire in the living room fireplace and it quickly takes the chill off, but it's not really "heat".

Even though the place has a very serviceable full kitchen we have no energy to try it out tonight. We'll have plenty of time for cooking later. We are staying here for a week and plan to mostly have lunches "out" and dinners "at home". Doris has left some supplies for us, a cooler full of food and fresh fruit. We are still a bit careful about what we eat, but we have some anti-bacterial spray along so we spray some of the fruit to eat tomorrow. So a sit by the fire, some snacks and a bit of reading and it's early to bed. We did little except sit on that (very comfortable) bus for most of the day, but somehow we're exhausted.