

Casita at K'uychi Rumi

We are staying for the next week at K'uychi Rumi, a compound of several acres just outside the town of Urubamba, with 8 large casitas, while we spend the next several days exploring one of the most beautiful valleys in the world.

Our casita here is two stories, two bedrooms, two bathrooms (one for each of us . . . no morning conflicts), living room, dining room and kitchen. There is a small patio near the door and a small deck off the upper level.



The casitas are situated so that you might see one other, and no more than that, and you get a sense of seclusion. Best of all, it seems to NOT be “family-friendly”; we see (or hear) no children and it is most quiet and peaceful.



The grounds are carefully landscaped and park-like, with lots of trees and blooming shrubs to attract birds, especially hummingbirds. And it's effective; we see many bird species around the grounds while we're here. The variety of blooms is amazing. Here



Notice the bee at the base of this flower (*left*)? There are several species of birds here named "Flower-piercers". They are nectar feeders, but since they have short bills they make a hole at the base of the flower as a "short-cut" to the nectar. Then bees and other insects use it after the bird is finished drinking from it.



Here a couple of familiar blooms, the Christmas poinsettia and the geranium (*above right and right*). At home we see them as flowering plants in pots. Here they grow into bushes 10-15 feet tall, covered with blooms.



On, no real heat in the casitas, but oil heaters that do an adequate job of taking the chill off our bedroom at night. You can't leave it on all night because it depletes the oxygen and might create some carbon monoxide problems (which we DON'T need) in the room. So we continue to live in multi layers of clothes. And they are well-supplied with blankets and comforters. We end up developing a pattern of turning the bedroom oil heater on at 2-3:00 pm, or as soon as we return from our day's adventure, then a fire starting at 5:00 pm every evening and it makes the place comfortable as we cook and eat our dinner and sit and read by the fire.

There's an



interior window in the upper level bedroom which we keep open so some of the warmth from the fire gets up there. When we go to bed we put a few more logs on so the fire burns most of the night and the heat makes its way up to that window and into our bedroom. The locals are used to the climate and make do without heat, just layers of clothing by day, blankets by night.

Our hosts here are Carlos, his wife Antoinette and 4 HUGE dogs (here are two of them). Of their several "hired hands", we get to know Julio, who starts our fire for us each evening. We'll be doing a bit of cooking here which will be fun, and they provide a breakfast which we discover is tasty and plentiful.



And since we will be cooking our own dinners here, Doris left us a big cooler full of provisions which we intend to supplement with a visit to the market in Urubamba. But Doris has left us with the basics like bread, cheese and such and a large amount of fresh fruit. We've brought some anti-bacterial spray and always keep some of the fruit sprayed so we can eat it without worries.

Sunday, September 1 – Ollantaytambo (pronounced: Oy-ANN-tay-tam-bow)

We start our first day at K'uychi Rumi with a nice breakfast in their dining room at 8:00. Some very tasty marmalades, fresh bread kept warm in a pottery container, fresh-squeezed juice, eggs cooked to order . . . we eat hearty. We are the only ones eating breakfast here, so we have the dining area all to ourselves.



Today we will start touring with Doris, our guide for the remainder of our trip, and our tour agent. So far we have not met her, but she has arranged the wonderful adventures we've had so far, and the guides she found for us have been excellent. She comes to pick us up at 9:00 so we finally meet her in person, not just by telephone. We visit for a bit and talk with Carlos, our host here, then walk around the grounds looking for birds, and we (well, Doris) find and identify some.

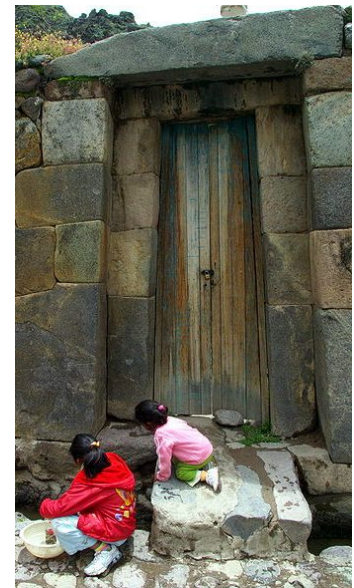


Then it's off to Ollantaytambo. We walk through the residential streets on our way to the archaeological site. Most of the buildings here were originally constructed by the Inca in the early-mid 15th century over an older settlement of one of the conquered peoples. They are still in the same condition they were then with only minor maintenance-type work having been done on them, and they are still occupied, and have been since pre-Inca times.

Very narrow streets, certainly no vehicle traffic. The doors of their homes are a big thing with many people here (and we later find this all over Peru). Many of the doorways have the traditional Inca trapezoidal shape, but have been retro-fitted to hold beautiful Spanish-style carved wooden doors.



Beautiful carved wood doors and elaborate wooden balconies, another Spanish influence. Some elaborate and "rich-looking" . . . And others not so much.



A tambo was an Incan site built for administrative and military purposes. Found along Incan roads, tambos typically stored supplies, served as lodging for itinerant state personnel, and were depositories Inca accounting records. Different types of tambos existed; those that served primarily the traveling Inca and his entourage (typically wives and state officials), those that served as relay stations for the chasquis (mailmen), state messengers who ran along the Inca trail system and military groups moving between cities. Ostensibly, tambos were about a single day's walk apart, with major installations about every five to six days walk. Remains of tambos are scattered throughout modern-day Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Colombia. Ollantaytambo is one of the best-known partly because it remains a functioning city today.

Ollantaytambo was a large Inca tambo at the convergence of three valleys along the Urubamba River. The town is located along the Patakancha River, close to the point where it joins the Willkanuta River and near where the Willkanuta joins the Urubamba. Around the mid-15th century, the Inca emperor Pachacuti conquered and razed Ollantaytambo; the town and the nearby region were incorporated into his personal estate. The emperor rebuilt the town with sumptuous constructions and undertook extensive works of terracing and irrigation in the Urubamba Valley. After Pachacuti's death, the estate came under the administration of his *panaqa*, his family clan.

During the Spanish conquest of Peru, Ollantaytambo served as a temporary capital for Manco Inca, leader of the native resistance against the conquistadors. He fortified the town and its approaches in the direction of the former Inca capital of Cusco, which had fallen under Spanish domination. In 1536 Manco Inca defeated a Spanish expedition by blocking their advance from a set of high terraces and flooding the plain. Despite his victory, however, Manco Inca did not consider his position tenable, so the following year he withdrew to the heavily forested site of Vilcabamba.

Much of the city is still divided into large blocks and each block houses four kanchas, all surrounded by one wall that faces the street. A kancha consists of a single entry from the street directly into a large courtyard. There are four large rooms facing the courtyard each with kitchen, sleeping, storage and living areas. Typically a kancha has been for a single extended family, but now they are sometimes occupied by 2, sometimes more, families.

Doris is able to get us into one of the kanchas on the residential side of the town. The one that she takes us into is occupied by a woman and her daughter, who have 2 of the 4 rooms, and another small family who occupies the other 2 rooms. The large courtyard area is shared, and is full of cats, ducks and chickens owned by the families in that kancha.



We only go into the kitchen area, but are immediately greeted by a large (herd, flock,?) of cuy . . . guinea pigs that they raise right in the kitchen area (very convenient). There is a bundle of grass available to feed them. We later saw huge bundles of this grass being sold along the roadside in several places. Cuy are only eaten for special occasions, so in the meantime, they breed just like little rabbits making plenty of food for the next holiday.

Also in a wall niche in the kitchen area are the skulls of the owner's parents. Since the government no longer allows mummification burials, many Indians keep skulls of ancestors and loved ones on display in their homes.



In addition to the skulls, there are some very odd (WE think) things hanging on the wall around it. Things like a mummified llama fetus, a stuffed weasel of some sort, etc. etc. Doris explained that these were objects of significance for this particular family and the meaning of each object is known only to the family members. She said the llama fetus was a common item for many families but its meaning might be different in each family.



They also freeze-dry papas (potatoes) by simply leaving them out in the freezing night air. Between the night cold and the daytime sunshine and the alternate freezing and heating, they dry up completely. Doris holds a couple of them, peeled and unpeeled. They weigh almost nothing in this form. When they are needed for cooking they are easily re-constituted by soaking them in water until they're "good as new".

The valleys of the Urubamba and Patakancha rivers along Ollantaytambo are covered by an extensive set of agricultural terraces which start at the bottom of the valleys and climb up the surrounding hills. The terraces permitted farming on otherwise unusable terrain; they also allowed the Incas to take advantage of the different ecological zones created by variations in altitude. Many of the terraces at Ollantaytambo were built to a higher standard



than common Inca agricultural terraces; in that they have higher walls made of cut stones instead of rough fieldstones. This type of high-prestige terracing is also found in other Inca royal estates. The path that we take to the top is along the side of one of the terraced areas and leads us straight up to the top.

Finally we arrive at the entrance to the site and begin to climb, and CLIMB. We're thinking this will be a good

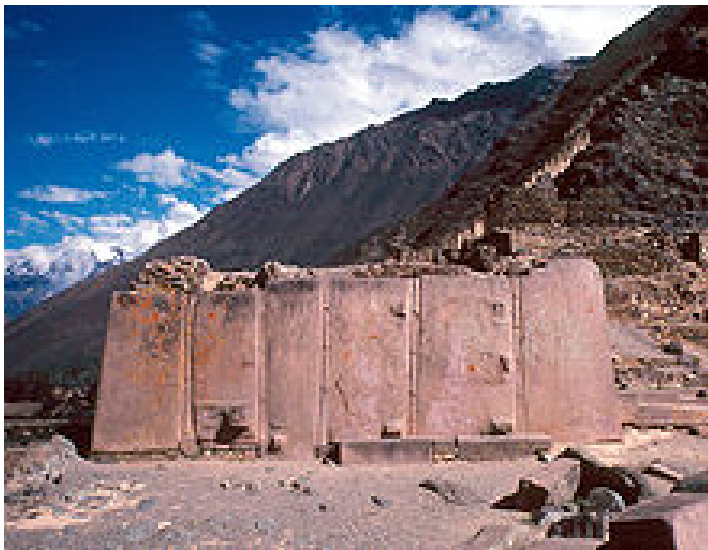
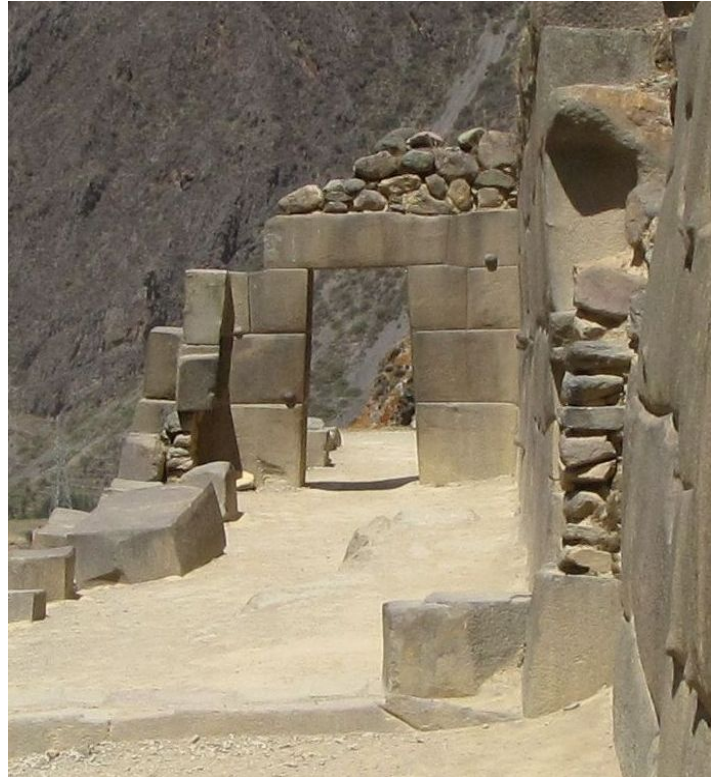
warm-up for Machu Pichu. As we climb we stop for breath every 5-10 minutes. Other than needing a breather that often we're fine. Looking back down on the town as we climb, we can see that this is a sizable settlement. And just outside the exit from the site we can see a small plaza full of vendor's stalls, so as we leave we'll have to run that gauntlet.





The site is divided into three main areas: the Middle sector, directly in front of the terraces; the Temple sector, to the south; and the Funerary sector, to the north. We climb all the way up to the main temple on the highest spot. It's really a large site and fortunately Doris is very familiar with it. Plus there is very good (large sized) map signage.

The Temple sector is built out of finely cut and fitted stones in contrast to the other two sectors of the site which are made out of coarser, partially trimmed stones. We arrive via a stairway at the top of our climb that ends on a terrace with a half-finished gate. This shows the classic "Inca shape" of doors and windows. A trapezoid, sloping in at the top.



Then the Enclosure of the Ten Niches, a one room building. Behind them there is an open space which hosts the Platform of the Carved Seat and two unfinished monumental walls. The main structure of the whole sector is the Sun Temple, an uncompleted building which features the Wall of the Six Monoliths.

The unfinished structures at the Temple Hill and the numerous stone blocks that litter the site indicate that it was still undergoing construction at the time of its abandonment. Some of the blocks appear to have been removed from finished walls, which provides evidence that a major remodeling effort was also underway. It is unknown which event halted construction at the Temple Hill, likely candidates include the war of succession between Huáscar and Atahualpa, or the Spanish Conquest of Peru and the retreat of Manco Inca from Ollantaytambo to Vilcabamba.



High up across the valley from the temple hill (and we do mean HIGH up) are the remains of storehouses (*qollqas* in Quechua). The Incas ran a vast empire built upon the state taking care of the people in return for payments in labor, generally agricultural or construction, or of whatever they produced. There was much to store.

The qollqas were used to store the production of the agricultural terraces built around the site. Their location at very high altitudes, where there is more wind and lower temperatures, helped protect their contents against decay. To enhance this effect, the Ollantaytambo qollqas feature ventilation systems consisting of openings at the top and at the bottom for air circulation inside each storage area. Grain would be poured in the windows on the uphill side of each building, and then emptied out through the downhill side window.



On the way down we walk through the remains of the lower city. The Middle and Funerary sectors have several rectangular buildings, some of them with two floors. The old aqueducts are still functioning and there is water running through them everywhere, and several fountains, also still functioning.



This one below, at the base of the ruins, is known as "The Bath of the Princess".



We have a wonderful lunch at a local restaurant run by a British woman who donates part of her profits to help the Andean women. From what we have seen, especially as you go out further out into the countryside, their life is challenging, at best. Forget the fact that there is no electricity, no phone, no television (we could all live without that, couldn't we?).

Most live in stone huts with thatched roofs in the bitter cold on subsistence farming, and with no medical help nearby. We don't know what the child mortality rate is but would bet it is high in the remote areas. Internet access is poor at best here, but of course there are many people who are able to lead 20th and 21st century lives. But still many more live just as their ancestors did for generation after generation for the last 1,000 years.



On the way back to K'uychi Rumi, we stop in Urubamba at a good-sized convenience store attached to a gas station, for more junk food and the bottled iced tea that Ed has quickly become addicted to. The Diet Coke here tastes awful (yes, even worse than USA Diet Coke). It is probably a different formula and also likely to be too long on the shelf since it is not very popular here. And of course some Inka Cola (almost the "national soft drink" of Peru) to try later. There are some little moto-taxis or tuk-tuks around and we think that before we leave the Urubamba area we need to try a ride in one.

Then its home to our little casita in late afternoon. Still much daylight outside so we walk around the grounds for a good look at them. Blooming plants are EVERYWHERE! The owner has planted them for both the "look" and to attract hummingbirds, which they do very well. There are hummingbirds EVERYWHERE. Then it's time for a "home-cooked" meal using the things Doris had left here for us. It was Peruvian potatoes and tuna fish. Ann can't enjoy her traditional gin and lemonade either. With this bit of a head cold she's developing and the altitude, her head just completely stops up if she drinks alcohol. Oh well, perhaps gin for her in the Amazon Basin, but that's still a couple of weeks away.

And there has been absolutely no problem with Ann's diet so far. She is eating fish and not eating any raw greens due to "things" that could make her sick, and so far, so good. Ed has no problem at all with a "meat-heavy" diet, but the fresh fruits and veggies are very good and we both eat them. And neither of us has had any "GI problems" since we've been here. It turns out we get through the entire trip problem-free (makes for a much nicer vacation).