

Inca Trek

By: Alex Montalvo

On May-2005, the Montalvos and friends ventured south of the Equator and visited Peru, the land of the Incas and the Condors. During a span of two (2) weeks we visited many memorable sights such as the Nazca Lines, Ballestas Islands, the Colca Canyon, the Uros Islands at Lake Titikaka, Cusco, the Sacred Valley, and magnificent Machu Picho.

During the first week the Montalvos and friends enjoyed a flight over the mysterious Nazca Lines, declared a Cultural Heritage of Mankind by UNESCO and believed to represent a giant astronomic calendar. A boat trip to the Ballestas Islands, Peru's counterpart of the Galapagos, followed. On the way to the islands, we appreciated a view of the "Candelabrum" figure engraved beneath the sand and used as guidance by seamen and fishermen. The dramatically carved islands are home to a diverse array of wildlife including penguins, sea lions, Peruvian boobies, and many other sea birds. Next we spent a day in the "White City" of Arequipa, which inherited its name because most residences were built using white rocks generated by the volcanoes in the area. Finally, the first week concluded with a visit to the Colca Valley and Canyon. In this area everyone enjoyed the beautiful natural scenery, up-close encounters with the magnificent condors, and a refreshing bath in the thermal pools.

The itinerary for the second week began around Puno with walking tours of the Sillustani burial ruins, an interesting stop at a typical local Indian household, some shopping, and a refreshing boat ride through Lake Titikaka with visits to the Uros Floating Islands and the Isla Taquile. The Uros were of special interest to us. The amazing floating islands as wells as the houses and boats are built by the natives using the cattail or reed vegetation that grows naturally throughout the lake.

Cusco, the Sacred Valley, Machu Picchu, and Lima were the final legs of the tour. Picturesque Cusco and the Sacred Valley offered a brilliant contrast between colonial and Inca or pre-Inca architecture. Machu Picchu was simply spectacular. The famous Inca citadel is perched on the saddle of a mountain with breathtaking views of the deep Urubamba River canyon and the lush tropical forest. Lima, on the other hand, is a large metropolis, which basks in its rich colonial history. Some of the most memorable sights in Lima included the old streets and colonial mansions, the Cathedral where the remains of the Spanish conqueror Francisco Pizarro rest, the luxurious San Francisco Basilica with its mysterious catacombs, and the traditional residential areas of Miraflores and San Isidro. Evidently, it is unnecessary to explain that the Montalvos and friends enjoyed a wonderful vacation in Peru.