

2011 PERU

Friday, September 16, 2011. I have been to Peru several times but have never seen the Nasca Lines¹; huge depictions of birds and other figures carved in the southern Peruvian desert. Thus when the National Geographic sent me an itinerary that included it², I invited Mary and Tom to do it with me.

The flight to Lima was pleasant. Since there is only a one-hour time change from Atlanta, I did not have to worry about jet lag. We were due in at midnight so I did not feel the pressure to sleep. The dinner was an excellent halibut. I also enjoyed the movie "The Lincoln Lawyer"³. I even had a two-hour nap.

My seatmate was a man from Peru who is living in the United States with his family. He was traveling to Peru to visit his grandmother. He has recently taken the citizenship test and is waiting to hear he passed. He is looking forward to voting and serving on juries!

A wheelchair took me to baggage claim and there were Mary and Tom who had flown United from Houston. We went through customs and were lucky when we pressed the button to get a green. Tom was not so lucky and had to have his bag examined.

Susan had said we probably would need a taxi to get to the airport Ramada/Costa del Sol Hotel⁴. Since an overhead walkway connects the hotel with the airport it wasn't necessary, I was tired enough that I went to bed and slept the night through. The tour starts tomorrow and we are a day early.

Saturday, September 17. After the buffet breakfast, Mary and Tom headed out to explore Miraflores⁵. I am still tired so opted to stay behind. There was free Internet at the hotel and I have several books on my I-pad.

I went to the hotel restaurant for lunch. A pasta dish came with a sprig of something as a garnish. Remembering that in Mexico City years ago, in the National museum, I had a sandwich that came with a leaf of lettuce. I removed it but it wasn't enough to remove the parasite that causes Montezuma's revenge⁶. This time I removed the garnish, but carefully did not eat the contaminated section of the dish. I hope it was okay to eat the rest for I don't really enjoy living on Cipro⁷.

We are headed for the Amazon River at Iquitos⁸. There is some dispute about whether the Amazon⁹ or the Nile is the longest river in the world. The problem is that the Amazon has many headwaters and a huge delta where it enters the Atlantic. It is 2200 miles from Iquitos to the Atlantic. Without question the Amazon has the greatest flow and fresh water can be found in the ocean out of sight of the land.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nasca_Lines

² http://www.expeditions.com/Trip_Extensions76.asp?Expedition=728&Destination=324&Extension=256

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lincoln_Lawyer_%28film%29

⁴ http://www.ramada.com/Ramada/control/Booking/property_info?propertyId=16013

⁵ [http://www.google.com/search?q=miraflores+peru&hl=en&client=firefox-a&hs=F2g&rls=org.mozilla:en-](http://www.google.com/search?q=miraflores+peru&hl=en&client=firefox-a&hs=F2g&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&prmd=imvns&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=F1yITt2JD7Pr0QHz-ZDIAQ&ved=0CEAQsAQ&biw=1105&bih=961)

[US:official&prmd=imvns&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=F1yITt2JD7Pr0QHz-ZDIAQ&ved=0CEAQsAQ&biw=1105&bih=961](http://www.google.com/search?q=miraflores+peru&hl=en&client=firefox-a&hs=F2g&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&prmd=imvns&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=F1yITt2JD7Pr0QHz-ZDIAQ&ved=0CEAQsAQ&biw=1105&bih=961)

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traveler%27s_diarrhea

⁷ I was fine.

⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iquitos>

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazon_River

2011 PERU

We had dinner at the motel. Perhaps it was the complimentary Pisco Sours¹⁰, but we lingered over dinner awhile before retiring. Gisela and John Sundhahl, Californians who are on our trip, came to our table and introduced themselves. Our wake up call is for 7 in the morning.

Sunday, September 18. At seven they marched us across to the airport so that we could check our bags and get boarding passes. Thousands of people were milling around but John, the escort, finally took Sally Goshen, in a wheelchair, and me to the handicapped line and we were checked in. The rest of the group soon joined us in the line. There are fifteen of us. Another ten will join us later in the day.

We boarded the bus for our city tour. We entered Lima through a square bordered by five red buildings. They were once apartments but now have commercial uses. We then started to see the old colonial architecture. We passed the Gran Bolivar Hotel where John and I stayed twenty-five years ago and went on to the Plaza San Martin¹¹ beyond. Jose Francisco de San Martin¹² was an Argentine general who led the struggle for independence from Spain. Independence was declared July 28, 1821.

Then we went on to the Plaza Major or Plaza de Armas¹³, with its bright yellow buildings and cathedral. The conquistador, Francisco Pizarro,¹⁴ designated the location of this square in 1535. Sonja our guide pointed out that people use bright colors to paint their buildings to make up for the fact that Lima has a permanent overcast which makes everything seem gray.

We left the bus to take photographs and Mary, Tom and I went over and entered the Cathedral. It had the most wonderful acoustics to enhance the chants of the mass that was taking place.

Then we walked a few blocks further to the Casa Aliaga¹⁵. This huge colonial house occupies a quarter city block and is right across from the Presidential Palace, guarded by an imposing tank.

A big 'A' was carved on the door and inside was amazing woodwork and old tiles. The house was built around three courtyards on top of an old Incan palace. There are only four members of the family who still live here. The rest is rented out.

The original Aliaga Count got his land and title from Pizarro because he had proved himself indispensable, by virtue of the fact he could read and write. Pizarro was illiterate. In later generations the family produced only girls and the men who married them had to take the name Aliaga so it would not die out.

We were shown the private sitting room, which could seat 12 or more people and the small chapel. The dining room was set for about twelve and we joked about how this must be where we were having lunch. I was interested in a small carved 18th century traveling chest. The owner's name was carved in the top. It was very versatile for it could hold the owners clothes on the outbound voyage, and, if need be, become his coffin coming back!

We left the house and walked through a mall of tourist goods. It was still part of the house but had been sold off when the family needed money.

Back on the bus we were taken to the Larco Herrera Museum¹⁶, which is housed in an 18th century vice-royal mansion built over a 7th century pre-Columbian pyramid. Privately owned, it contains one of the largest collections of pre-Columbian art in the world.

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pisco_Sour

¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plaza_San_Mart%C3%ADn_%28Lima%29

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jos%C3%A9_de_San_Mart%C3%ADn

¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plaza_Mayor,_Lima

¹⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francisco_Pizarro

¹⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cathedral_of_Lima

2011 PERU

There were cases of nose rings and pottery. Sonja pointed out the face jars were actually portraits and some frowned or smiled; others had oriental features showing an early link to other cultures. There was another room full of small figures of erotica.

We had lunch at the museum. A lovely lanai with trailing vines surrounded the dining room. The rest of the group has joined us. Many of them had been on the extension to Machu Picchu¹⁷.

We went to the airport and here Sonia marched us off and through security. I never had a chance to get a wheelchair and by the time I raced through the airport, had the pat down and re-stowed my computer and redressed I was completely stressed and my body was in total rebellion. It was only after four trips to the rest room that I started to feel normal again.

I sat with Peggy Doyle, from Boston, on the LAN¹⁸ plane. She is traveling alone and we became buddies on the trip. They gave us a snack that included two chocolates and Ritz crackers.

At Iquitos our naturalist guides, Luis Vela, Jean Luis Ihuaraqui and Rudy Rodriguez, met us. We were loaded into two mini buses, with a third van for the luggage, and taken two hours south of Iquitos to Nauta¹⁹ where the Delphin 2 was moored. Lindblad used to board the ship in Iquitos but too much time was spent getting to the park so now minibuses take us to Nauta.

During the ride we saw many tuk-tuks, 3-wheeled motorized rickshaws imported from China. There were also a few cars. The road we took is the major road in the Peruvian Amazon extending about 100 kilometers. You can only reach Iquitos by plane or boat. There were small villages along the way with palm frond thatched roofs. Most of the houses were open air to allow air to circulate in the hot tropical heat. The temperature today is fine, perhaps mid seventies, but that is because of recent storms.

In Nauta they have built a reception structure where the boat is moored and we were greeted with cooling fruit drinks while Mike Greenfelder, the cruise director, briefed us on the procedures aboard. Most important seems to be to heat the shower water and then afterward turn it off so it won't melt the apparatus. Also toilet paper is placed in the provided receptacle and not in the toilet!

We are here to explore the Pacaya Samira Nature Reserve²⁰. Formed in 1981, the Rio Ucayali and Rio Marañon embrace a huge rainforest, just before they give birth to the Amazon River. 5,139,680 acres (about the size of New Jersey) has been protected and it is the largest wildlife protected area in Peru.²¹ The biodiversity is enormous. Unfortunately poachers are a problem since there is no way to police the area. The guides report anything they see.

Finally we boarded the Delphin 11. I was so surprised with my room, the largest I have ever had on a ship, with a huge glass wall. Inside was every amenity. They even provide insect spray and sun block. The ship is three decks high. My room #5 is on the main deck. The dining room and more staterooms rooms are on deck 2 and deck three is open-air with a large sitting area and bar. Astern are hammock and Stairmaster machines; although why people need the later I do not know as we climb stairs all day long!

¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larco_Museum

¹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Machu_Picchu

¹⁸ http://www.lan.com/sitio_personas/country_selector.html

¹⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nauta>

²⁰ http://www.paseosamazonicos.com/pacaya_samiria_map.htm

²¹ http://www.greentracks.com/pacaya_samiria.html

2011 PERU

Dinner in the attractive dining room was delicious. We sat with Chuck and Kari Zubarik, who are from Dallas, and Sally. We started with fish kebobs and then had delicious steaks. The ice cream was made from some exotic fruit and I did not finish it.

Monday, September 19. I had a five-o'clock wake-up call and after finding my "hot" shower was to be cold I went to join the people going on the birding. Seven of us, with Rudy, Luis and Mike were loaded on the comfortable skiff that had padded seats and set off down the river. We saw one tree with many squawking parrots. The parrot likes to live in flocks and mates for life. We saw the yellow-headed caracara²² and the red-capped cardinal²³. The Amazon cardinal is only red at his head. There were hawks and woodpeckers. Luis spotted a sloth in a tree.

Then we saw the pink and gray dolphins²⁴ that were fishing near the skiff. They are almost blind and use echolocation to fish. They can grow to eight feet long. The Shamans think their oil can be a love potion and so they are endangered.

Back on the boat we had breakfast. Mary was annoyed with me because I didn't wait for them but I honestly thought they weren't getting up when I boarded the skiff. They left the ship in the last skiff.

At breakfast Mike tried to help me see through binoculars. I have always had troubles and frankly by the time I get them focused whatever I am looking at am long gone. They are also too heavy to lug around. I see pretty well with my eyeglasses. My point and shoot camera is not the best for this kind of trip but sometimes I can bring the birds into view on the computer.

The Amazon is at low water. After the snow in the Andes melts it rises perhaps 20 feet flooding vast areas. The morning walk was to climb the muddy bank to terra firma and walk a couple of trails. Mary didn't think I had the proper clothes on. I began to have second thoughts about climbing that bank and so decided to stay behind and catch up my journal and upload my pictures. I also had a nap!

At lunch the Captain introduced many of the crew. There are more than 20 of them to take care of the 25 of us.

After lunch I had a massage on the upper deck in an enclosure open to the river. Pieres (pronounced peers) spoke no English. He also didn't seem to realize that modesty should go with the massage. I clutched the towel but sometimes parts of me were exposed that would not be ordinarily. Why I should worry about modesty at my age I do not know. There is certainly nothing about my 83-year-old body to give a thrill. It was a pretty good massage. At one point he had me roll on my side while he played on my legs like a xylophone. He also had me sit while he did my shoulders. The cost was \$60.

My shower is now fixed but the water is too hot. I changed clothes and went up to the lecture that Mike gave on the Amazon.

At the recap each of the guides and Mike gave little talks about how they got involved with Eco-tourism. They all consider Lindblad the best job you could have.

Then we were back in the skiffs for two hours on the river. We went up a smaller river to the Park headquarters. Here we all ceremoniously signed the guest book. Small children came and held

²² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caracara>

²³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red-capped_Cardinal

²⁴ <http://www.google.com/search?q=amazon+pink+dolphin.&hl=en&client=firefox-a&hs=3Op&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&prmd=imvns&tbn=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=vdmITvbmBMLm0QGU1ZC3Cg&ved=0CCUQsAQ&biw=1105&bih=961>

2011 PERU

up their souvenirs. We could not patronize all of them but did buy a couple of wood toucans from one little girl.

We saw lots of birds, including some that Mike said were not common. Some of them were North American birds that had come south for the winter. One highlight was to see two sloths in a dead tree and they were moving!

There was a free cocktail party and we all clustered about the bar. Many had Pisco sours but I decided on wine instead. The wine is very expensive on the ship, about \$10 a glass.

At dinner I sat at a table with Peggy Doyle. In the course of the conversation it appears we may have both been on my first trip to China in 1978. After dinner the crew band entertained us, which was very good. They even encouraged a Congo line of passengers to dance.

Tuesday, September 20, 2011. I heard the 5.30 wake-up call but I was still tired and not ready to get up. Mary was the only one of the three of us to go. At breakfast Peggy and I discussed our trips to China but it seems we were on different sailings. Her trip started in the Philippines. Mine in Japan. We both remember the wonderful adventure to be where the tourists were the novelty and the people were just getting over the Mao years. China has changed much since then.

Then it was into the skiffs. As we entered the Nautocano River we passed a native fisherman who proudly announced he was 83 and still able to fish. We went up the small tributary, narrow, filled with floating water hyacinths and snags. The thick jungle was close on either side. We saw many birds and the yellow-headed caracaras were everywhere. Hawks and Kingfishers, there are so many varieties and sizes. The pygmy kingfisher is about the size of a finch. High in one tree we spotted two toucans.

There were huge walking fig trees, which grow much like a banyan with long tentacles that reach to the ground. The only problem was that it got quite warm and Primo could not run the skiff very fast for fear of damaging our propeller on the underwater snags. I was very tired when we got back to the ship.

In the late afternoon I went ashore with Mary at San Francisco where they had a shopping mall of native crafts. I was disappointed we did not see the village itself. Mary bought some baskets and a bag to help the native economy.

Wednesday, September 21. This morning we went ashore at Sapuena, a native village. It would have been more interesting if I hadn't had a dizzy spell when I disembarked the skiff. I sat awhile while Jean Luis described a house and how it was made and then I felt a bit better as we went on to the communal oven and saw the huge mortar and pestle made of ironwood. At the next house a native woman told us of her life. She had had 15 children and was 63 years old. Her whole life has been in the village although about once a year she goes to a big town like Nauta where we embarked the Delphin 2. I don't think she has ever been as far as Iquitos. Her beguiling grin showed an amazing lack of teeth.

For some reason my cane stool fell over. I don't know if it was the dizziness or not but when we got into the kitchen I was dizzy again. Mary brought me back to the ship and in the air-conditioning I began to feel better. I managed to go to the lounge for the cooking demonstration. Juane is a rice and chicken dish, mixed with olives, hard-boiled eggs, cumin, cilantro and garlic, cooked in marantacia leaves. We had some for lunch and it was very good. Then I had a nap.

At four we prepared to go out in the skiffs but had to wait until a rain shower passed through. They only took two skiffs for 22 of us and had to bring a chair out of the dining room for one to sit on. Jean Luis was our guide as we went up a small River to "Demon Lake" which was really not a lake but a wider portion of the river. We didn't see as much as on previous stops but did see a

2011 PERU

swallow tailed hawk and some Tinamou²⁵, a chicken sized bird more commonly heard than seen. We got a glimpse of some spider monkeys and the usual kingfishers and caracara. It was almost dark when we got back to the ship.

We had cocktails with John and Geisela in the lounge. Mike gave a photo presentation pointing out things we should be doing with our cameras. The ship band entertained us.

Thursday, September 22. The wakeup call was later today, at 6. I went on Jean Luis' skiff. He was wonderful, making sure that everyone saw everything. He is so enthusiastic that you can't help but get enthusiastic too. We saw many new things and even a five-foot caiman. It is unusual to see one in the daytime. It was probably the best trip we have had.

Three hours in the boat is a bit much and I was very tired when we got back to the ship. I skipped lunch and had a three-hour snooze before Mary woke me and suggested I go up to the fruit demonstration. Rudy had a number of the tropical fruits to taste and he explained the medicinal use of each as well.

Then the heavens opened and it rained cats and dogs. There was a slight delay but then with everyone in parkas we set out again to explore the Zapote River. It wasn't too long before we could discard the darned parkas.

We saw the usual assortment of birds as we went up the river. There was one stop at a village but I did not make the muddy climb up to see it. Rudy guided the skiff into the water hyacinths and found some bugs for us to look at: a ladybug just like the ones at home, and a beige colored grasshopper.

We waited for the sun to go down and Rudy got out a light and started swinging it to see what he could find. We disturbed a number of roosting birds and then he found some caiman eyes gleaming in the light. He even reached in the water and plucked one small caiman up for us to see. They look exactly like alligators to my untrained eye and I did not wish to get any closer to it. I was in the front of the skiff and it was two feet away! The strange thing was that it didn't seem upset at all. Rudy dropped it back in the water and on we went.

A couple of fishing bats passed near the skiff. I have been on night tours like this before and frankly I was disappointed in this one.

We sat with Mike at dinner and heard about his travels with Lindblad and others. He is going on vacation in Cuzco after his cruise ends.

Friday, September 23. We had a 6:30 departure to explore the Pacaya River. Since we are re-entering the preserve we had to sign the guest book at the Ranger station. This was the first Ranger station built in 1982.

Jean Luis started pointing out the birds: a chestnut fronted Macaw and parrots in a dead tree. We saw some more sloths. They eat the leaves of the sarcocolla tree and it acts like a narcotic, which makes the animals move so slowly. We spied an iguana in a tree.

We saw fishermen taking their fish traps to market. They keep the fish alive in a cage and push it like a barge with their skiff. We watched a large troop of squirrel monkeys and saw a festive parrot.

Jean Luis was trying to show us an anaconda and we went up one narrow creek to look. The stream was clogged with water hyacinths and other plants. There was a banyan on the shore that blocked the light and it was sort of spooky. But alas no anaconda was to be seen.

²⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tinamou>

2011 PERU

And at last it was breakfast time and we rafted up the skiffs on the shore and the men donned white gloves and served us food just as if we were on the ship. One feature of course was the unusual plates. I have seen so many types of plates on this trip and I wonder where they keep them all. On the plate was a doll decoration. Two types of sandwich followed skewered fruit. The one made of sweet potato bread had ham in it. The other had egg in it. They were both a bit dry for my taste but thinking of where I was it was good. All of it was washed down with the exotic fruit juices we have at breakfast each morning. I do miss my orange juice but have become used of melon and passion fruit juices. There was even coffee for those who wanted it.

In the afternoon there was an opportunity to go swimming, but the murky waters, and the unseen critters dissuaded me. Those that went said it was wonderful.

Sunday, September 25. I went on the early morning skiff ride but we did not see much that was new. I am pretty skiffed out. The morning walk had a hard rain shower and they came back looking like drowned rats so I was glad I missed it. The afternoon walk also got rained out.

We were invited to have mud baths given by the naturalists. The mud is supposed to be a great antioxidant. I decided I would rather not. The pictures of my cruise mates covered in mud were very amusing. Again they said it was wonderful.

I did have a chance to talk with Rudy and he identified my pictures. When he saw my dolphin picture he said, "Wow, looks like National Geographic!" The point and shoot camera is woefully inadequate for this trip but I do get lucky sometimes.

Mike asked us each to donate a few pictures and he gave a slide show.

Dinner was a barbecue. I wasn't overly impressed with the meats, which were tough, and the corn didn't even look like corn. Large kernels, and the worst part it was served cold. However the ship band entertained us. Carlos the bartender on the marimba, Pablo, our room steward on the 2nd guitar, Rual, the chef who is so talented with his guitar and various wind instruments, and lastly, Luis, one of the naturalists, who sits on and plays a box! Juan Luis got me up to dance but I became very winded after we started the conga line.

Sunday, September 25. The last day. One last skiff ride took us to where we could view the amazing Amazon water lilies²⁶. I really had to struggle to get up the mud bank, and then the walk was not easy though muddy woods where planks had been placed so we would not sink in the mud. However it was quite a sight to see. They are a foot across!

Then there was the problem of paying the bill. The machine was not getting a signal so I had to wait, but at last it was done and we had our last lunch.

Then it was announced that we had a problem with our steering cable, so we were offloaded into the skiffs to get us back to Nauta in time for the waiting buses.

Near the airport we stopped to tour the Amazonian Manatee Rescue Center²⁷. Here they have a number of manatees being prepared to be released into the wild. Two babies are still on bottles and it was a thrill to be able to feed them. Their sweet heads were close enough to touch. The manatee is very important for they eat the water hyacinths that clog the creeks. Unfortunately the natives like to eat them. The center releases them into the preserve with chips so that their movement can be checked. So far all is well with the first group of five.

²⁶ <http://www.squidoo.com/Amazonwaterlily>

²⁷ <http://www.ikitos.com/acobia-dwazoo/acobiaEN06.htm>

2011 PERU

We flew back to Lima and Lindblad was there to transfer us to the Costa del Sol/Ramada. Mary Tom and I used our free coupons for Pisco sours and had sandwiches.

Monday, September 26. There are five of us taking the tour to the Nasca Lines: Mary Ann and Bill Fallon, from San Diego, Tom, Mary and myself.

Yanina met us a little late, at 7.20, and we left for the three-hour trip to Pisco²⁸. The road was not scenic, one scruffy town after another interspersed with the huge sand dunes that fill the coast of Peru. Many squatters have come and erected shacks but Yanina tells us they have jobs and the government provides them with water and electricity.

As we drove south it became more and more dry and when we entered Pisco province we saw plantations of artichokes, asparagus and onions, most marked for the export market to the US. Because it is desert, they are watered from the underground aquifer. However the aquifer is being stretched too far and the people now have their water rationed to three hours in the morning and three in the evening.

We arrived at the Pisco airport and then cooled our heels for over an hour. They told us they were getting a bigger plane but this wasn't so. After a long wait we five, plus 6 Chinese tourists were loaded into the very cramped three-abreast airplane. It was pretty miserable. We had all been weighed and then they assigned our seats to balance the load. I was lucky to have a window seat where I could see but Mary had a middle seat and couldn't see much of anything. The Chinese girl next to her was airsick! Tom was too tall to look out of his window easily.

The Nasca people²⁹ who made the lines we have come to see flourished in southern Peru from 100 to 800 AD. However they apparently had no written language so not much is known about them. They carved enormous figures in the sand of the Peruvian desert but no one knows how they did it or why. The archaeologists believe it must have been a religious center for they have found bones and broken pottery, probably from human sacrifice, but no remnants of habitation have been found.

We flew for over half an hour just to get to the lines. The pilot would call out, "Look under the wing," as he spiraled down first on the right and then the left to see them. It was a very brief look but what we could see was amazing. Birds, even a figure that looks like an astronaut, and a monkey were there. There were even geometrical figures, but these are thought to have been made later. Then we flew over a half hour back.

The ride was disappointing. Lindblad should have bought enough seats so each of us had a window at the very least. The plane would have been a lot more comfortable if we had not been crammed in.

Shortly afterwards we were taken to the Hotel La Hacienda Bahia de Paracas³⁰, right on the water. My single room does not see the water but Mary and Tom have a balcony and view so I hope it makes up for the hard time they had on the plane. Mine has the advantage of being right off the lobby with no stairs to climb.

We finally had lunch (It was almost five) in the dining room. I had asparagus soup followed by a beef dish cooked in wine, with fruit cup for desert. The best part was the Chilean wine. Then it was early to bed.

²⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pisco,_Peru

²⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nasca_culture

³⁰ <http://www.hoteleslahacienda.com/>

2011 PERU

Tuesday, September 27. We started early to go to the Ballestas Islands³¹. We boarded launches and headed out along the peninsula admiring the 'Candelabra'³² carved in the cliff. There is debate about this carving; some believing it is even older than the Nasca Lines. Others think it might have been done by the sailors who came with San Martin in 1805, for there is a small pyramid like the Masonic emblem of the sculpture.

We went on to the islands, which are volcanic in origin. Bare rocky island, they have huge view holes through them, carved by the sea and wind. On the islands are countless birds. I have never seen so many birds in one spot! There was everything from the Humboldt penguins³³ to pelicans. There are the Guano Cormorants³⁴ who produce more of this nutrient than any other bird. There was the gray-footed booby. I have been on many bird tours but this exceeded them all, partly because of the sheer numbers of birds but also because I have never seen so many varieties of birds roosting together. We cruised in and around the islands for over a half hour marveling at the site.

Atop some of the islands there were workers collecting the guano. This is an important crop for Peru as it makes one of the best organic fertilizers. Mary did a little collecting on her own and it made a mess on her parka. Also on the rocks were colonies of sea lions. It was an amazing trip.

Back in the van, Yanina took us to the Paracas National Preserve, a large area being saved for its beauty and other features. The area was under water millenniums ago so our first stop was to look at fossils in the sand.

Then we went on to the "Cathedral". This picturesque rock formation was destroyed in the 2007³⁵ earthquake but it is still magnificent to view with the surf coming in from the sea. Everywhere the coast is spectacular. We saw some sandpipers but the bird life was unexciting after the Ballestas.

One place where we stopped people leave little cairns of stones so that they will come back in their afterlife. Yanina pointed out hers and Mary left a small one.

We had lunch at the brand new Hilton hotel and then set off for Ica³⁶, the capitol of the district. We toured the archaeological museum. I was so impressed with the Nasca pottery³⁷. They had a way of polishing it so that the 1500-year old pottery looked as if it had just come out of some modern pottery. We toured the whole museum learning about the various civilizations of Peru up to the time of the Incas.

I was sorry to see two exhibits where thieves had made off with some of the ancient fabrics with which the people wrapped their dead. The dead were placed in a fetal position and then, depending on the rank of the individual, wrapped in fabrics. Some only had two layers but others had five or six. The mummies were interesting. One was a mother that had died in childbirth. The baby was buried in a separate bowl. X-rays shows that these people suffered from terrible diseases. The ancient people did not mummify their deceased as the Egyptians did. They wrapped the body first in cotton to absorb the moisture and then the other wrappings to protect it. The dryness of the desert did the rest of the work of mummifying.

³¹ http://www.go2peru.com/gal_ballestas.htm

³² <http://www.redbubble.com/people/paris69/art/1921521-candelabra-ballestas-islands-peru>

³³ Humboldt penguins

³⁴ <http://www.flickr.com/photos/28092414@N03/3922478907/>

³⁵ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3oKtpx1WifA&NR=1>

³⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ica,_Peru

³⁷ http://www.google.com/search?q=nazca+pottery&hl=en&client=firefox-a&hs=BD&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&prmd=imvns&tbn=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=NCuKTV_LGqjH0AGwxbj_DA&ved=0CEcQsAQ&biw=1145&bih=945

2011 PERU

Then we went to see the Huacachina Desert Oasis, a small lake that used to be a hot spring with therapeutic benefits but now is just a small fresh water lake where you can rent paddleboats. Beyond you can see the huge sand dunes.

We went on to an old winery where they still stomp on the grapes at a big festival every fall (March-April). Then we saw an ancient wooden press that is still used. Most of the juice is then distilled into Pisco a high alcoholic drink that is the basis for the national Pisco Sour drink. They make a red wine that I was not too impressed with and white wine is not made because the fermentation takes too long and the wine spoils in the heat.

It was a long day but so interesting!

Wednesday, September 28. We checked out of the hotel about 9:30 and went to the sand dunes where we were strapped into sand buggies, armed with goggles, and set out to tour the dunes. They are almost as impressive as the ones in Namibia. I did not realize what we were doing and all of a sudden we were on a sort of roller coaster ride where our driver banked off the dunes and plunged over them. I held on for dear life feeling the sand gave a light sandpapering of my face. I didn't dare open my mouth or hardly breathe. At last we stopped and Mary, Tom and MaryAnn got on sand boards and coasted down the slope. I remained in the buggy. Just getting in and out of the thing would be more than I would enjoy. This was my least favorite part of the trip but the others seemed to get a kick out of it.

Then we drove the Pan-American highway to Casa Andina Chíncha for lunch. Two hours more we came to Pachacamac³⁸. This was a huge pre-Inca complex, probably a religious site. It has been largely excavated and you can see the pyramids and ancient walls and roads. I did not climb to the top of the pyramid with the others. I think I did that many years ago on a Travcoa tour. One area for the women has been reconstructed. The guide was a bit vague on this but I believe they sacrificed the women.

I was so happy to get back to the Ramada. It is time to go home. We had sandwiches and wine in the hotel dining room and planned our last day.

Thursday, September 29. After a leisurely morning we caught a cab to Miraflores and the Larcomar shopping center³⁹. Our goal was the small gold museum supposed to be there, but we found it had closed. However the shopping center was a sight to see. It is built into the side of a cliff with spectacular views of the surf pounding the coastline. On three or four levels it has everything from amusement arcades to shops. We selected the Portofino Restaurant⁴⁰ for our farewell dinner. I had a delicious cebiche⁴¹, marinated raw fish, and we spit a desert.

Our taxi returned to take us back to the airport and we rested until 9 PM when it was time to go. We loaded our luggage on a cart and took the overhead walkway across to check in. The Sesniaks were flying United and got checked-in with no trouble. However it was not so good with Delta. They did get me a chair but there was no one to push it. I waited about a half hour until I could check my bags and then waited probably 15 minutes for someone to take me through security. Finally I was able to join Mary and Tom in the lounge.

Friday, September 30. My plane left at 12:35 AM for the seven-hour flight to Atlanta. I skipped dinner and was asleep shortly after we left the runway. It was nice to be home with no jet lag.

³⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pachacamac>

³⁹ <http://www.larcomar.com/informaci%C3%B3n+tur%C3%ADstica.aspx?language=en-US>

⁴⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sb4fE30wp2o>

⁴¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceviche>