



ANOTHER UNFORGETTABLE SOUTH AMERICAN WONDER

The Lost City of Machu Picchu

DO YOU LIKE MYSTERIES AND SECRETS? GOOSE-bumpy legends and spooky who-done-its? Well, you should come with us in March 2017 to **MACHU PICCHU**. Perched on a mountaintop in the Peruvian Andes, this 600-year-old archaeological heart-stopper has got it ALL! And we still can't quite believe that we've SEEN it ...

On our early-morning flight from Lima, we caught glimpses below of ever-higher peaks and ever-deeper gorges. Our destination, **Cuzco**, lay spread-out in one of those. Home to 400,000 hardy souls (including **Quechua Indians**, decked out in gaudy clothes and hats), it was once capital of the Incan Empire. But today its cobblestone streets and plazas are trod mostly by tourists (like us) who breeze through en route to Machu Picchu.

Cuzco sits at a cloud-scraping 3200 metres – a full two miles above sea-level! And, within seconds of getting off the plane at that unusually high altitude, we felt like concrete-blocks had somehow been tied to our shoes. We grabbed a quick breakfast – plus a cup of medicinal coca-tea – then piled aboard a small coach for a long drive to the **Sacred Valley** of the Incas.

Two days later, we were still in the Sacred Valley, but on a tourist-train now, rock'n'rolling through heart-stopping, neck-straining gorges. Arriving in **Aguas Calientes** (a rumpty little town in the misty cloud-forest) we rode a minibus up a zig-zaggy, edge-of-cliff dirt

road (22 hairpin-bends!) to a magical, OMG, pinch-me-please sight. Laid out up there at top of the world, on a grassy saddle between impossibly high crags, was the famous '**Lost City of the Incas**' ...

Six hundred years ago, at the height of the Incan Empire, Machu Picchu was destined to be a bustling centre of culture, cultivation and worship. But this remote city-of-stone was never finished – and today it's an empty shell. Narrow stairways, archways and alleyways wind around houses, town squares, temples, towers, sacred sundials and astrological sites (all missing their roofs) ... and near-

perfect blockwork (including a still-working water system) bears silent witness to masons long gone.

In the late 1400s, something awful happened – and Machu Picchu was abandoned! Nobody knows why, for sure. Best guess? The city's leaders got news that the Spaniards had landed down on the coast – and while Incan warriors raced to drive off the invaders, the remaining population simply melted into

the jungle. The secret of Machu Picchu was buried with the (eventually defeated) Incas – and no-one lived here again until an explorer, **Hiram Bingham**, cleared away the encroaching overgrowth and exposed this mind-boggling sight in 1911.

We puffed and panted and clambered all over the ruins, our imaginations running riot and our cameras smoking hot. And, after lunch, we did more of the same.

An unforgettable day? You've gotta believe it! And the '**Lost City of the Incas**' is calling us back for more ...

