

## Saturday, 16 April 2011

Through Lima customs by about 9:30 p.m. A driver from Hostel Mami Panchita was waiting for us outside security, as was our friend Frank. Frank worked on our basement before returning to his family in Lima five months ago. We met his wife and two girls, who are adorable. All 10 of us piled into the hostel's van, got there by about 10:30, and then ordered pizza (only thing open). Marx tried dessert first: one of the "white chocolates" left with a towel on each bed, labeled jabón. Yep, soap. Being so tired made this twice as funny, one of those things she'll never live down. The hostel was fine -- all five of us in one room was tight, and the girls complained about Scott's snoring, but it didn't seem so bad to me!

## Sunday, 17 April

Breakfast and then back to the airport for our flight to Cusco. Bag checking trauma for Scott, so used to NOT checking his bag, but the flight crew was adamant. No worries in the end, as it was a short flight with no connections and our bags smiled at us from the Cusco claim area. Mercedes (owner of Hostal Girasole) gave me a big hug outside security and then drove us 15 minutes to the hostel not far from Plaza de Armas. We were greeted with maté de coca (coca leaf tea), on which we relied tremendously throughout our stay at the high altitude (3,600 meters or nearly 12,000 feet). Yes, this is the coca leaf. Yes, chewing it numbs your mouth. We had already been downing diamox to prevent altitude sickness, which worked well for me, Mo, Scott, and (mostly) Satch.

Dropped our bags in our rooms (huffing up to the third floor) and headed out to explore the city. This is the alley in which our hostel was located.



To get to the main plaza, we had to leave the alley and walk single file down a balance beam of a sidewalk on Calle Recoleta. People would dart in front of the one-way traffic to pass us. Held the kids back from doing that. We didn't see anyone get smashed, but that seemed more like last second magic spells lifting pedestrians than driver's intentions.

The main plaza was much more roomy.



Loads of laundry places, stray dogs. Found some chocolate-covered coca leaves in a store on the plaza.



Street signs in Hebrew, Spanish, and Quechuan throughout the city. Learned later that many Israelis tour Peru.

Marxe and Satch weren't feeling the altitude's effects yet and tore up this Exorcist-beating stairway. Scott, Mo, and I watched safely from a distance.



Walked back toward the plaza and found a restaurant. Scott finally got his long-sought-after cuy (Guinea pig), which he had yearned for since Ecuador, but I tell you, the rest of us could have waited the rest of our lives without seeing it. We all moved away from him and tried desperately to keep our eyes averted. Marxe glanced by mistake and promptly lost her appetite. Apparently the dead animal was laid out like a skinned rat. Maybe it was the combination of the altitude and the Pisco Sour, but I kept picturing a Ralph Steadman cartoon coming to life. UGH.

## Monday, 18 April

A happily crowing rooster awoke us, creating a vengeful-of-all-poultry Mo. It *was* pretty loud. Felt decent at first, but soon Marxe was on the road to crappy. Lots of maté de coca. We pushed on, and passed the main plaza, where Semana Santa activities were starting outside and in the church.



We planned to climb to Saqsayhuaman, a fort in ruins atop the city, but made it only as far as the San Cristobal church (really was a pretty steep climb). Marxe was fading fast, so we hung out there for a while.





A family and their llama were hanging out also. From up there, we could see one of the many messages carved into the mountainsides of the Sacred Valley.



Descended back to the city, and found some choclo (gigantic corn that tastes somewhat like yucca) y queso that hit the spot. While the procession for Semana Santa continued, we grabbed some down time at the hotel.

Mid afternoon, I found a reference to a chocolate museum in town, and Marx suddenly felt able to move again. Satch and Mo perked up as well. So off we went. Caught up in the religious procession, with a HUGE crowd. Mercedes told us that more than 10,000 locals arrived from the surrounding countryside to celebrate. Took us a while to get to ChocoMuseo, but when we finally did at about 6pm, mmmmmmm. Served perfect home-made hot chocolate among the exhibits. We all felt much better.



ChocoMuseo offers two-hour chocolate-making workshops: we reserved spaces for Friday morning.

Back on the streets, it was even more crowded. Scott got meat on a stick, the girls got earrings. An impromptu street market opened up, including many

food stands where older women sat creating soups and meals, dipping a spoon, tasting, and then sticking the spoon back into the pot to stir some more.

How many hundreds of years has this same Semana Santa procession and street market taken place? We pictured the past to be much the same as we saw it that evening. Less electronics, but otherwise the same.

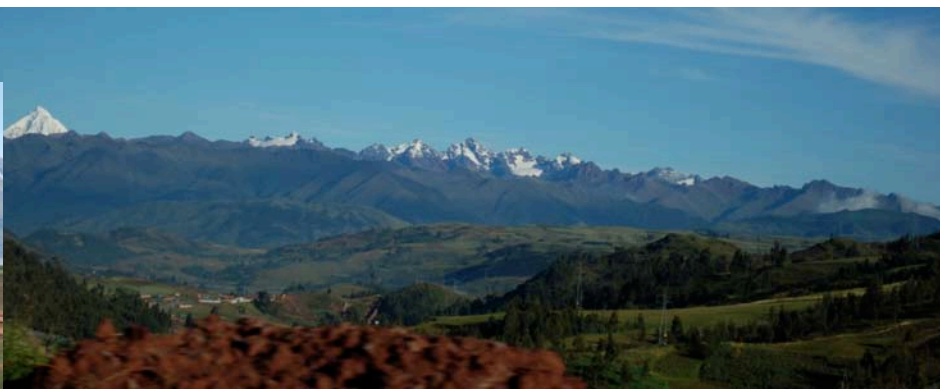
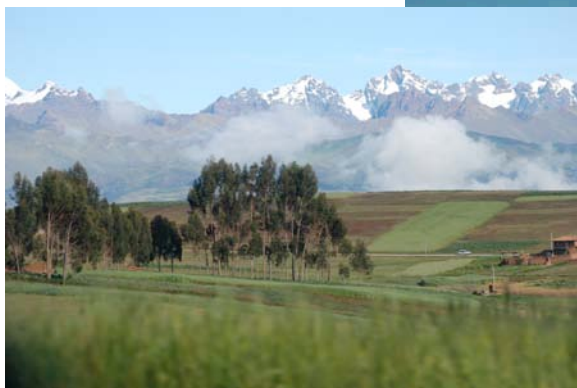




Back at the hotel, drip drip, dripping shower, but it was hot!

## Tuesday, 19 April

Woke up really early, yet the rooster was earlier. To get to Machu Picchu, you need to take a train from Cusco to a town at the base of the MP mountain called Aguas Calientes. However, the train tracks were washed out from Cusco to Ollantaytambo (about half way), so we took a large van/small bus from the Cusco train station to Ollantaytambo. This was a 90 minute ride through gorgeous countryside.



In Ollanta, we boarded a train with windows in the ceiling.



Scott, Marx, and Mo were assigned seats in one coach, and Satch and I in another.



Satch played on the iPad much of the time, but I couldn't stop looking out the windows. So much to see. Scott shot tons of pictures.



The train followed the Urubamba River. You could also see the river up on MP. Major rapids!



We arrived in Aguas Calientes (about 1,000 meters below Cusco) late morning. A guy from our hotel was there to meet us, which was great, because the town is much like MP in that there's steps and ramps everywhere. Our hostel, the RupaWasi lodge, was up the hill, and our cabin (the treehouse room), was up even more stairs. Geez. But it was pretty cool. We had been scheduled to go to MP the next day before our 1:30pm train (trains were completely booked). Our brilliant idea: switch things around and go to MP immediately that morning, when we had the whole afternoon ahead of us. Fortunate that Mercedes (back in Cusco, who had arranged the transportation and guide for MP) was able to reach another guide and move everything so quickly. We got a packed lunch from the hotel and headed to the bus, grabbing some mosquito repellent on the way. Supposedly those hellacious biter insects we met in Ecuador feasted on MP tourists.

Bus ride up the mountain. From here on, I kept thinking about my Mom, and her reactions to the bus reeling around the hairpin curves high above the valley and river, passing other buses on the less-than-single-lane road, etc.

When we exited the bus at MP, we met our tour guide, Eddie. He immediately ingratiated himself with Mo by commenting about how tall she was. No food allowed (they forgot to tell us that when we got our lunches), so a side trip to the storage hut before entering MP officially.

Eddie was great. We learned tons. Climbed sooo many steps. Many pictures.



Hiram Bingham was the American who 'discovered' Machu Picchu on 24 July 1911. Of course, locals had known about it for a long time. Because of the centennial, MP is even more booked than usual.



When Bingham came upon MP, he thought it was the lost city of the Incas, but it wasn't. The lost city is still lost, and best guesses are that it's somewhere west in the jungle.







This was the nobles' housing. Servants and others were housed about 150 meters away on another part of the mountain.



The Room of the Three Windows and the Temple of the Sun, is between the nobles' and servants' housing, above the agricultural sector.



Climbing to the Temple of the Sun. Climb climb climb.



Incas organized the tiered terraces to plant crops.

Everything was built so well and stones cut to fit together so perfectly that the site has survived hundreds of earthquakes since the 1400s.



Mo exiting the Temple of the Condor.



Mo and Marx believe that this stone formation on the opposite mountain was carved to signal the true lost city's direction (where the Incas moved all their riches upon abandoning MP after 100 years).



Chinchillas and llamas roam free.







Isn't this cool?



Marxe was always up ahead climbing.



Satch visiting the servants' area.

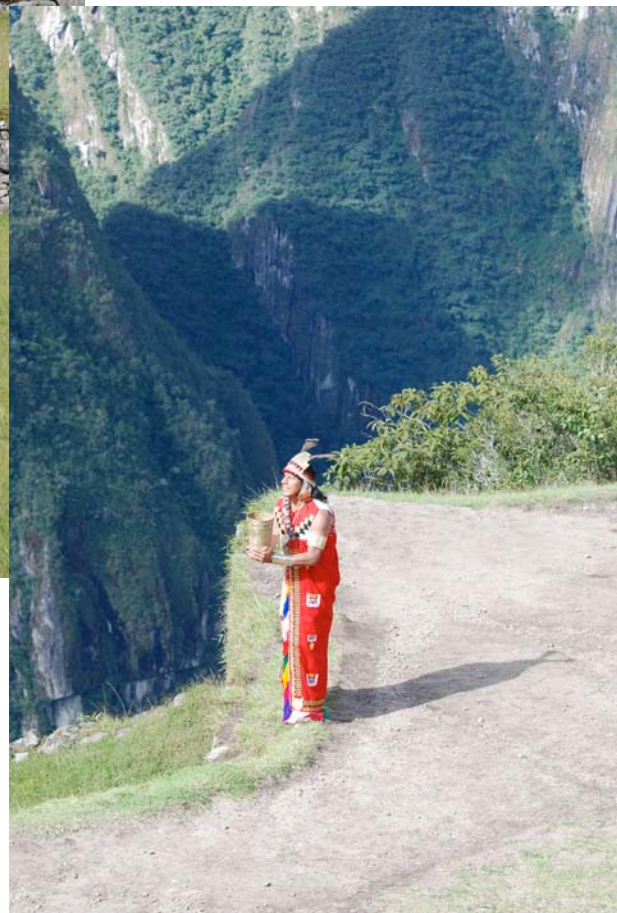




After Eddie left us to explore on our own, we came across this re-creation of an Incan ceremony that was being filmed for some commercial. The king certainly acted regal. Impressive.



Late afternoon, we started back down the mountain. Scarfed our box lunches on the bus ride. Scott took this picture of the river and train from the bus.



In Aguas Calientes, we climbed back to our treehouse cabin and rested for a little before walking around town, which is really just a tourist trap, but has an OK market. Then we had our mucho bizzarro dinner experience at El Feliz Indio. Here's our review, posted on [TripAdvisor.com](#).

First, we were given two separate tables, one by a waitress and one by the owner. We took the table upstairs because the owner had given it to us, and we assumed that was the best move. After 15 minutes with no service, Scott went downstairs. He asked a waitress to bring up 4 aguas sin gas and 1 agua con gas and grabbed menus. Five minutes later, the waitress brought up 4 aguas con gas and 1 agua sin gas. OK, no big deal. But then we waited for another 15 minutes, and she never came back, so we left some money for the water, traipsed downstairs, and opened the door to leave.

The owner, who had seated us 30 minutes earlier, followed us out and asked us how the meal was. When we told him what happened, he apologized profusely and offered to buy us dinner. OK, cool! So back in we went. The owner took a "Reserved" sign off a table and sat us next to the fireplace, then offered to light a fire. We said sure and he promptly disappeared.

New waters came. Menus came. Shortly after, a basket of bread came. Some rolls were warm, some cold: were we being served leftovers from a previous customer? Anyway, a new waitress took our order while the owner came by and said (in Spanish) to give us all only one plate each. We didn't quite understand this, but figured maybe the people for whom the



table had been reserved were expected. When we questioned the waitress about it, she said not to worry, and that the owner was crazy. She left, without taking Scott's order. We got her back, and Scott ordered ceviche. She said ceviche would take 25 minutes, which was fine. The appetizers arrived reasonably promptly. Then, about 40 minutes after the appetizers, four meals came. The owner came by and asked how all was, and we told him that we didn't get the ceviche. He said not to worry, that the ceviche takes 25 minutes. Then he ran off before we could tell him that we had ordered at least 45 minutes earlier.

The waitress brought tortilla chips and a side to go with ceviche, but no ceviche. No fire in the fireplace either. On the other hand, they did bring Satch's meal twice! Dessert (which was ordered as part of the three-course meal at the beginning) was fine. The food itself was fine. Nothing to write home about, but passable. Then we sat for about 25 minutes while waitresses and the owner passed by again and again. Finally, four of us rose and left the restaurant. Scott stayed to settle, but we didn't expect to pay anything since the owner had promised us a free meal. Nevertheless, yes, you guessed it, he was presented with a bill. When he remarked that the ceviche never came, the waitress said "I know." The bill, our payment, and change back all happened in front of the owner buying us dinner.

Scott says the owner made Basil Fawty look like a Nobel laureate. It didn't seem for lack of trying, just incompetence. As the meal progressed and screw ups accumulated, we started laughing about it amongst ourselves. At one point, we wondered if we were on Candid Camera and if this was all part of some joke. When we left the first time, we were irritated. But after the owner invited us back and one thing after another went wrong, we became more amused than irritated and started trying to guess what would happen next.

Climbed stairs yet again. Sleep.

### Wednesday, 20 April

Slept late cause this town's rooster was muffled. The view out Scott and my window on the upper floor of the treehouse was pretty incredible.



Kids slept on the first floor, down a steep staircase.



Nice hot showers, good breakfast. The hostel staff promised to bring our bags to the train station later so we could check out the market, large and touristy. Scott sought carved-stone Incan objects, which included the culture's three important animals (condor, puma, snake) and other Incan symbols. The first ones we saw weren't made so well, but word got out in the market so another lady found us and brought us to her stall. Scott bought a natural stone sculpture 20 cm tall as well as a hat for his burned scalp, Marxer got a hand-made parcheesi board, Mo earrings. Throughout Peru, we found the people to be warm and helpful (most did not speak English), but vendors were very aggressive (more like Thailand than Ecuador). The girls learned how to say 'no, gracias' very well.



We purchased snacks for the train, and our hostel guy brought the bags to the station. The IncaRail employees were very sweet, trying to get us all on the same coach this time. They did, but at opposite ends. No big deal. Mo and I sat together this time and we created the plot for a novel about an Incan runner (we learned on MP that runners on foot relayed messages from MP to Cusco within a day!), his partner, the Incan queen, etc. Maybe we'll write it someday. Also during this ride, we discovered that Satch likes Inca Cola (Duh. It's sweet).

Arrived in Ollantaytambo, but apparently our van driver never did. After 45 minutes and calls to Mercedes in Cusco, a shady guy tried to charge us something like 500 soles for the ride, but we found Mario Cruz who would take 75 soles for the five of us in his roomy van with five rows of seats. Catch was that we had to wait while he tried to get more riders from the next train; but if we gave him 130 soles, he'd take us right away. Okely dokely. When we returned to Hostal Girasoles, Mercedes was apologetic and promised to reimburse our van cost. Meanwhile, on the beautiful ride to Cusco, we saw a double rainbow. Mario was very nice, and we all decided that he would drive us around the Sacred Valley the next day for a set fee close to \$100.



After a quick rest in the rooms (switched from our first stay, and not as comfortable), we walked through town to a typical hole-in-the-wall restaurant. Chocla con queso, papa huicainas (boiled potato with peanut-y sauce), small pizza for Satch, meat thing for Scott. Back at the hotel, we watched "Los Simpsons" en español and crashed.

### Thursday, 21 April

Up early and girls not hungry. Met Mario Cruz and his 10-year-old son Diego (out of school for Semana Santa) down the single lane street at 9am. Mercedes suggested we follow a circuit through the Sacred Valley that Mario knew well. Soon after leaving Cusco, the rompás muebles (I think that's what they're called) became really annoying. Speed bumps. All over the place. You'll be driving along this road (they're all two or less lanes) with nothing for miles around and then, bam! A speed bump. Then another few. Then you don't hit any for 10 or so kilometers. No signage, just these speed bumps in the middle of nowhere. Mario is obviously used to them and much more patient than I would have been (was).

During our drive, we passed many small houses/huts made of mud brick as well as laborers coming in from the fields.

Less than an hour on the road, Satch announced that she had thrown up in the back seat. Marxie had already made the trip 'official' by vomiting the second day in Cusco, and she wasn't feeling so hot at this point; but Satch was fine after she threw up. Poor Mario's van....





Fortunately, we arrived in Chinchero soon after. Tickets required for all the sites we planned to visit that day, so we got one-fits-all boletos for me, Scott, and Mo. Other two kids were free.

Chinchero isn't so much a market as it is a village. Inside many of the homes/stores, women (they were all women) demonstrated their crafts, sold their goods. A group of women invited us into their courtyard and showed us how they create textile products, from using local roots for soap to clean the wool after it's shaved off a lamb or alpaca; to dyeing the wool with herbs, flowers, and cactus for color; to weaving the wool into patterns representative of the Incan and Quechuan lifestyle. After the whole demonstration, we couldn't leave without buying, which is what they intended I guess. Mo and I got fingerless gloves, Satch a bird whistle.

We then climbed around town and ended in the main plaza, where a small market was held.



One edge of the plaza looked out at the ruins on the mountain.



Then back in the van, which Mario had cleaned. Very grateful.

Throughout the Sacred Valley, you could see earthquake fault lines slithering through mountains, rock, and streams. The ground was one level, then a chasm in the earth, and then a whole other plateau 2-3 meters below. It's very cool.

We also saw many of these wind vanes atop tiled roofs. Pigs and bulls.





On to Moray, a pair of circular amphitheater ruins cut 30 meters into the mountain. The site brought to mind a gathering place, but we later read that Incas created the plateaus for agricultural reasons -- to test different crops at different altitudes.



At the very bottom.

The agriculture thing makes much more sense because climbing

down and up into this thing was not easy! Big steps.



Down at the bottom, Scott decided he was hungry for a protein bar (which was back in the car) and Marxe decided she had to pee. We climbed up to a bunch of bushes, and I held Marxe while she pulled her pants down, but then she almost fell, and we couldn't stop laughing for quite a while. Made it to the bathroom at the very top. Satch had to go but hung back because she couldn't deal with the no-seat/liquid-covered-floor.

Onto Urubamba for lunch at an outdoor garden --typico food of arroz, avocado, etc. Mo was experiencing difficulty with the vegetarian-Passover thing (she has recently decided to be a more observant Jew), but she did nicely here with lots of beets, olives, queso.





Drove to the Pisac ruins and market next. Passed this old lady on the way. Had to stop the van again for Marxe, who felt sick, but Mario showed us a neat trick -- splash rubbing alcohol on your hands, hold up to your face, and breathe in. Worked for the short term at least.



Pisac ruins were accessible through another small, windy road. The ruins were cool, but we were getting tired. Climbed around a bit, Marxe did another pee stop (successful this time).



Down the mountain to the Pisac market, for which ringing church bells (Semana Santa again) indicated closing time. In time to get a hat for Mo, a pair of cool earrings for me, and a ceramic bird whistle for Marxe.

The girls crashed on the drive back to Cusco, and it was already about 8pm when we got to the hostel. Found out that our bank transfer to Mercedes had failed to go through, but we talked to her about it and she agreed to let us send it from the States when we returned (Friday was a bank holiday in Peru). She is a very sweet and trusting lady (way overworked) who did well

by us. That evening, no one was really hungry, but we cajoled the kids out for an ice cream by the plaza before bed.

## Friday, 22 April

Our workshop at the ChocoMuseo was set for 8-10am. Surprise, the girls woke with no difficulty. Alan, a 20-something, cute Frenchman, operates the place. Great manner with the group, jovial, knowledgeable. Also participating -- a nice American family living in Uruguay.

First the girls learned how to roast coca beans.







Then they shelled the coca to get nibs, and ground the nibs with a mortar and pestle into a paste.



Alan asked for a strong man to grind the nib paste into a fine powder. After one boy tried and got nowhere, Marxe jumped up and muscled that grinder like there was no tomorrow. All were duly impressed.



Alan had everyone try the coca powder with warm water and chili, the traditional Incan method. Grrrrs all around, and then Alan added warm milk and a little sugar for the yummy hot chocolate we love.

Next it was time to conch the powder, and to save time (this usually takes a day or more), Alan distributed chocolate that had been conching for the past day. Then the kids chose their molds and poured chocolate and added ingredients (almonds, milk powder, sugar, beans, etc.) as desired. Mo tried to pour the cinnamon gently, but the container had other ideas. She had LOTS of cinnamon in her chocolate.

Much concentration in this part.





While the chocolate was cooling, we ran back to the hostel to pack, say adios to Mercedes. A taxi took us back to the ChocoMuseo to grab the chocolate creations and then to the airport. Bag check again: we were ready.

Seated all over the plane, but the flight attendants were very helpful in getting us together, with the exception of Mo, who sat a few rows up. On arrival in Lima, we recovered our bags, and then began our adventure with Hotel Soul Maté. Posted another review online, printed for your enjoyment below.

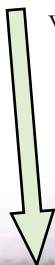
We arranged our visit months in advance and I confirmed the reservation and transportation to/from the airport the week before arrival. Nevertheless, no one was at the airport to meet or drive us. I called from a pay phone and spoke to a woman who understood English (I don't trust my Spanish so much over the phone). She said they didn't have us listed as reserving a driver from the airport -- fair enough, mistakes can be made. I asked for the hotel's address a number of times, but couldn't understand her reply. I had to ask, seriously, about six times. Finally got it spelled out, and she cautioned me that a taxi should cost no more than 30 soles. Everyone and their mother had warned us to NOT take a cab from the airport: no choice. We found a driver asking 75 soles who eventually took 50.

Fast forward to hotel arrival. First they tried to overcharge us. I had confirmed a rate of US\$90 per night for a quad room plus one bed. At the hotel, they insisted we pay roughly 15 percent more because they converted the soles using an inflated exchange rate (which we did not witness anywhere else in the country). They also insisted on charging 3 percent for credit card use, not disclosed previously. When we showed them the correct math, they feigned ignorance but said we could pay in cash the next day (when we could get to an ATM). This is where we left it.

They sent us to our room. We understand a quad plus one room to mean a room that sleeps five. The first room we were given had three beds, one of which could be called a double if you stretched it. With the three beds in the room, virtually no floor space remained for luggage or anything else. When we brought the front desk man up to ask for a different room, he told us we could fit two kids into one of the single beds. Uh, no. So then he said he would bring up a fourth bed. We had no idea where he could put it unless he stacked it on one of the other beds or stood it upright. So we asked for a different room. He complied, but this room had four single beds, and he said that Scott and I could sleep in one of the singles together. Seriously. With both rooms available, the problem could have been solved, easily, by offering us the second room. But no. This may have been a good business decision for them in the short term since they appeared to be renting out the rooms to couples for a "daily rate." In fact, over the hour we sat in the lobby waiting for a ride somewhere else, we did see two "couples" come and go.

When we realized this was not what had been advertised, we tried to log into their free internet to find other accommodations. Didn't work. Tried the pay phone. Didn't work. Scott Blackberried over to the Marriott website and reserved a room. He went to the street and found a taxi big enough for all of us while the two front desk employees ignored us. On our way out, the woman who spoke English said, "I'm sorry there was a problem," which was the first time she had acknowledged us since denying the correct price for the room.

Then, luxury! Upgraded at the Marriott into a gorgeous, gigantic Concierge suite on the top (25th) floor right on the water. Our view was fantastic. The kids loved it. Twice the price of Hotel Soul Maté, but so worth it, especially cause





Frank and his family and uncle met us to chow down in the lounge. Later that night, Satch had a jacuzzi.

## Saturday, 23 April

Early morning, freezing swim in the hotel pool for Marx, Satch, Scott. Maté de coca in the lounge for Mo and me. A hot shower full of pressure (whoo hoo) that still shut off inexplicably.

As we left the hotel to meet Frank, a giant rabbit (Easter costumed) jumped out at the girls and handed Satch chocolate. You'd think this would be a good thing, but the girls got it into their heads that this killer bunny was stalking them. Avoidance at all costs. Hilarity ensued.

Everyone sat on each other's lap in the taxi with Frank to downtown Lima. We arrived at the Palacio de Gobierno just as the changing of the guard started. This was pretty cool, especially the rifle-bayonet throwing (which Mo watched expectantly for tragedy).

The girls got hot and bored after a while, so we headed to the side of the palace for a much-heralded exhibit of ancient Machu Picchu pieces removed by Hiram Bingham and (until now) controlled by Yale University. After much negotiation, and to celebrate the 100th anniversary, Yale finally allowed repatriation to Peru, and here the pieces were on exhibit. Pottery, some weapons, and even an Incan skeleton.



The kids got some gelato, and then Frank had to leave to take care of his youngest daughter who was suffering from allergies and had been in the hospital the night before (!). As soon as we heard this, we told him to go go go, but before he left, he suggested we visit the Museo San Francisco, a convent under which catacombs for the city were kept hundreds of years ago. The monastery itself was typical of the time, but the catacombs included hundreds of pits with a different type of bone in each pit: femurs, skulls, pelvises, etc. It was very cool and creepy.

We then walked a block to the artisan market for final purchases. Mo, with assistance of Peruvian gravity, unintentionally purchased overpriced coasters (broken glass). The perfect tourist shop (from the salesperson's POV), with rickety shelves that fall at the slightest breeze from a passing shopper. Bam! Chaching!

Walked back toward the palace plaza, by the main shopping street, which pretty much sucked. Was like any other shopping street anywhere in the world.

Caught a taxi to a ceviche place (late lunch) in Miraflores (not far from our hotel). That one was closed for Semana Santa, but a small restaurant down the block was still open for another hour or so, and the ceviche was great. Strongest Pisco Sours of the trip. We kept ordering more ceviche, and Mo kept ordering more arroz blanco (after we finally got her to eat). By the time we returned to the hotel at 7ish, we were pooped.



The girls watched “Los Simpsons,” “Futurama,” “los Tres Stooges” in español, and Mo watched the original “Night of the Living Dead,” which really doesn’t need a language. Frank came by one more time, with a box of powders, herbal concoctions, and four flask-size bottles of liquid medicine for his uncle in Maryland who was suffering from a respiratory illness that Frank’s grandmother was convinced this medicine would help. We couldn’t fly with the liquid as is, so Scott and Frank went on a hunt at 10pm on Easter eve for little bottles. They found eight 2oz bottles of peroxide in a pharmacy, dumped the peroxide in the sink, and replaced it with the medicine, to be divided between us all through customs. Sleep.

### **Sunday, 24 April**

Up really early. The cab driver who brought us from the airport on Friday to the evil hotel had given us his number, and his charge of 60 soles was one-third what the Marriott was charging for the same service. So he was there at 5:20am to take us.

Everything went well through customs and we got to our gate just as the flight was boarding. Nothing much to speak of for the rest of the day, except for the third-world standards of Miami airport, which was horrendous. Took over an hour to get through customs, and we didn’t even check bags. They only had one door open from the baggage claim to immigration, so hundreds of people crowded around baggage belts toward the door, trying to get through, waiting for customs to call next. Then, when we had to enter TSA security for our connecting flight, we witnessed an agent refusing to answer an old man’s question (who obviously spoke no English), sneering “I only speak English here in America.” Lovely.

Got to the house about midnight. It was a great trip, but as always, it’s good to be home.

--Evie

Pictures by Scott