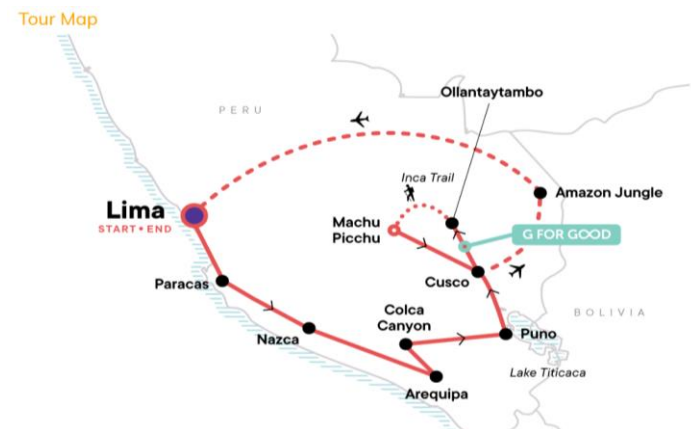


Peru 2024



Oh my goodness 'Peru' a 21 day trip of a lifetime which included the classic Inca Trail – A four day trek I have wanted to complete for a very long time. Seemed apt I should treat myself for my 60th birthday. Coincidentally it was my friend Gills bucket list too, also a 1964 baby. So, 15th May 2024 off we went on our travels.

Day 1 We arrived at Manchester for our 6am flight to Lima, Peru's capital city, & an overnight stay. We met the rest of our team at 19.00 hrs (9 of us in total) & our Chief Experience Officer (CEO), Elmer an exceptional human being.

Day 2 We had the morning at leisure to explore Lima and who should we bump into but 'Paddington Bear' gifted to Peru by the British Embassy in Lima in 2015 as a symbol of our enduring friendship & cultural links.¹ We were picked up at 12 midday, for our bus journey to Paracus.^{2,3}

Day 3 Was a drive along the west coast from Paracus to Nazca

Paracus town is a launch point for the uninhabited Ballestas Islands, Peru's little 'Galápagos' so before leaving Paracus we took a boat trip around Ballestas Islands,⁴ where we spotted sea lions, Humboldt penguins, pelicans, and many sea birds.

En route, we visited the Huacachina Winery & sampled our first taste of a Pisco Sour (1st of many!) It is made by mixing pisco (a renowned brandy, made from fermented grape juice), lime juice, egg whites and sugar/syrup.

Our next stop was the magnificent natural Oasis of Huacachina where we couldn't resist the opportunity to experience the sand buggy & sand boarding down the steep dunes.^{5,6}

Day 4 We continued south taking a 30 minute flight over one of the world's greatest archaeological mysteries, the Nazca Lines.⁷ They are believed to have been made by a pre-Inca civilisation possibly between AD 450 and 600, although no one really knows. The lines consist of patterns and pictures etched into the ground, crisscrossing a wide area of flat desert. They measure up to 10km (6 mi) in length, yet remain perfectly straight. We saw depictions of birds, insects, and animals, only recognizable from the air. Current beliefs suggest that they may be part of complex agricultural calendar.

We also visited the ancient Pre-Inca Nazca desert cemetery site of Chauchilla, with 1500-year-old mummies, bones, and pottery on the desert floor. The entire desert area was also once home to the ancient Paracas and the Nazca cultures, which preceded the Incas by more than half a millennium.

The journey to Arequipa continued via the night bus.

Day 5 Tired and somewhat queasy (that's me) we arrived in the gorgeous city of Arequipa,⁸ Peru's 2nd largest city, enshrined by 3 dramatic volcanoes; Misti, Chachani & Pichupichu.

We stopped at picturesque viewpoints to capture the surrounding volcanoes and one of the most stunning colonial buildings in the country, Santa Catalina Monastery. In the afternoon I succumbed to several hours of sickness following the overnight bus, rising altitude and tiredness!

Day 6 After leaving Arequipa we travelled to Chivay, a gorgeous village near Colca Canyon.

Along the way we spotted vicunas, alpacas and llamas; stopped at Mirador de Patapampa lookout, the highest point on the tour at 4,910m (aside of rainbow mountain) with views of nearby volcanoes.⁹⁻¹²

We soaked our weary bones in the thermal baths near Chivay - steaming hot water pouring from the earth.

Day 7 Another early rise, for a tour of the Colca Canyon, to see the magnificent condors.¹³⁻¹⁵

The Colca Canyon, the world's second deepest canyon, (approx. twice as deep as Grand Canyon) is a huge fissure that runs for 100km across the high Andes. Inhabited since pre-Inca times and later colonised by the Spanish.

We continued by bus to Puno, traversing the mountains & descending into Puno which is on the shores of Lake Titicaca; the largest, highest navigable body of water in the world at 2000m above sea level.

Day 8 Puno to Lake Titicaca – we were promised premium transport to the port from our hotel!! Aka ...Tuk Tuk ride (I'm so gullible). Surviving the journey, we boarded our motorised boat on Lake Titicaca for a tour of the floating Islands and onto our homestay with a host family. Little Marcus taught me how to count in Spanish & Gills Spanish lessons helped us to interact with Mama, Papa & big sister.

We met residents and learned how they built the islands with totora reeds, which are also used to make their homes, boats, crafts (and are also edible!). As the layers of reeds closest to the water start to rot, they are replaced with fresh reeds on top.¹⁶⁻²⁴

Day 9 Saw us say our goodbyes to the families & take the boat back to Puno

Day 10 Puno to Cusco – we hopped on the bus for a full day's drive to Cusco

Day 11 We opted for the Rainbow Mountain excursion – 4am pick up & a hike up to the summit at 5036m. Oh my goodness, this did not disappoint. These colourful Andean mountains striped with maroon, turquoise, lavender, and gold were spectacular and emotive.

Reaching 5,036m this 14km hike was no walk in the park, well not for me; but these unique mountains are something else.²⁵⁻²⁷

Diamox (altitude sickness tablets) & cocoa tea & some natural remedy you inhale to help you breathe – I had them all.

Day 12 CUSCO – Ollantaytambo. We enjoyed a full-day guided tour of the Sacred Valley, stopping at the women's weaving co-op to learn about traditional weaving and dyeing, before visiting a local pottery making community. G Adventures support these local communities.²⁸

On arrival to Ollantaytambo, our local guide thought it would be a good idea to get our blood flowing in preparation for the Inca Trail & take a steep hike up to the Pinkuylluna Incan storehouses. Perched on the hill, these ruins provided excellent views of the Sacred Valley and the Ollantaytambo ruins below.²⁹⁻³⁰

Day 13 Ollantaytambo – Wayllabamba, day 1 of the Inca Trail.³¹⁻³⁵ Oh I so wish I was a good 4-5 inches taller – big boulders for someone who's just about 5ft. We departed Ollantaytambo by minibus to km 82 where the 26mile (42km) Inca Trail begins & headed for Wayllabamba Camp; 3000m (9842 ft) 5h-6h of walking 11km. Ease into the adventure with a straightforward day of hiking the meandering streams, they said stunning Andean scenery, and ancient Incan ruins. Not too sure

straightforward would have been my description!! I did stop more than most but that's ok, you need to arrive at each camp safely. We did trek through some spectacular scenery though, passing several smaller ruin sites like Llactapata.

A crew of local porters, cooks, and guides took care of all the necessities for the duration of the hike. They carried the majority of our gear, so we only need to carry a small daypack with water, rain gear, snacks, a camera, etc. We were allowed 2.5kg of luggage in our holdalls..... really, for 4 days....I have a lot to learn!!!. Our sleeping bags & air mattress accounted for 3.5kg of our 6 kg max. Any excess went into our day pack. Our 1st night went well.

Day 14 From our Wayllabamba camp to Paqaymayo camp via the very steep climb to Warmiwañusca, day 2 of the Inca Trail,³⁶⁻⁴⁰ better known as dead woman's pass (a supine sleeping woman). At 4200m (13,779ft) this was the highest point on the Inca Trail. We had already completed Rainbow Mountain at 5036m (16,522ft) so this instilled some confidence in our abilities at altitude. However I was not quite prepared for the strong Andean sun up to the pass. Again frequent stops & plenty of water were the order of the day for me to arrive safely. The amazing views are so worth it. What goes up..... must come down.... I loved the downhill's! Camp felt chilly that evening, so off to sleep in my woolly hat it was!! An immense sense of personal & team achievement.

Day 15 Paqaymayo camp to Winaywayna, Day 3 of the Inca Trail.⁴¹⁻⁴⁵

Having accomplished day 2; today's trek saw us cross two more passes and ruins. The first pass is Runquraqay at 3,950m (13,113 ft) where we caught a glimpse of the snow-capped Cordillera Vilcabamba. We hiked through the cloud forest on a more gentle climb to the second pass of the day, walking through original Incan constructions. The highest point of the pass is 3,700m (12,136 ft). At 3,650m (11,972 ft), we reached the ruins of Phuyupatamarca, the "town above the clouds." Finally camping at Wiñay Wayna ruins ("forever young") located at 2,650m (8,694 ft).

Day 16 Winaywayna – Machu Picchu 2h-3h 6km.⁴⁶⁻⁵¹ We woke around 03:30 to reach the Sun Gate as early as possible; headed off to the checkpoint and joined the line-up to wait for the gate to open at 05.30. The realisation that we were all going to make it was quite emotional. From the Sun Gate via the Monkey Step boulders, we caught the first views of the breath-taking ruins of Machu Picchu. We then hiked down to Machu Picchu (about 45 mins) for a 1.5 hr guided tour of the site. Nothing can prepare you for what you are about to see...the lost city of the Incas, a spectacular 15th century site, and I felt extremely privileged to be viewing one of the seven wonders of the world – the ancient city of Machu Picchu a UNESCO World Heritage site.

We then caught the bus outside the Machu Picchu gate to the village, had a well-deserved amazing meal & a celebratory few beers – we were thirsty & a Pisco Sour, courtesy of our incredible guides Jose & Liz, before taking the train to Aguas Calientes & bus back to Cusco.

Day 17 Cusco & a very welcome day to explore this beautiful city.

Day 18 & 19 We left Cusco and took an internal flight to Puerto Maldonado, deep in the lowlands of the Amazon Jungle. Our onward journey was via bus and motorised canoe to the amazing Tambopata lodge in the Amazon Rainforest.

There is nothing in the jungle that can 'harm you' said our guide before our night walk where we discovered a poisonous frog, a killer ant, and an enormous tarantula – coxed from a hole amongst

the many inhabitants⁵²⁻⁵⁶. The following day, we enjoyed a guided 10km jungle trail by our expert naturalist, to spot wildlife, heading towards a lake where we boarded our canoe to go caiman-spotting – we were so not disappointed, seeing white & black caiman's. To top it off thanks to the extreme patience of our guide we saw an anaconda, who had just shed its skin. On the trek back the squirrel monkeys we are on form

Day 20 Goodbye to the Rainforest & Tambopata and a flight back to Lima; our CEO Elma took us on a tour of the city by night

Day 21 Lima – Home

The trip (booked with Trailfinders) was the most amazing experience ever, and was made even more special by travelling with, and meeting some amazing human beings. Our G Adventure Tour Guides & our chief experience officers were exceptional.

1. Lima



2. Paracus



3. Paracus



4. Ballestas Islands



5. & 6. Oasis of Huacachina



7. Aerial view of the Nazca lines



8. Arequipa



9-12 Mirador de Patapampa lookout, the highest point on the tour at 4,910m – or so we thought!



13-15 Colca Canyon and the Condors



16-24 Puno for Lake Titicaca

16. Puno at night



17. The tuk tuk ride through the streets of

18. Floating islands on Lake Titicaca



19. Helping to secure our

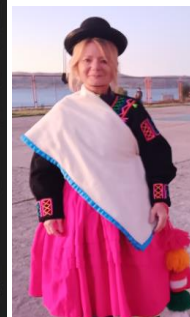


20. Shoe soles for hinges –

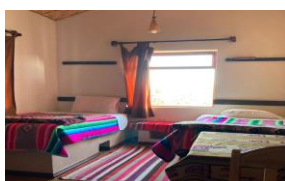


21. Lake view

22. Layered skirts

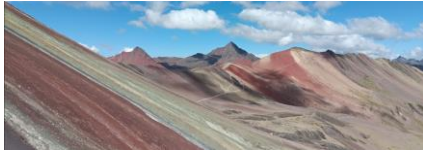


23. Building mud bricks for a storage house



24. Comfortable rooms at the homestay

25-27 Rainbow Mountain – 5036m



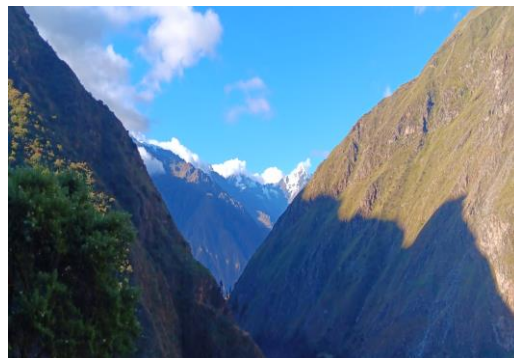
28 G-Adventures supporting local communities



29-30 Ollantaytambo



31-35 Start of the Inca Trail & some of the Inca ruins & incredible scenery we saw on day 1



36 – 40 Day 2 of the Inca Trail – made it to Dead Woman's Pass



Even in the mountains
these amazing chefs can bake a cake

41-45 Day 3 of the Inca Trail



46 – 51 Day 4 of the Inca Trail and one last climb to the sungate & Machu Picchu





52-56 Amazon Rainforest

