

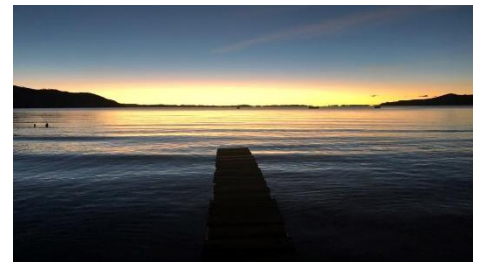
Elise's journey to Peru

Trip Report

On Friday 20th July I got up at 1:30am and travelled to school. Our coach left at 2:30 and we travelled to Heathrow airport, where we flew at 7:55am to Newark airport, New Jersey. From here, we flew to Lima airport, where we stayed overnight before flying to Arequipa the next day. Once in Arequipa, we had an 8 hour coach journey to our first camp: Camp Titicaca.



This camp was situated on the edge of Lake Titicaca: the highest navigable lake in the world. We were staying at an altitude of 3812m, so it took a while to acclimatise to this tricky environment! As you can see, the views of the lake were beautiful, and I frequently got up early to watch the sunrise in the early morning.



Our work here began the day after our arrival. The projects varied between a school, a kindergarten, and an orphanage. On our first day, half of us worked in the orphanage, where we cleared out a greenhouse, painted a playground and made a path to each of these sites. The other half of the group worked in the primary school helping to give English lessons and building on their playground area. We worked around 6 hours each day on these projects.



On the second day of project work, I worked in the kindergarten. The work was very tough, as we were finishing foundations and starting the bricklaying of a dining area for the toddlers' parents, as they come in to feed their children during the day. I started off transporting bricks, before doing some bricklaying and mixing mud to use as a cement. We managed to make lots of progress, and set the project up nicely for whichever group came next to continue it.



Our third day was a break from project work, and we used it to travel across and explore Titicaca. First we took a small boat 2 hours across the lake to a floating island called Uros. This is one of 12 islands situated on Lake Titicaca which are entirely man-made out of reeds! They are all very small and house just a few families, but are decades old and hold lots of tribal history on them. We had a look around and were then given a presentation on how the island was made. We left just over an hour later and travelled further down the lake to a large natural island, where we ate lunch. We then began a 2 hour trek to our overnight accommodation: tents on a beach! This was one of the most amazing places I've ever camped, and the view was - again - amazing. We travelled back to our camp the next day, where we had a day of rest (I managed to chat a bit with the locals and play with the local children) and began to pack up our things for the next part of our journey.



The next day, we woke up early and travelled to our next camp: Camp Caylloma. This camp was situated in the Colca Canyon, at an altitude of around 4300m. It took us a 12 hour coach journey to get there so we didn't arrive until the late afternoon. We stayed in small dorms of about 16-20 people, so the sleeping arrangements were quite crowded! Unfortunately, I chose this point to get sick (suspected food poisoning), and so was in bed all evening and the whole of the following day. This means I missed not only the first day of project work but National Peruvian Day, which occurs on 28th July, and there are lots of parades for. 48 hours later I was better, and so was able to help on days 2 and 3 of project work. Here we worked at a newly built school, where we started the work of building 2 greenhouses. First we had to dig the foundations using shovels and pickaxes, before constructing the struts to go in them and filling them with rocks and cement. This was also very hard work which I had to take easy in order to not get sick again! We worked hard for 3 days on these projects and managed to get them all set up to be built on, which was great news for the local workers there.





Our fourth and final day at Caylloma was a practice trek before our big trek a few days further on. We hiked for 5 hours down then back out the Colca Canyon. The scenery was beautiful and we saw many interesting birds as we walked! Once we got back, we spent the afternoon packing and preparing for our upcoming trek.



On our 13th day, we left Caylloma and travelled to the Sacred Valley, where we stayed overnight before travelling to Cusco. Here we met our trek leaders and prepared a small bag of the things we would need for the next few days. At 3am the next morning, we got up and travelled to the beginning point of the Salkantay Trail. We left at 8:30am and walked through until 3:30pm, where we camped at Wayracmachay. We walked all the way up to the Salkantay Pass at 4630m then back down again, at which point it started to rain! This was probably our hardest day of trekking, as we were very high up (there was even snow!) and the terrain was very steep and rocky.



On our second day of trekking, we walked from 7:30am until 4:15pm. Early on in the route, we entered a cloud forest, which is a similar climate to a rainforest but higher up. The temperature was fairly humid, but the views were amazing! We were surrounded by interesting plants and animals, and had amazing scenery to look down on as we walked. This walk was very long (and rainy!) but not as tiring, as it was more flat and downhill. We camped at Lucmabamba overnight, and rested well for our next day of trekking.



3 days in, and we continued our trek through the cloud forest. This part of the trek was more uphill, so it was quite hard work, especially in the humid environment. As we neared our camp, we passed through an old archaeological site, which is the first point on the trail where you can see Machu Picchu. However, the weather was much too cloudy and Machu Picchu much too small for us to see! We camped overnight at Llactapata, after walking 6 hours to get there.



Our fourth and final full day of trekking was rainy but easy terrain. We walked flat along a train track most of the way, and it took us 6 hours to get to our campsite. We camped near the bottom of Machu Picchu at Aguas Calientes, and so were ready to get up early the next morning and start our trek up.



Our final day on the Salkantay trek was – of course – Machu Picchu. Visiting times were restricted from 6am until midday, so we had to get up early at 3am in order to make sure we were up there on time. First we queued to get through the bottom entrance at 5am, before spending just over an hour walking up the steps. Apparently there are over 3000 steps to get to the top so it was very hard work! We then went through the main entrance and walked up to get to the first viewing platform. The view (as you can see) was AMAZING, and we were incredibly lucky as the weather forecast predicted cloud and rain, so we wouldn't have even been able to see it had that been true! We took some pictures then walked further round to various other viewing platforms, before making our way down to the Inca village to have a look around. Our trekking leaders gave us a tour and told us some of the history around Machu Picchu. We were then allowed some time to have a look around ourselves, which was really interesting and lots of fun!



At 12:00 we left the site and made our way down by bus. We were supposed to catch the train to Cusco (where we would have a day's rest before continuing to our next camp) but unfortunately there were railway strikes and roadblocks so we had to set up in a hostel for the night (which turned out great as they had warm showers there!)

Later on we made our way down to our final camp: Camp Maras, based at a lower altitude of 3380m. Here, they had many projects going on, all of which were almost finished. We worked on 3 community toilets, some secondary school toilets, a kindergarten toilet and a greenhouse for the young school children (which would serve both educational and nutritional purposes, of which they had little). I worked mainly on the greenhouse, and we managed to get it from half-finished to basically done! Our work consisted of lots of mud mixing in the mud pits (to act as a cement), along with transporting bricks from the town to the site, bricklaying, gap filling, levelling off, log work and finally building the roof. Every day we worked 7 hours and, after 4 days work, we managed to finish all the brick work and got the roof started so it only needed a couple of days work before being finished! This offered us a great sense of achievement as we hadn't managed to see a project finished before this one. The rest of our group managed to finish all the other projects as well, so the community now had some toilets, as well as various years in the school. The work here was by far the hardest, but definitely the most rewarding when it was all finished!



We stayed at Camp Maras for 5 days, and on our final day we had one last small trek before preparing our things ready to leave. We left the next morning and travelled to Cusco, where we had a day of rest and time to explore before the long journey ahead.

