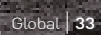


Through the Ages

Celebrating the 80th anniversary of the Footprint South American Handbook, Dominic Hamilton looks at how Peru has changed since visitors first set eyes on the magical Inca Kingdoms





Above: Over the years this shot of Machu Picchu has become an iconic image that has come to represent travel in Peru

Tourist groups shunt through the ruins of Sacsayhuamán, the great fortress and religious centre that dominates the city of Cusco in southern Peru from its hilltop perch. Visitors are shepherded by guides, or else wander the site in smaller groups. The setting sun casts an orange hue over the site accentuating its primeval beauty bringing to an end another day of sightseeing. There are perhaps a hundred people left at the ruins. The sun sinks lower and the chill of the high Andean evening begins to bite.

Three rows of stone walls run in tiers one above the other, facing south. The rows are laid out in a zig-zag pattern. They are said to represent jaguars' teeth, the ruins symbolising the head of this sacred and revered animal, with the city of Cusco itself laid out as the animal's body by the Incas over 600 years ago. The stones are huge, seemingly set down by Cyclops, not human hands at all. Single, leviathan blocks at the outer points of the zig-zags tower easily three times the height of the tourists standing at their feet. Some of them weigh as much as 130 tons and have been fitted together with such precision that you can't even stick a penknife blade between them.

The light plays tricks with the rocks' relief. One row changes its form in the waning evening light. A mythical snake, symbol of the third underworld level in the Incas' cosmology, and invisible at other times of the day, emerges magically. In little over 30 seconds, I've travelled light years. Back to the glory of the Inca Empire, back to Inca eyes contemplating the same magic as me.

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Old tomes

Time travel is possible, I've discovered. It's not as hard as the scientists would make out. All you need is imagination - and a ruin as evocative and beautiful as the Incas' Sacsayhuamán. Alternatively, you could take to another type of time machine altogether: old editions of the *South American Handbook*. The guide celebrates its eightieth anniversary this year and is the oldest guidebook in the English language, going right back to 1924. It might not be Jules Verne, but the pages of each annual edition provide an unparalleled prism through which to gaze upon the nations of South America over the last century.

In 1924, Lima's population stood at 220,000. Lauded as the "beautiful City of Kings" by the Inca chronicler William Prescott, he described the city as "the fairest gem on the shores of the Pacific." The genteel travellers of the day used to get about in electric cars, and took the electric railway to the resort of Miraflores, down by the sea. By the 1950s, Miraflores was "becoming an important shopping centre with several first class restaurants." By the 1960s, skyscrapers had "changed the old skyline out of recognition" and Lima's population had topped two million. To the writer, "all this is either distressing or encouraging, depending on the point of ►



Right and below:
Peruvian Indians
selling their wares
at local markets

view." Miraflores had by now become "Lima's most important suburb."

And it still is, although it's now somewhat outshone by newer developments in other parts of the city. But it's still where most tourist hotels and conveniences are located. Lima's population, meanwhile, has exploded to some eight million, representing a third of the country's population. It enjoys the grim fame of the world's largest squatter camp, numbering some 350,000 souls. It is, in the words of the latest edition of the Handbook, a "sprawling capital, daunting at first sight." It's come a long way from its days as the City of Kings.

"LIMA'S POPULATION MEANWHILE HAS EXPLODED TO SOME EIGHT MILLION, REPRESENTING A THIRD OF THE COUNTRY'S POPULATION."

The Handbook has chronicled all these changes, for better and for worse. Through its pages, it's possible to trace not only the development of Peru, but also of travel around the country and the evolution of travellers themselves. In early editions, the guide advised on choosing pack animals and making loans to their keepers, as well as providing guidance on appropriate clothing: "Men do well to take formal clothes for functions, such as high hat and frock coat. Women can suit themselves in heavy and light wraps, but they will find use for attractive and styled dresses." There was none of your

Gore-Tex, high-tech, breathable, UV-resistant, repellent-impregnated gear for these travellers. Women are also advised: "For formal occasions such toilettes are suitable as would be worn for similar gatherings at home." The mind boggles at the thought of ladies setting off to South America dressed for an Edwardian garden party. Women travellers' apparel today isn't given any special mention. It would seem we are liberated enough for advice to be superfluous.

The Handbook was originally conceived as a manual for British businessmen trading in South America and it didn't concern itself unduly with sights and tourism as such. But despite this, there was still space for some beautiful descriptions. Well into the late 1950s, the Handbook carried the same evocatively written description of the journey from the coastal town of Arequipa up to Lake Titicaca and on down to Cusco:

"The passenger watches the engine wind round the short curves as it follows the course of a widening stream down the narrow canyon. There are thrills as the shriek of the whistle and the grinding of the brakes tell that the driver is trying to stop the train before it runs over some Indian driving his pack mule, or some herder attempting to cross the track with his flocks... The valley widens, fields become greener, buildings look more liveable in... Inca ruins come into view from the train windows. Every little pueblo has its church; every prominent hilltop is mounted with a cross; open outdoor shrines are scattered here and there, and every hut and habitation carries a small cross."

And in the 21st century, these magnificent views remain virtually unaltered. The descendants of the herders the authors witnessed are still there, as are the llamas, cultivated fields, crosses mounted on the hillsides and houses, and the timeless serenity of these bucolic Andean scenes.

The only thing that has transformed is the timetable. At present, the weekly schedule amounts to one train. The road from Arequipa to Puno on Lake Titicaca was recently asphalted, cutting the journey time down to five hours. By train it takes 12. Perhaps more than any other aspect of South American travel, the decline of the railways is the most important. Today, on much of the continent, you only board a train for its old-world charm, or else the dramatic route and scenery that you'll encounter and not for getting from A to B in the shortest space of time. "Trains are now few and far between and certainly cannot be relied upon as the main means of transport," to quote the 2004 edition.

Although the route claiming the "highest train journey in the world" (from Lima to Huanayo) was revived for tourists in April this year, and some adventurous travellers do board the Puno-Cusco train, the great majority of tourists in Peru will only get on one train in the country: the one for Machu Picchu. The poshest of this service, the Vistadome, boasts a see-through plastic roof for better views, and includes a fashion show set to the latest techno tunes half-way through the journey. ►





Early editions of the Handbook concerned themselves more with information on import duties and shipping costs than convents and beaches. But way back in the 1920s, the guide commented that one of Cusco's "main attractions are the ruins... These are a source of increasing interest to travellers and archaeologists." The authors could never have predicted the extent to which tourism would come to dominate the town's economy, or the hordes that would tramp their stones every year. And they surely couldn't have envisioned a day when a special tourist police would be required - whose name, INDECOPI, unfortunately sounds more like a remedy for a stomach complaint than a crime-busting organisation. An early edition warned that: "Laws exist impeding the export of antiquities - pottery, mummies, silver or gold ware of either Inca or colonial origin." To which was added, in the 1960s, "by predatory tourists."

Rising to distinction

In early editions the tourist Mecca of Machu Picchu hardly merited a mention. The first entry, in 1932, reads: "Trains run twice weekly for the interesting ruins of Machupiccho." By



Right: Local children dancing at a religious festival

the 1950s, more details were given: "The trip to Machu Picchu, by rail, takes four hours; by lorry to the foot of the hill, and by mule to the ruins on the summit, another hour and a half. There is now a small rest house at Machu Picchu so that the ruins may be explored at leisure." In 2004's edition, the Inca Trail and Machu Picchu details take up five pages; the "small rest house" has morphed into the Machu Picchu Sanctuary Lodge, run by Orient Express Hotels and costing around \$400 a night; the mules have been superseded by belching diesel buses; and up to 50,000 people visit the ruins each August.

Times change. In the 1950 edition, a suggested itinerary for sightseeing in Lima "should not cost more than 30 shillings per person", and includes the classic entry: "3.45 pm Tea at Hotel Bolívar." The latest edition of *Footprint's Cusco and the Inca Trail* guide carries an inset box about 'Happy Hours in Cusco' and how to plan your evening accordingly. The Norton Rat's Tavern boasts "Cable TV with BBC and CNN" while Paddy O'Flaherty's, an Irish theme pub, "serves up Guinness by the can."

More poignantly, the Cusco chapter of the guide has included a boxed entry on Inca Society since the 1960s. Its last lines read: "It can well be understood that a people unaccustomed to think or act for itself should have been helpless when the elite was destroyed by the Spaniards. With the murder of the man-god Atahualpa the state died. To this day the Indian seems sunk in a dream from which he cannot be awakened." They were edited in the 1980s. To me, this seems a huge shame. Since, despite the political and to some extent economic advances of Peru's Indian population over the last 40 years, most remain excluded from power and often do indeed seem sunk in a melancholic dream.

The evening wind scythes across the treeless heights of Sacsayhuamán. The cold is intense at 3,400 metres. I take one last look at the ranks of stones aligned with such thought and reverence, bathed in the last gasps of the sunset, and then head reluctantly to the gully that leads back down to Cusco.

"AND IN THE 21st CENTURY, THESE MAGNIFICENT VIEWS REMAIN VIRTUALLY UNALTERED."

There are numerous Inca legends predicting the return of Pachacutik - the 'world changer' - the Inca who put his kingdom on the map, and organised and readied his domain into the greatest empire the American continent ever saw. Sacsayhuamán is just one of his accomplishments, just one of the wonders the Incas performed on this stunning yet harsh land in their quest to commune and communicate with their gods. The ruins' stones, like the pages of the Handbook, make time travel possible. Their aura and magic make you wonder whether maybe, just maybe, future editions of the Handbook will chronicle the return of Pachacutik, and the awakening of Peru's Indians from their long, melancholic dream. ©



Peru

The Facts

Population: 25 million

Capital: Lima

Currency: The Nuevo Sol, which replaced the old 'Inti' (meaning 'sun' in the Andean Quechua language). Coins range from 10 centavos to 5 soles, and then up in notes from S/10 to S/200 from there

Language: Spanish is the official language. Quechua is spoken by millions of highland campesinos (peasants) throughout the country, and has begun to be taught in schools. Lonely Planet publishes a phrasebook to Quechua, and it's a good idea to learn a few greetings when trekking about the countryside. Aymara is spoken around Lake Titicaca, and there are numerous indigenous tongues in the Amazonian regions

Flights

There are no direct flights from the UK. You can either fly via Bogotá with Avianca, or via a European hub such as Amsterdam with KLM or Madrid with Iberia. Alternatively, via a North American hub such as Atlanta with Delta Airlines, Houston with Continental Airlines or Miami with American Airlines, LanPeru, Aero Continente or Copa, among others. Journey Latin America (www.journeylatinamerica.co.uk) can advise you on the best options.

Internal Travel

For flights, Peru's main carriers are Aero Continente (www.aerocontinente.com.pe) and Tans (www.tans.com.pe), as well as the newer boy on the block, LanPeru (www.lanperu.com). Tickets from Lima to any part of the country cost between \$40 and \$100 one-way. Fares tend to go up at Peruvian holiday times, and during the northern hemisphere summer. Book early at these times, and always reconfirm flights.

For road transportation, most of the Pan-American Highway which runs the length of the country through the coastal desert is in good condition. Roads in the highlands can be iffy, and the jungle ones even worse. Good, comfortable buses run the routes between the major cities. Recommended companies include Ormeño and Cruz del Sur. Local buses are more basic, but there are also small combis (small Japanese vans), which run routes of not more than three hours. Prices go up and tickets become scarce over holiday periods.

By rail, trains in the southern part of the country are run by PeruRail (www.perurail.com). There is also a passenger service between Hancayo and Huancavelica in the Highlands, and a sporadic tourist service between Lima and Huancayo.

Money Matters

ATMs are easy to find in the main towns and tourist centres and allow you to withdraw cash in both soles and dollars. Exchange desks are also common. Travellers' cheques are best changed in banks, which usually charge 1-3% commission. Beware of forged dollar notes. Check them carefully. Budget-wise, Peru is pretty cheap. You can travel comfortably (depending how long you stay in Lima and how many flights you take) for around \$25-35 a day.

Paperwork

No visa is necessary for UK residents. Make sure you are stamped with the full 90 days if you require it. For more information, see www.peruembassy-uk.com.

When To Go

Peru's climate divides into three distinct zones. For the coast, summertime is from December to April. Lima sulks under a blanket of cloud and sea mist for eight months of the year. In the mountains, the driest months are April to October with temperatures of 20°-25° in the day, but down to freezing at night. During the wet season, temperatures are about 18° in the day and 15° at night. The jungle has the same dry season, with temperatures hot and humid at around 35°. The wet season rains are hard but brief.

Health

Check with your local health clinic on immunisation well before leaving. Typhoid and hepatitis are common. Altitude sickness is a real danger in the highlands (Cusco is at 3,200 m). Take things easy, follow health advice, and come down to lower levels if you're suffering from symptoms such as nausea, loss of appetite and headaches. Rabies is also not uncommon, so consider getting the three-stage course of jabs if you're likely to come into close contact with wild animals.

Accommodation

Peru is well geared to foreign travellers, and you'll find plenty of accommodation options in all major towns. Most hoteliers will speak some English. Establishments run the gamut from five-star business hotels down to backpacker hangouts costing a few dollars a night. In Lima, Huaraz and particularly Cusco, competition is fierce and you can nearly always get price reductions by haggling. Book in advance during Peruvian holiday times and the northern hemisphere summer.

Activities

Trekking and mountain climbing are the number one activities in Peru for travellers and the possibilities are limitless. The Cordillera Blanca, to the north of Lima, has some of the best mountaineering routes in the world. The whole area around Cusco is also stunning for trekking and climbing. To this list, add some of the world's best white-water rafting on the Apurimac River (near Cusco), as well as everything from horseback riding to paragliding, and surfing on the coast.

Contacts

Tourist information is handled by PromPerú (www.peru.org.pe) which have offices and bureaux in most towns.

Check out the South American Explorers (www.samexplo.org), who have clubhouses in Lima, Cusco and Quito and loads of information on everywhere.

For travel arrangements throughout Peru, contact SportsTravel in Lima (www.sportstravel.com.pe).

For treks, trips, the Inca Trail and the safest white-water rafting money can buy, contact the tour operator Instinct (www.landoftheinkas.com).

For trips arranged from the UK try:

Classic Journeys	www.classicjourneys.co.uk	Tel: 01773 873497
Magic Globe	www.magicglobe.co.uk	Tel: 08700 110270
Peruvian Secrets	www.peruviansecrets.com	Tel: 01248 751005

Websites

www.magicperu.com
www.perulinks.com
www.peru.com/turismo
www.traficoperu.com
www.nomadom.net/peru/peru.htm

Read On

The 80th edition of *The South American Handbook* has all you need to know about travelling the continent. Footprint also publish a *Handbook to Peru*, and to *Cusco* and *The Inca Trail*. The Rough Guide to *Peru* is excellent (if getting out of date), as is the Lonely Planet (new edition out at the end of 2003).

