

Journey to Machu Picchu

A Transformational Adventure in Peru

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After longing for many years to travel to Machu Picchu, the lost city of the Incas in Peru, I woke up on a spring morning in 1993 feeling a quiet yet powerful knowing that the time had finally come, that my husband and I were going to be there in just six short months. When I went out to the breakfast table and shared this with him, he was elated and we excitedly made our plans for the pilgrimage. By May we had our passports in order and had purchased our airline tickets. Over the summer months the finances at our wellness center improved. In fact, in August, usually our slowest month, business was the best ever! The money poured in and we packed!

In late August we departed on an overnight flight to Lima, arrived the next morning and caught a flight to Cusco. At the airport we met Andy, a tourist guide who was a native of Cusco and was actually descended from the Incas. We knew we were on the right track! He helped us find a room in a small hotel a few blocks from the bustling center of the city. We immediately purchased our train tickets to Machu Picchu from his agency, and were so excited that sleeping peacefully through the night was out of the question!

Early the next morning Andy came to our hotel and took us to the local train station where we boarded the train to Machu Picchu. After traveling for several hours along the wild and raging Urubamba River, deep into the heart of the valleys of the high jungle, we arrived in Aguas Calientes, the little pueblo at the base of the ruins. We ran to the bus stop and boarded one of the park buses that took us on a half hour ride up fourteen dizzying switchbacks to the top of the mountain. After quickly checking in at the on-site hotel, we threw our suitcases into our room and purchased our entrance tickets! At last! We were finally in Machu Picchu...away from the world and in the land of the ancients! Even though I've been there many times since, I must say that nothing in this world can prepare you for that first glimpse of the Sacred City. Located at 8,000 ft. and surrounded by towering snow-covered peaks, the Crown Jewel of the Andes was not discovered by the Spanish when they conquered Peru in the 1500's. It was only recently "re-discovered" in 1911 by the American anthropologist Hiram Bingham, and only as recently as 1991 was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. When Bingham arrived in the area, the native people had known about

the site for years, and had even farmed on the terraced slopes around the area. But none of them lived there, as it was considered sacred ground. I could feel why! The energy of the land was extremely palpable...very strong, pulsing up through the soles of my feet and straight into my heart. Tears overflowed from my eyes as I felt the sweet sensation of finally arriving "home"!

Mark and I enjoyed a morning group tour with one of the professional guides from the site. He took us to all the main areas, as well as all the power spots: the Temple of the Sun, Temple of the Moon, Hitching Post of the Sun, and the Pachamama Rock. He was extremely knowledgeable, but when we continually asked him questions about the esoteric history of the site that others in our group were not interested in hearing the answers to, he finally offered to meet us in the evening and take us into the Sanctuary at night. What a treat!

So later that day, in the cool and enfolding darkness of the early evening, we walked through the gate of the Sanctuary just as the light from the full moon, *Mama Quilla*, was peaking her bright face over the horizon. We could see the sparkling lights below us in Aguas Calientes. The fresh night air helped us clear our minds of worldly concerns. We carefully followed our guide, who we had since learned was a trained ritual specialist in the Inca Spiritual Tradition, what we in the US call a shaman. He led us through the darkness until we stood in front of our evening's destination...a small opening to a cave that led into the *Pachamama* (Mother Earth). It felt as though She had been waiting for us for centuries. Now...here we were, ready to meet Her. We knew that we had been called here out of our daily life in order to reclaim ourselves as a Daughter and Son of the Sun, the Moon, the *apus*, (sacred mountains), the rivers, the trees, the flowers, the stones, and of course of the *Pachamama* Herself. Now we stood outside the Her womb in silent anticipation, reflecting on what had brought us to this moment.

Our shaman quietly interrupted our reverie. "It's important to hold a very clear focus for healing when you enter the cave" he solemnly told us. "Pray with care, for you WILL get what you ask for!" He then took out a small bottle of *agua florida* (flower water), and poured a little into my upturned palms. As he directed, I offered a small splash to the Mother Earth, rubbed my hands together, clapped them three times, placed my hands in front of my mouth and nose and breathed in deeply several times. Mark repeated the same motions. As we entered the cave, our shaman called in the energies of the *Amaru* (the Serpent), Guardian of the Inner Earth or Lower World in Andean cosmology. Whoosh! I felt very strong energy surge into me, almost taking my breath away. I took a few deep breaths to calm myself and continued forward into the beckoning darkness. I felt at home, as if I had been here many times in the past. The many offerings of coca leaves that had been left here in the past by the shamen of the area who had used this cave for perhaps thousands of years in order to commune with the Earth Mother crackled softly under my feet. Stepping quietly into the deeper part of the cave, I immediately felt the joyous blessing of the Mother Earth as she poured forth her exquisite life force into me, her Daughter who had come home. With tears filling my eyes, I stepped forward, turned around and saw the crystal blue light of the Moon, as She streamed in through the cave entrance. Our shaman brushed his fan of condor feathers around my body, quickly and adeptly performing his shamanic work. In his very quiet yet commanding voice he urged, "Now is the time, here is the place. Let go of your fears, open once again to your true nature, to Love. Remember who you are. You are the child of the Pachamama, and She loves you unconditionally." I raised my arms and took in the healing feminine energy...allowing it to pour into every welcoming cell in my body, washing through me and out my feet into Her body, unstoppable, and cleansing me on a very deep level of fears that had shadowed me for many years. I gladly gave them up to Her, allowing Her to gently stroke me and rejuvenate me, filling those now empty spaces within me with Her nurturing Unconditional Love. "Thank You, Pachamama. *Gracias a ti, Pachamama*" I chanted over and over in my heart and mind.

As our shaman began singing an ancient Quechua chant I wanted to join him, but didn't know how to pronounce the words. I felt sad, only a moment though, for suddenly I knew the meaning of the words in my heart...age-old words that I sang with him. The stones echoed our voices and filled us with a rhythm and energy that bound us forever in

this timeless moment to each other and to the cave, the loving body of our Earth Mother. Deeply thankful for feeling the sense of "family" I knew this moment would last forever in my heart and soul...as I was born again from the Arms of the Pachamama. We then closed our ceremony in what I have come to know as the Andean way - with hugs. No words were needed; they were spoken heart to heart. We then turned and walked out into the night and a new life! I once again saw the lights in the valley below. Could I go back to my former life? No, I knew I couldn't because I was now different. I had remarkable gifts from the *Pachamama* that I was ready to share with the world! But was the world ready for them? As Mark and I silently looked in to each other's eyes, we smiled and knew the answer.

Since that magical night of the Peruvian odyssey that changed my life in Machu Picchu, when I reflect upon those events I always feel blessed by that humble yet profound healing experience. And honored that I can share my story with others - YOU. Hopefully you will manifest your dreams and travel to Machu Picchu for what I know will surely be one of the most magical moments in your life! I encourage you to step through any fears you may have about doing so, for the result will well be worth the effort. Enjoy the journey! AND.... *Ñuka Sunkuypy Causanqui!* You will always have a place in my Heart!

From *Journeys to Sacred Sites: Transformational Adventures of Spiritual Pilgrims* ©2023 by Andrea Mikana-Pinkham, Director, Sacred Sites Journeys

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