

Topic: Life changing experience after traveling to Peru

Abstract: When I was a sophomore in high school, I had a life changing experience on my first trip out of the country to Peru, South America. During this trip I saw amazing beaches, beautiful scenery, Machu Piccu, green hills, as well as the heart breaking poverty that was present. After traveling to Peru, it made me realize how fortunate I was to have simple things in my life such as a toilet and a sink to brush my teeth in. This experience has affected me by never taking things for granted because it could always be worse.

Key words: Peru, Poverty, Traveling outside the country, Identity crisis, and life changing.

On December 27th 2005 my family and I woke up extremely early on a very foggy morning. We were off to the San Francisco airport to begin our journey to Peru. I had never been out of the country before and I had a lot of mixed feelings about leaving. How was I going to be treated there? Will I be able to eat the food? What if I get food poisoning? The only thing that made me feel a little safer was the fact that we were going with my aunt who is from Peru. I figured she wouldn't be taking us here if it weren't safe enough. Once we got to the airport it was a long wait to go through customs, even though I never have anything I shouldn't the security points always make me nervous because I feel like they watch everything you do and just jump to conclusions. After about thirty minutes going through customs we were off to find our gate. After a short five hours we arrived in Miami, Florida. Well, the Miami airport. I had never been to Florida before and it seemed like such a tease not to be able to get off the plane. It seemed like it was taking forever to get to Peru, most likely because I was so excited and had been anticipating this trip for months.

When we arrived in Lima, Peru I was immediately scared. Everything went from being in English to being in all Spanish. I was a sophomore in high school at the time and was taking

Spanish class but I felt like none of that was going to help me communicate and get around. I felt stranded even though I was with my family. My family didn't speak any more Spanish than I did. I was starting to feel a little bit of anxiety about this trip and how things were going to go. Just at that moment I was feeling down we went over to exchange our money for "Soles" which is what Peruvian money is called. It felt like we got so much more money back than we had actually given them and I was so excited I came with only a little bit of my own money but yet had all this new money to spend and everything was cheaper! Being a girl and a fashion lover my attitude was instantly changed. It was now nighttime when we arrived and when we got into our taxi I had to try my best with my Spanish to tell him where to take us. I remember just looking out the window the entire hour we were in the taxi and looking at this new world I had come into. I was seeing all this poverty I had always heard about in school and on the news but had never experienced it in person. It was dark but I could still see the small homes people were living in on the side of the road. All the stray dogs, the filthy living conditions, it broke my heart.

When we arrived to the gates to my aunts house there were guards with huge guns standing there waiting to take our name. Since the house was on the beach and in a private gated community they had to have heavy security to make sure no one was breaking in at night. That part scared my family and I a little. We even had to go through security to get to the place we were staying, although it did make us feel safer. The house was amazing! And when I say amazing that is an understatement! Finally though, after a long day of traveling and stress I laid down in my bed that had been turned down by one of the housemaids and went straight to sleep.

When I woke up the next morning I smelled fish coming from the kitchen. I had never been a big fan of breakfast period but fish for breakfast? Sounded pretty gross to me. I have never had a better fish dish in my life. When we went down to the beach that day I got to experience how some of the Peruvian people make some of their money. They come up to you on the beach and try to sell you things that they have made themselves, just like they do in Mexico. Of course my mother and I bought some things as well as other members in my family. I just almost felt guilty paying the prices that I did for what I was given. I felt like they put so much work and effort into these things why aren't they charging us more? Especially since we are American and they know we came with money.

A few days of relaxing on the beach and shopping trips it was time for our big adventure...to climb to the top of Machu Picchu. After a long train ride we were finally in Cuzco, Peru. We started on a bus on a very, very, very, windy road to get to the top of the first hill. This was the scariest bus ride I have ever taken in my life, I literally felt like I was going to die on that bus and fall off of the hill. Once we were at the top of that hill we had to go through a security checkpoint to make sure we weren't bringing in anything to alter the surroundings. We also had to have a ticket to climb it. Yes, you actually have to pay to climb. I found this rather interesting but I am sure that is where a lot of the cities income comes from since it is a very popular site in Peru and the world. Hiking up this beautiful mountain where the Incas once lived was nothing less than magical. It truly made me think how privileged I am to be able to experience these things with the people I love. We had a tour guide with us to explain to us how this was built and to tell us some of the stories of Machu Picchu. It was very hard to hike up this

mountain especially since Peru is already at a higher altitude Machu Picchu has an elevation of 8,000 feet, so it makes it harder to breathe being so high up. It took us about three hours to get to the top. Once we reached the top it was amazing to see how high up we were and how beautiful the valleys down below looked. Everything was so lush and green. Just as we got to the top the clouds started to part and the sun began to shine down on the mountain making what we thought was beautiful even before, more breathtaking. There is no way to describe how standing on the top of this magical mountain makes you feel. You just can't help but stand there breathless and speechless. After we stood there for honestly about an hour and took some pictures we began our decent to the bottom of the mountain. Once we got to the bottom we got back on a bus that would begin to take us down the treacherous mountain. I thought going up hill was scary, I hadn't seen anything yet! One train ride, and two taxicabs later we were back at the house and ready for some rest.

Although this is only a couple of days on my trip to Peru I feel like this part of the trip affected my identity. I don't think I realized how privileged I was in my life back home in America until I came to Peru. I realized how many of the little things in life I took for granted such as having a washer and dryer, having a sink to brush my teeth, and having a warm bed to sleep in at night. After traveling to Peru and seeing some of the homes people live in there it really made me think about my life more. It made me depressed seeing all of these families living in little homes with horrible living conditions on the side of a road where many dangers can affect them. It really made me miss America and my house. I think just seeing the beauty of Machu Piccu and seeing all the poverty that was present in Peru really changed me and how I

view my life now. I never take the little things for granted and when I get upset about something as little as having a bad hair day I just think to myself, it could be so much worse why are you complaining.