

Trekking to the ends of the earth by Lindy Jordan

My Peruvian adventure started early one April morning at Heathrow along with six others. The long flight allowed us to catch up on missed sleep and we arrived in Lima late in the evening, ready and eager to go.

We were going to trek for eight hours a day, for four days, over steep mountain terrain. Nine others from another charity joined our group; with three guides, a doctor, cooks and porters, horses, llamas and mules to carry the equipment, we made a colourful group. I got quite used to being stared at in wonder by the local people we met along the way!

On our first morning in Peru we visited the EveryChild project area in the slums around Lima – vast areas of dusty, steep, mountainside, covered as far as the eye could see in tiny dwellings often no larger than one room. Facilities that we take for granted: electricity, sanitation and running water, simply don't exist for most of the people living in these areas. We visited a community centre run by EveryChild, as well as a school and medical centre, and saw firsthand the work being done. Two members of our group sponsor children in these projects and we were able to meet the children they sponsor. The smiles and enthusiasm with which we were greeted was almost overwhelming. The positive attitude of the people, determined to improve their lives for the better, and dedication of the staff, was both humbling and inspiring.

So it was with great motivation that we set off early the next day to Cusco, the ancient Inca capital, high in the Andean mountains. Several of the group were already feeling the effects of the altitude, so we made most of our free day and had an early night.

The next day we set off early to the starting point at Patacancha, at 3,700m. By the time we started walking, the weather had turned colder and a light drizzle filled the air as we started up the steep slope. I was out of breath on the first ascent, and the rain made the slope slippery and walking difficult. We made the first camp by the mountain lake at Epsaycocha Lake (4,000m). Exhausted and suffering from altitude sickness, our initial enthusiasm had worn off and we suddenly realised just how much of a challenge this was going to be!

But as we awoke to clear skies our optimism began to return. After climbing steadily all morning to the Epsay Pass at 4,300m, we camped that night next to the thermal baths at Lares. The next morning we rested, enjoying the sunshine and the baths. After feasting on a fabulous lunch of roast lamb, cooked in a traditional Andean style, we set off with another five hours of hard trekking ahead to us, climbing steeply to 4,100m to camp next to the stunning waterfalls at Quishuarani.

The last day was the longest but most rewarding. We were woken early and set off for Pachacutec Pass, at 4,550m, the highest point of the trek. As we approached the pass and scrambled over the final ridge, we were met by an incredible sight. Appearing in front of us was the vast expanse of the Urumbamba mountain range, snow-capped and shining brilliantly in the bright sunlight. It literally took our breath away! We stood in awe at the size and sheer power of the mountains and then descended into the lush lowlands of the Sacred Valley, and to our trek's end at Ollantaytambo, where we stayed the night.

The next day we visited the ancient Inca city of Machu Picchu, perfectly preserved and hidden for centuries by the Andean rainforest. After wondering the marvel of Inca stonework and creativity, we took the train back to Cusco, exhausted but elated to have finished the trek. After a celebratory and farewell dinner in Cusco, we flew back to Lima and then on to London, enriched by our experiences and with memories of a beautiful, warm and welcoming country, which will stay with us for many years – in the knowledge that we had helped EveryChild continue its amazing work.