

# Spectrum

MAY 10, 2009

SCOTLAND on SUNDAY

PADDY'S  
MARKET  
RIP

15 May



## Murder, polis

Who's killing off a Scottish icon?

# Picking up the Inca trail

Virtually untouched by the passage of time and with breathtaking views of the Andes, a journey into the heart of Peru is an enlightening experience

WORDS BERNADETTE STODDART

**I**T MIGHT have been the iconic images of Machu Picchu, the exotic place names or even childhood stories about Paddington Bear, but for as long as I can remember, I've wanted to visit Peru. So when an opportunity arose to finally take a walk along the Inca trail, I grabbed it.

It's a long flight from the UK, and jet lag made my first night in Lima a bit of a blur. But after a good night's sleep it was time to fly to the historic capital of Cusco and head on to the Sacred Valley of the Incas. This fertile strip of land is fed by the Urubamba river and is surrounded by the peaks of the Andes. Travelling through the valley was like stepping back in time, offering glimpses of life and culture that has barely changed in centuries. Locals were dressed in colourful traditional dress and in the village of Pisac, the group with whom I was travelling had the opportunity to stop and really soak up the atmosphere of the market.

Tourists, traders and local people come together here to barter over essentials such as vegetables, rice, sugar and salt as well as weavings and pottery. We soon discovered

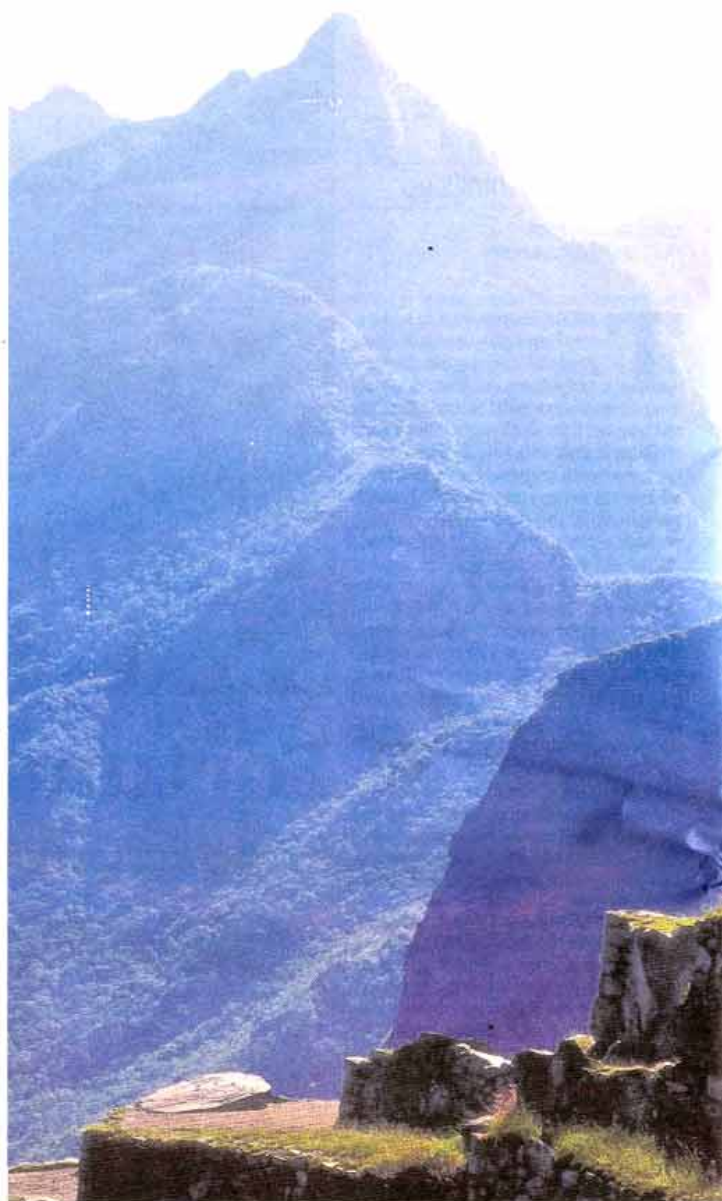
that farmers in this area of the valley specialise in growing corn, with 19 different varieties thriving in the fields. I sampled a large cob covered with herb sauce and a chunk of delicious local cheese. These kernels are far larger than the ones we're used to and this simple meal, accompanied by freshly baked bread from an outdoor stone oven, was mouth-watering.

Moving on from Pisac, we travelled on to the Inca temple at Ollantaytambo. The craftsmanship of this fortress and temple was breathtaking, with the sun gates positioned to allow the Incas to worship the sun and the mountains. As we watched the setting of the afternoon sun on this glorious horizon, we felt a sense of the harmony between history, culture and nature.

Journeying along the Inca trail, it's impossible not to let your mind wander towards Machu Picchu. Some athletic travellers opt to walk into the reserve, but our group took the train. The breathtaking view of river, mountains and cloud forest was serene, although the sound of Abba's 'Dancing Queen' coming through the train's PA was a bit at odds with the scenery.

Our base for the night was the resort of Inkaterra Machu Picchu. Inkaterra was way ahead of its time, aiming to provide hotels and tourist services that would support the concept of eco-tourism as far back as the early 1970s. Set in five hectares of cloud forest, it is also heavily involved in research into social, scientific, technological and cultural consequences of tourism to ensure local biodiversity. Paths meander through the gardens and guests can wander alone or take a guided tour. So the eco-minded traveller can rest easy that the carbon footprint of their trip is as small as is possible while they enjoy as authentic an experience as possible – and with enough luxurious experiences to make a long-haul trip a joy rather than a chore.

The grounds of the hotel are a flourishing testament to biodiversity: some 372 species



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of orchid, 184 species of bird (including 15 types of hummingbird) and 111 species of butterfly can be found here. In the morning you can watch the resort staff collect, dry, and grind the coffee leaves and beans, creating an aroma that fills the senses and imprints a memory that is recalled every time you open a jar of coffee (though the smell is not quite the same.)

Next morning, we took a half-hour bus journey up the mountain to the Machu Picchu reserve. As 22,500 people visit every day, we left early to try to beat the crowds. Despite having seen photographs of the site, nothing prepares you for the real thing. The drive itself is spectacular, weaving up 400 metres from the village to the citadel. Chatter on the bus stopped as everyone gazed at the scene that was unfolding outside, and this spectacular archaeological

site lives up to all the hype. The sundials, sacred plaza and temple of the sun seem an impossible feat surrounded by Wayna Picchu, Intipunka, the sun gate and entrance to the Inca trails. Our guide explained what life would have been like when the site was inhabited and also talked of the possibility of other undiscovered sites that may lie in the dense cloud forest of the region. It was captivating stuff, although we also learned that subsidence of the site has been detected, meaning tourist access to Machu Picchu is currently being reviewed.

From the mountains to the heart of the city, we headed back to Cusco. The highlight was the Cathedral, which houses the city's collection of colonial art, although our guide explained that the Andean people managed to surreptitiously represent their own gods in the churches of their



**ON TOP OF THE WORLD** (Above) Taquile islanders; (main) the breathtaking vista from Machu Picchu

## TRAVEL NEWS

**Let tourism be your bible**

Jordan may be the birthplace of Christianity but when Pope Benedict XVI visits next week, he will quickly realise that there is more to this holyland than godliness. With a history that spans the Neolithic age through to Moses, the Greeks, Romans and Lawrence of Arabia, visitors will be overwhelmed by the sheer wealth of experiences available to them.

While the Pope, however, may be tempted to rely on his Bible as a guide book, other visitors might opt for one of the multitude of good touring holidays now available to the region.

Voyages Jules Verne (0845 166 7035, [www.vjv.com](http://www.vjv.com)) offers a Discover Jordan tour from £850pp based on two sharing for seven nights. Price includes B&B accommodation in Petra, Amman and Aqaba, return flights from London to Aqaba, transfers and main excursions. For further information about Jordan, see [www.visitjordan.com](http://www.visitjordan.com).

**Art adventure**

With three films about Salvador Dali about to hit the cinemas, there can be few better excuses to discover more about the Surrealist artist's life.

Born and bred in a well-off home in the Spanish border town of Figueres, he



admitted that much of his inspiration came from the Costa Brava. It was here that he once said he felt "linked by a veritable umbilical cord to the living totality of this Earth".

PCI Holidays (0330 555 0034, [www.pci-holidays.com](http://www.pci-holidays.com)) specialises in holidays to the picturesque resorts along the Costa Brava, all within easy distance of the Dali museums.

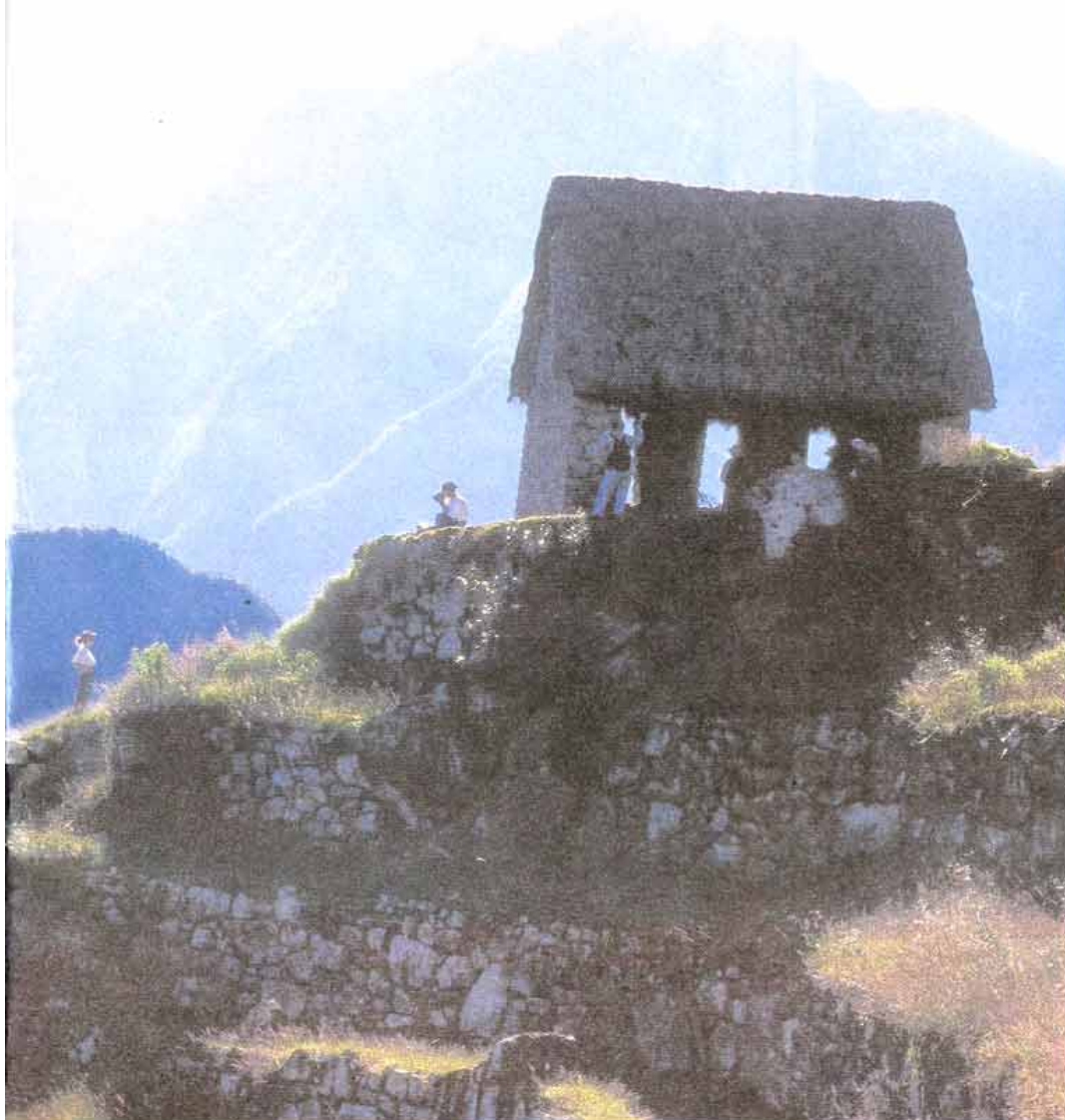
**Park life**

It may be the UK's capital but according to a recent poll of visitors, London is lagging some way behind its European competitors as a tourist destination.

The survey of 2,376 travellers by TripAdvisor found the city to be Europe's dirtiest and most expensive city, an accolade it won for the second year in the row. London was also reckoned to have the worst cuisine, most badly dressed locals and, to add insult to injury, some of Europe's worst tourist traps. Edinburgh, meanwhile, was found to be the most under-rated city.

It wasn't all doom and gloom for London though. Some 50 per cent of those polled said the city was best for public parks, with its nearest competitor Paris, polling just 7 per cent of the vote.

[www.visitlondon.co.uk](http://www.visitlondon.co.uk)



conquerors in their role as artists. All around the city you can see how Peruvian and western cultures have blended together.

The vast Lake Titicaca was our next destination, reached by plane then boat. Titicaca sits 3,810 metres above sea level and crossing it feels like sitting on top of the world. We stopped in at the floating islands of Uros. Made from reeds called totora, the islands are home to the Uros people who predate the Incas. They continue to live on the islands by fishing, weaving and more

recently, tourism. The two families we met were welcoming and, although we couldn't speak Spanish and they didn't speak English, we got along just fine. A young girl called Mary took a shine to me and we played a game of tapping hands like pat-a-cake before taking a trip on a reed boat which she and her father punt - not bad for a seven-year-old.

Our base on the lake was the Inkaterra Hotel Titilaka. The huge windows and wraparound terraces allow guests to view

the lake at all times. Watching the sun set and rise the next morning from this vantage point was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Before leaving Titicaca, we journeyed on to the island of Taquile. From here you can see the snow-capped mountains of Bolivia and the scenery was stunning - the island's red soil contrasting with the blue waters of the lake. It took most of the morning to walk round the island, meeting islanders who were happy to stop and chat (through our guide and interpreter). Back at the hotel we decided that to visit Titicaca without taking a dip would be remiss: it was freezing.

The journey ended where it began, in Lima. We had a whistle-stop tour, taking in the old city where colonial palaces and churches abound, before heading over to the coast to watch surfers and paragliders enjoying the sunshine. My trip to Peru was over much too soon, and to truly appreciate the country would have required a far longer stay. But, having walked along the Inca trail, I hope one day I'll get the chance to return.

**FACT FILE PERU**

Last Frontiers offer several packages to Peru. A ten-day itinerary, staying one night in Lima, and two nights each in Villas Urubamba, Inkaterra Machu Picchu, Inkaterra La Casona, Cusco and Inkaterra Titilaka, with private

transfers, most meals (B&B in Lima and Cusco), international flights with LAN from Heathrow and internal flights with LAN starts from £3,895 per person based on two people travelling together (01296 653000,

[www.lastfrontiers.com](http://www.lastfrontiers.com)).

From 16 June, LAN will be operating a daily flight to Lima from £612 for economy and from £1,966 for business, including taxes. [www.lan.com](http://www.lan.com)