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FUNFARE

By Ricardo F. Lo

No wedding in Machu Picchu

Did Dr. Vicki Belo and her beloved Hayden Kho get married in Machu Picchu, at 7,970 feet above sea level, said to be one of the world's highest peaks (it's known as "Old Peak")?

"No," Vicki told *Funfare* yesterday.

barely 48 hours after she and Hayden came back from a week-long vacation in Peru. "We went there to fulfill a long dream."

You see, people were suspecting that the couple, who got engaged in December last year, were scouting around (the world!) for an ideal place to get married in.

"We do have a plan to get married but we don't know where yet," added Vicki who looked younger, recharged no doubt by the dizzying Machu Picchu altitude which is said to cause people to hyperventilate.

According to Wikipedia, Machu Picchu is a pre-Columbian 15th-century Inca site on a mountain ridge above the Urubamba Valley in Peru, which is 80 kilometers (50 miles) northwest of Cusco and through which the Urubamba River flows. Most archeologists believe that Machu Picchu was built as an estate for the Inca emperor Pachacuti (1438-1472) and is deemed to be the most familiar icon of the Inca world. It is often referred to as "the Lost City of the Incas."

"When I was 20," recalled Vicki, "I read a book by Shirley MacLaine who was all praises for Machu Picchu. She even claimed to have sighted a UFO from there. Since then, I'd been dreaming to visit Machu Picchu."

Vicki and Hayden have traveled around the world but they'd never been to Peru.

One time, out of the blue she asked Hayden what place he would like to visit and he said, "Machu Picchu."

What a coincidence!

"I told Hayden, That's also my dream."

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Part of the send-off to Machu Picchu was a native dance by a group of Peruvian dancers. Dr. Vicki Belo and her beloved Hayden Kho must have felt like 'honeymooners' in one of the world's highest peaks.



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destination", said Vicki. "Sabi ko, soul-mates nga talaga kami."

It was a "cultural trip," very educational and very "historical," according to Vicki.

After visiting other places in Peru (Lima and Cusco, among them), the sweethearts checked into the Incatera Hotel for their three-day stay in Machu Picchu, brought there by the famous Orient Express.

"The trip was very memorable," said Vicki. "Up there, you could hear yourself think and your heart beat. It's so quiet and you feel nearer to God."

How about getting married in a place "nearer to God?"

"Hmmm," smiled Vicki. "Ganah nga siguro n'ya, ano?"

(E-mail reactions at rickylo@philstar.net.ph or at entphilstar@yahoo.com.)

ON OUR BUCKET LIST: MACHU PICCHU

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Kept warm in their Peruvian alpaca wool sweaters, Vicki and Hayden smell the flowers at Hotel Sol y Luna in Cusco.



Pisco Sour, the Peruvians' favorite drink.



Faces that tell a story, windows that reveal a history.



Machu Picchu. "Ka-ching! Soalmate!" I rejoiced.

Luckily, Audrey Puckett Chiu told me about Choy Urra of the "Global Nomad" who was a Hong Kong-based Filipino "travel designer" and specialized in one-of-a-kind custom-made tours that created memories to last a lifetime.

Here, I did not get to see any UFOs or buy any designer bags or shoes. Instead, I learned so much about the Incan culture and met some of the kindest and most hospitable people in the world.

Choy advised me that the quickest and easiest way to get to Machu Picchu was to go to Los Angeles and then take a nine-hour flight to Lima, the capital city of Peru. We spent one day there, exploring the colonial city and visiting the Larco Museum to appreciate the evolution of Peruvian art and culture. The highlight of our Lima tour was having cocktails at the Casa Aliaga, which is perhaps the oldest colonial mansion in the whole of South America. It was like stepping back in time 500 years. It has been owned by descendants of Jeronimo de Aliaga, one of Francisco Pizarro's right-hand men for 17 generations. I have never tasted such delicious foie gras, which perfectly matched Peru's favorite drink, the "Pisco sour."

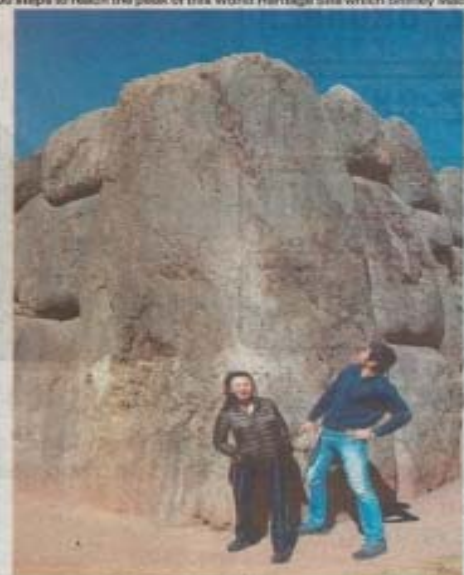
The next day Hayden and I took a 90-minute plane ride to Cusco. From there our personal tour guide Francis Casapino drove us to the sacred Urubamba Valley. It was



No modern tools were used in building these amazing structures of stone.



These two figurines perched at the rooftop of almost every home symbolize abundance and fertility.



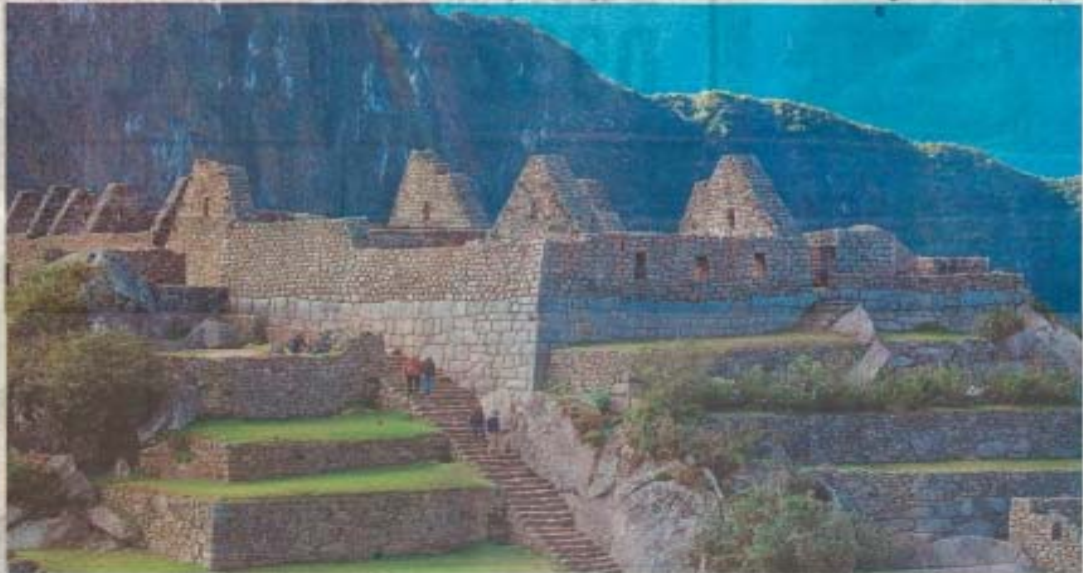
Is Hayden looking for traces of UFOs? It is said that UFO sightings were so common here that locals thought them ordinary, says Vicki.



Casa Aliaga is perhaps the oldest mansion in South America. Here you step back in time 500 years.



Every door, every piece of furniture in Hotel Casana is a fragment of the Peruvian past.



You have to take 11,000 steps to reach the peak of this World Heritage Site which Shirley MacLaine described as magical, overflowing with so much positive energy.



Vicki felt dizzy after a session with a shaman named Luzes, who read their fortunes using coca leaves, from which cocaine is derived.

fun because we visited a llama and alpaca farm where we got to play with them. We were also able to buy some gorgeous sweaters made from their wool, including that of the vicuña, which is known to be the world's finest wool. Actually, the real reason we had to stay in the Urubamba Valley is to get acclimatized to the higher altitude. As you know, in high altitudes the oxygen in the air is much less concentrated and people tend to get dizzy, feel nauseated or faint if they're not given time to adjust.

The next day we took the famous Hiram Bingham train, which took us to the Machu Picchu Pueblo in the village of Aguas Calientes. This train is run by the Orient Express and is quite luxurious, with little chandeliers, a private bar and dining carriages. At the train station we were entertained by local dancers wearing colorful costumes. Upon arrival in Aguas Calientes we had to ride a public bus, which was the only way to reach the entrance to the ruins. Machu Picchu is often referred to as the "Lost City on the Inca Trail." It was only discovered 100 years ago by Yale archaeologist Hiram Bingham, although the site was already in existence for 600 years. It is 7,972 feet above sea

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ON OUR BUCKET LIST: MACHU PICCHU

From Page K-1

level. Most authorities agree that this was the royal estate of Pachacuti, the great Inca who started the expansion of the huge empire.

Going up this very steep mountain left me breathless and gasping for air. We had to hike up huge rocks to reach many of the important sites and, at one point, Hayden had to carry me (but only for 20 seconds because he started panting as well). The weather was cool, but the sun was scorching hot. Thank God I brought lots of Belo Sunblock. Both Hayden and I were awed by how the Incas were able to build this magnificent sanctuary on top of this mountain, since they lacked any modern tools. The Incas, it turns out, were superb engineers and architects. Everything was well thought-out, from the water channels to the stones placed with perfect precision. It has survived 600 years of torrential rains and mudslides.

After spending hours exploring the Machu, we were dog-tired, so we returned to Aguas Calientes. I was getting apprehensive as we walked along dusty, dirt roads, imagining that our hotel would be ugly. At the end of this dirt road, though, there was a rope bridge and suddenly, we were confronted by what seemed to be a beautiful oasis: the Incaera Hotel. This hotel is a bird sanctuary and has 370 varieties of indigenous orchids grown here. Each casita was well appointed with comfortable beds, 600-thread-count sheets and an indoor and outdoor shower. We spent two days exploring the fascinating Machu Picchu town.

Our last stop was the town of Cusco. Most of Cusco looks like Intramuros so the highlight of our stay was staying at our breathtaking hotel, the Hotel Casona. It fused Incan and modern architecture in perfect harmony. We also had a session with a real shaman named Lucas. He read our fortunes using coca leaves, which he also made us chew so we could connect better. While he was pretty accurate, I felt dizzy and my mouth was numb from the coca leaves. No wonder. Cocaine is derived from coca leaves. The next day we flew back to Lima and on to Los Angeles. I did not get to see any UFOs or buy any designer bags or shoes. Instead, I learned so much about the Incan culture and met some of the kindest and most hospitable people in the world.



Vicki and Hayden discover the heart and soul of Machu Picchu through its beautiful people.



The natives wear their colorful iconic outfits for days because in most cases, these are the only clothes they own.



The alpacas are very snobbish, unless you have food for them. Hayden soon finds out.



Souvenirs of Peruvian art and culture include trinkets.



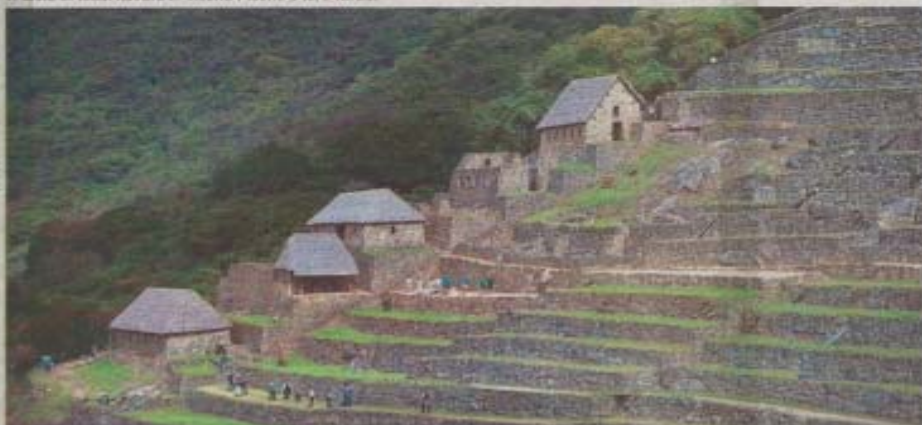
On the famous Hiram Bingham train, run by the Orient Express



A taste of local flavor in Machu Picchu's Inca-Auras.



Hayden says the Machu Picchu market reminded him so much of Baguio.



The Incas were superb engineers and architects. Everything, from the water channels to the stones, was placed with perfect precision, surviving 600 years of torrential rains and mudslides.



"We had to hike up huge rocks to reach many of the important sites and, at one point, Hayden had to carry me but only for 20 seconds because he started panting as well," says Vicki.