

Peru In 5 Days



By Gregory Emvy

April 26, 2019

Five days are not enough to soak in the beauty of Peru, but artist Gregory Emvy and photographer Guilherme Licurgo made the most of it, and even managed to squeeze some work in

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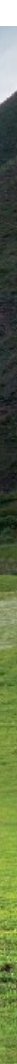
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Peru, for me, has always been a place of mystery: one with a tremendous cultural legacy, as well as beautiful mountains, people, and its own unique and delicious cuisine. My friend, Guilherme Licurgo, a well-known photographer, and I have been working on a mixed-media project called Back to the Roots. The project is centred around the relationship between humans and nature, and we'd like it to serve as reminder of our common roots and how we should take responsibility in protecting the environment.



We've already travelled to six countries as part of this initiative, and Peru was one of our destinations. First, I'd like to mention the hotel we stayed at: Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba. It's an incredible spot located in Sacred Valley. It offers a unique combination of style and comfort set against the backdrop of wild landscapes.

Sacred Valley is one of the key nature attractions in Peru, and is famed for its spectacular views. It is also a stone's throw away from Cusco, Machu Picchu, the Inca Bridge, Maras Salt Mines, Rainbow Mountain, and other key sights of the country. The Urubamba river valley where the hotel is located was important for the Incas because of its geographical and climate features, which made it an almost sacred area that fed the civilisation. It was the heart of the Incan Empire.

If you are a free-spirited traveller, I would suggest renting a car. It is inexpensive here and provides all the flexibility you'd need. Taxi service isn't always reliable, so having your own vehicle will solve all your problems. You can hire a car right at the airport. We used Europe Car service. Be ready, however, for the poor quality of the roads. There are stones, potholes, and winding paths—but the views are worth it.



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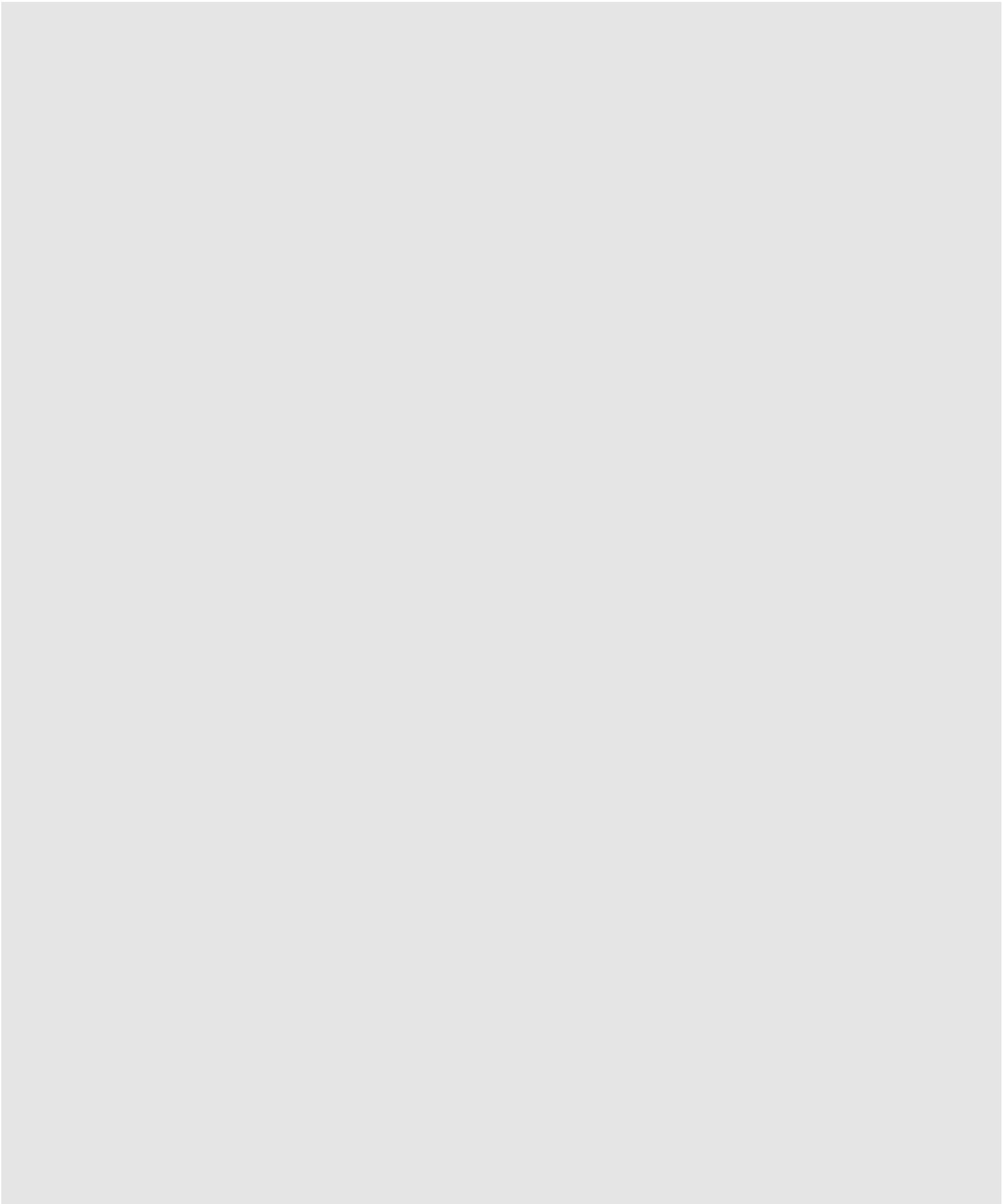
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Don't forget to carry SPF-50 sunscreen with you. Most towns around Cusco are at least 3,000m above the sea level and it's easy to get sunburnt even on a cloudy day. We only had five days in Peru, and most of them were filled with work, so we had to prioritise. First on the list was Salinas de Maras, the salt mines outside the town of Maras. You can start the visit by climbing the hill there and getting some nice views of the area.

Maras was founded by the Incans in the early 16th century, when Spanish colonisation had already begun. Locals there noticed that the pools were salty and built an intricate system of water paths and canals fed by a hot spring. Now, there are 3,500 water ponds Salinas de Maras, each belonging to a local family and is passed on from generation to generation. The higher the pool is, the more salt it produces.

On average, every pool produces up to 200 kilos of salt per month.

Our next stop was Moray, a gigantic archaeological site containing the ruins of round Incan terraces. This was another feast for the eyes. The terraces were used for agricultural purposes. The wells dug across the area created a temperature inference of 15°C between the top and the bottom, thus letting them grow various types of fruit and vegetables.







You can't go to Peru and not visit Machu Picchu. A unique place of its beauty and energy, it deserves a whole day of exploration. Consider the logistics first. You can ask the hotel staff to book train tickets (it's unreachable by car), as well as entrance tickets—which is what we did. During high season (March to August) it's highly advised to book tickets in advance. Our hotel also organised a personal tour guide for us, and provided us with lunch. This might sound like a luxury, but it made our lives much easier.





Machu Picchu is often called a “city in the ruins,” or “the cloud city.” This unique Incan citadel comprises some 200 parts and could fit more than a thousand people. It was a summer residence of the emperor Pachacuti (the sixth in the Incan dynasty).

The structure is very defined. You can see the remains of the palace in the southeast part. The bricks there are polished so thoroughly you could tell that some of the finest architects of the time must have worked there. There is also the theory that Machu Picchu was an art hub, attracting talents from near and far with the aim of knowledge exchange.

In the western part, you can see the main temple and the altar. In front of it there is a living quarter, made up of densely squished two-storey houses. Between the houses are labyrinths of tiny alleys and stairs, many of them leading to a dead-end or a bluff. We spent half a day in this town with our helpful tour guide.

Buy a ticket to Huayna Picchu; it’s a must. Surrounded by Urubamba River, this peak is 360 metres above Machu Picchu and provides some stunning views. Be ready for a steep climb up the stairs that can last about 1.5 hours. We saw a lot of people getting exhausted and giving up half way to the peak.

Lastly, pay a visit to Rainbow Mountain if you are able. At 5,000 metres above the sea level, you’ll find this amazing rock formation. However, to reach it you will have to hike a 4.5km uphill path, which takes about an hour. If you arrive around three in the afternoon, you also have an option to hire a horse and an instructor (20 euros) to help you ride all the way up.

Don't try climbing the mountains after 5:30 in the evening. Chances are the sun will go down while you're still there, and you'll be trapped without any light. This is dangerous: trust me; I've been there.

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