

PASSION  PASSPORT

Peru in Black and White: Capturing Vibrant Landscapes without Color

BY

LAUREN BREEDLOVE

-

February 8, 2021

Peru had been at the tippy-top of my list for a while, so I was beside myself to finally be traveling to one of my most coveted destinations. As someone who loves travel photography, the promise of capturing the vivid spectrum of colors and vibrancy of Peru is something out of a dream. And as if that wasn't enough, there would be llamas and alpacas galore. Excitement bubbled over.

Color seems to be synonymous with Peru. It's woven into the culture, the cuisine, and the landscape. There's a [Rainbow Mountain](#), for goodness sake. Even the massive variety of potatoes come in an array of colors. I didn't set out to edit any of my images in black and white; in fact, it almost seemed like a preposterous idea with the bounty of hues at my fingertips. Once I returned home and started editing, I branched out with this collection of photos, choosing to showcase the beauty of Peru in a way that contrasts with the vibrant captures we usually see, stripping cultural, portrait, and landscape scenes down to the basics. The purpose was to allow for the saturation to be drawn from the scenes directly, without the actual pigment.

But why would you take one of the most distinguishable elements of Peru away from the photographs — to toe the line between creative madness and brilliance, or to make room for the others to shine? You decide.

This series explores the impact and definition of color. This is my attempt at highlighting Peru's visual extravaganza in everyday life through cuisine, textiles, culture, landscape, and markets — void of surface color.

Machu Picchu



The most popular attraction in Peru is an obvious jumping off point. I was lucky enough to visit on a day where the weather was crap. Spending three hours exploring Machu Picchu as a wet dog was a fair trade for the dramatic scenery, in my book — particularly with a constant ebb and flow of fog to play around with capturing. One minute, the ancient Incan city and soaring mountains cradling it would be masked in a white cloud, leaving visitors waiting in anticipation. Then, the curtain would lift and the icon would reveal itself once again in perpetual encore. The suspense was unreal and thrilling.



I found that black and white edits of an iconic site such as Machu Picchu opened up the possibility to appreciate and focus on some of the details outside of the popular



panorama.





Traditional Wool Dyeing + Weaving



In the Andes Mountains, the process of dyeing wool using all natural materials is a cocktail of art and science. Ancient recipes have been passed down generations, keeping the craft alive in commendable fashion. Hand-woven textiles are an intricate part of their cultural expression and provide income for the communities and artisans that produce them.

To say that color plays a significant role in one of the most authentic art forms in Peru would be a gross understatement. The artists that dye wool and camelid fibers (like the adorably soft alpaca and vicuña), infuse shades and hues representative of Peru, sparking life and strong cultural ties to their handmade textiles.





During my visit to weaving villages like Awana Kancha and Chinchero (coincidentally referred to as “rainbow city”), I observed the process of dyeing using natural materials like insects and plants ground to a powder. The star color, red, is produced using cochineal, an insect indigenous to the Sacred Valley. Orange is created by combining citrus with cochineal; yellow comes from flowers like the q’olle; and blue is produced from tara, a bean-like plant. Green is devised from a leafy plant called the ch’illca, then mixed with collpa, a mineral sourced from the jungle.

I soaked in the vivid colors, marveling at the process of boiling and blending items sourced from the environment. It was incredible. The best I could’ve done in my artistic prime of mixing colors was create a cool shade of blue-green courtesy of my crayola paint set at 10 years old.

These ladies were talented.



And then there's the weaving and embroidery. Once their yarns are dyed, the artisans take to their looms, using their hands to create magic in the form of intricately designed textiles in a wide array of brilliant colors and patterns, inspired by their natural surroundings and native animals. All of this while wearing their own marvelous creations. I wanted to buy all the things.

Daily Markets





Landscape

Peru's diverse and dramatic landscape makes you want to pack 175 memory cards. From the Andes mountains to the Amazon jungle, lush scenery practically activates the camera's shutter for you.

You don't need color to appreciate the sheer beauty of Peru's backdrop. It's easy to detect the lush, tropical greenery in images of the Amazon. You can unmask the colorful vigor of exotic flowers and deep tones of the mountains.



I paddled in Tambopata National Park in the Amazon through a tunnel of ferns, into a wide open Lake Sandoval where tall, verdant giants met the bright blue skies. I tried not to think of the creatures below the water, mentioned by our tour guide from Inkaterra's Hacienda Concepcion.

“In this lake you can find all the dangerous animals like from the movies,” he told us.





I learned that Peru has 372 species of orchids. Each one was more beautiful than the next. I stuck my head out of the train to Machu Picchu, practically drooling over amazing vista after amazing vista. I admired ancient architecture backed by Mother Nature, marveling at the incredible contrast and how it made perfect sense. I attempted to wrap my head around Peru's diverse landscape with every snap.

Clothing



In different parts of Peru, whether it be city, country, village, or remote regions, traditional clothing varies. The one thing they all have in common, though, is an abundance of color. The colors of hats and main garments are representative of each region and community, as are the unique styles and embroidery patterns on traditional pieces like skirts and vests. Here, color and style can signify status and serve as a defining factor when identifying the region a local comes from.



The llamas and alpacas sport colorful accessories as well, though their personalities evoke vivid glee themselves. I captured this friendly trio at a roadside stop outside of Chincerro (“rainbow city”) and felt instantly uplifted. How could you not smile in the face of a quirky llama with stacks of rainbow poms and tassels upon its neck?

Traditions



Peru is a destination known for its energetic and colorful festivals. Tradition is a large part of everyday life. One tradition in particular stuck out to me. These ceramic bull duos seen perched upon the roofs of homes date back to Colonial days and are meant to bring good luck and protection. The bulls are also a sign of the hard work of people who built their own houses. The Pucará Bulls (*torito de Pucará*), originally hailed from a region near Lake Titicaca and were used in cattle-branding ceremonies. In addition to household security, they’re said to bring luck to annual harvests and livestock. Many are painted with colorful flowers on top of their traditional earthy tones.



Peru is one of those places where I was already planning my return before I left. I ate a rainbow of foods. I *felt* color and warmth in my interactions with locals and in observing theirs. I was inspired by the creative energy of the Peruvian culture. You can't help but let the vibrance seep into your soul. Whether in color or black and white, I hope these images are a feast for the eyes, just as the country is itself.

Link: <https://passionpassport.com/peru-photography-black-and-white/>