

Sue's Peru

By Sue Christman

The Christmans, Greenes, Wrays and Matthews recently returned from an Overseas Adventure Travel (OATS) trip to Peru. The trip included four nights in the Amazon jungle in two different jungle lodges. The traditional Amazon sleeping house consists of a high thatched roof covering individual partitioned bedrooms. Luckily for us, they had recently added a shower and toilet to the back of each bedroom. The showers were cold and slightly muddy looking but the water had been treated.

We explored the rain forest by foot and by boat. It was the rainy season and a number of the trails were muddy. The rain came late in the afternoon, evening and early morning so we were never bothered the entire 21 days of our trip. Explorama Lodge in the jungle provided us with a wonderful naturalist and guide. We found poisonous frogs, snakes, monkeys, birds and all kinds of plant life and trees. The highlight of the jungle was the Amazon Conservatory for Tropical Studies canopy walkway. It is the longest treetop walkway in the world and rises 120 feet above the ground giving one access to monkeys, toucans, macaws and the most gorgeous butterflies.

Visits to several jungle villages enabled us to try our skill at the blowgun and native dancing; we also got to hold a



Front row left to right: Jerri Matthews, Joy Wray, Sue Christman, Mary Greene
Back row left to right: Phil Matthews, Dick Wray, Bill Christman, George Greene

Our last night in the jungle was spent at Ceiba Tree Lodge (ceiba trees grow up to 150 feet tall and can be hundreds of years old). The lodge had hot showers, air conditioning and a swimming pool! We ate quite well—lots of fresh fruit, juices, vegetables and usually a very tasty soup. We flew from Iquitos back to Lima where we spent several days touring the city, visiting museums and archeological sites along with the requisite shopping and visits to the ice cream stand.

The first part of our trip was made up of eight PKS people and a couple from New Jersey. We added six more people once we got to Lima. We all got acquainted, re-acclimated and then flew to Cuzco to explore the Sacred Valley of the Incas and Machu Picchu. Our experiences in this Peruvian highland community were quite unique. We rafted down the Urubamba

River, only one class 2 rapid much to our disappointment. We ended this excursion by giving away our second pair of sneakers having left very muddy

shoes in the jungle, leaving more space for souvenirs.

Cuzco was our first encounter with guinea pigs (Spanish - cuy). They raise them in their homes and serve them for dinner. The poor little creature arrived at our hostess' dinner table whole with a little red pepper between his teeth. My taste of this entree was really quite microscopic. I stuck to chicken and rice but the children we were sitting with thought it a great treat. Don't leave home without your Imodium or your malaria and altitude sickness pills.

Fortified by guinea pig, we set out by train for Machu Picchu and the start of some of our climbs. Machu Picchu was "discovered" by Yale professor Hiram Bingham in 1911. It is truly one of the wonders of the world. We were able to spend an afternoon there, stay overnight on the banks of the raging Urubamba River and return to the site again the next morning. We visited a number of archeological sites, sun temples, burial sites and the terraces but nothing compares to walking through a magnificent stone work entrance and seeing the Lost City of the Incas.

The train ride to Cuzco was interesting with a folklore presentation and a fashion show of alpaca clothing; lots of the American and Japanese passengers participated. The Cuzco area is known for its folklore shows and we were able to see several. It's important to remember that Peru is still a third world nation; except for the major cities there is a tremendous lack of infrastructure, roads, sewage, water, schools, etc. People considered middle class in Peru would be just barely above the poverty level here. A police officer with 28 years experience spoke to us about drug trafficking and terrorism and what the country's response had been. This man earns \$300 per month and is considered to have a good job.

Once back in Lima, some of our group departed but eleven of us continued on to Lake Titicaca and the Andes mountains. We reached an altitude of 14,200 feet, having climbed up to see the pre-Incan and Incan funeral towers most of which had been looted by the Spanish hundreds



The Greenes

of years ago. The boat trip on Lake Titicaca included a visit to Taquile Island, once a part of the Incan Empire and to Uros Islands where the Uros Indians live on floating islands made of reed and fish from reed boats called balsas. This visit gave us a whole new understanding of the book *Kon Tiki*.

Leaving the lake and mountains behind, we flew back to Lima and boarded our plane for another midnight flight back to the states. It was definitely an adventure, sometimes arduous but we all came back with an understanding of the culture and everyday lives of a number of groups of Peruvians and an exposure to some of most unique geographic and historic places in the world.



The Wrays

one year old sloth. We took small boats out on the Amazon and Napo Rivers to search for the pink dolphins and to fish for piranhas, which they cooked for us for lunch.



Sue and Sloth