



## A Prizewinning Trip

*Entering and winning competitions has never been Kath Wordsworth of Newland Alpacas's fort , but when she came across the Peruvian Secrets competition in Alpaca World she just had to have a go. So, when a letter dropped through the door in December 2005 confirming Kath as the winner, her life was about to change...*

Fast forward to Tuesday October 31<sup>st</sup> 2006 and myself and husband Tom were setting off on a journey of a lifetime to see alpacas in Peru. We left a little anxious at the thought of leaving 27 alpacas and four cats in the hands of our two sons – but these thoughts proved to be unfounded as they did an excellent job while we were away.

We arrived at Lima early in the evening after a long flight of approximately fourteen and a half hours. After clearing immigration we met up with our guide and fellow travellers. Two other couples came on the trip – Jo & John Coates of Kerthua Park Alpacas and Paul & Cherry Philp of Fraddam Alpacas. They proved to be excellent travel companions with a great sense of humour – something we needed at times. We were taken to our hotel in Lima where we sampled our first Pisco Sour (the local drink) and then it was off to bed for a well needed rest.

Next morning we were transported to the airport for the short flight to Cuzco. It is called the Inca capital and boasts of many Inca sights all set amongst stunning hillsides. This was to be our introduction to altitude – something we all felt in different ways.

After a walkabout in the city and many steps later we returned to our hotel for a cup or two of Mat  De Coca (coca-leaf tea) as this is said to help adjust to the altitude. I can say from experience the effect of altitude is not pleasant but you do adjust over time. That evening we rallied round and took ourselves off to a local restaurant, where we were serenaded by panpipes!

Thursday November 2<sup>nd</sup> – everyone was feeling the altitude and had not had a good night's rest – we set off for our visit to various Inca sites with our first port of call being the Coco caf  to stock up on altitude sweets. We all felt much better as the day wore on and returned to the hotel for much needed rest as we were to have an early start the next morning for Machu Picchu.

Friday November 3<sup>rd</sup> – Transferred early to the small train station for a special Machu Picchu train. This is a journey of about four hours with incredible scenery and different micro-climates. Machu Picchu turned out to be breathtaking, marred only by the incessant rain. Our guide Percy was a mine of information and the whole excursion was a joy. We returned to the train very wet but the trip back was made very enjoyable by entertainment from an alpaca garment fashion show and folk dancer- something you would never see on British Rail. Late back to the hotel, we all set about drying off our money, passports & tickets...

Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> November - the Orient Express to Juliaca. This is an incredible journey of about nine hours with ever changing scenery. The service was first class but then we had a slight hiccup. Our party was supposed to disembark at Juliaca but due to a booking mix-up we had to carry on to Puno. This meant we had to travel back to Juliaca by road and then on to our final destination of the day – Mallkini Alpaca Ranch. This journey took another four hours by minibus- mostly on off-road tracks. We were all feeling a little jaded by this time and it wasn't helped by being taken to what I can only describe as the worst toilet in Peru (or perhaps the

world?) en-route and also by the driver getting lost miles and miles from anywhere. Pretty scary to say the least.

We did arrive at Mallkini eventually- tired, light headed (due to the altitude) and just wanting to crash out into our beds. This we did, armed with our novelty sheep hot water bottles. Mallkini is a super place but please note they don't have central heating or mains electricity. Power is supplied by a generator- that is usually turned off at 9:30 PM.

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> November - Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> November - Awoke early to a sunny morning and stunning view; yesterday's long trip had been worth it. There outside my window was the altiplano and of course – alpacas. Heaven!

After a good breakfast we met with the ranch administrator Moises Asparrin and the interpreter Lourdes Vizcarra. Lourdes, who works for the Michell Fibre factory in Arequipa had been brought to Mallkini for our stay and she proved a valuable asset- speaking very good English against our basic Spanish. We also met up with fellow Brit Steve Doughty from Boston, Lincolnshire. He had been resident at Mallkini for a few weeks where he had been learning to shear alpacas.

My first foray on to the altiplano was on horseback. Jo and myself trekked off with a few ranch hands to scout out a herd of 400 pregnant alpacas. This took us about one and a half hours while the other group members came by 4 x 4 truck. This was to be the highlight of my whole trip and really cleared my head with the fresh air. We eventually found the females and met with the shepherd's two children Alex and Marie Sol who were helping to look after the herd with their mother. At this time of year the shepherds live out in the wilds in little stone huts no more than 9' long and 4' high. After a photo shoot we set off back for lunch.

The afternoon was taken up by lectures on morphological characteristics and disease in alpacas. Moises was a very interesting teacher and answered all of our questions with enthusiasm. It was nice to know that we really are doing the same as the Peruvians with our alpacas in these respects.

Awoke to another sunny but cold morning – this morning we covered alpaca reproduction and fibre. The afternoon was taken up with practicals covering fleece, nails, injections etc. We then had a shearing demo and were shown the grading and wrapping of fleece. That evening we had a special dinner and were all presented with our Alpaca Breeding Basic Course Diplomas. On our last morning at Mallkini we were invited to help with the selection of alpacas for a show to be held in Puno. I felt privileged to be able to get hands on – especially with the Suris, my favourites. We sadly had to leave Mallkini after lunch for the long off-road trip to Puno.

Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> November. – The morning was taken up by a visit to the Floating Islands of the Uros Indians on Lake Titicaca. We then hopped onto another plane heading for the 'white city' – Arequipa. This is a city dominated by volcanoes, at present just one is active.

Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> November – We were once again to meet up with Lourdes the interpreter at her place of work – the Michell Fibre factory; an amazing place. Our first port of call was the newly opened visitor centre and shop followed by a tour around two of the factories and finishing off at the factory shop where we succumbed to buying a few Alpaca garments! It would have been nice to spend a whole day at the factory but what we saw opened our eyes to the wonders of alpaca fibre processing; they were even able to put 30 micron fleece to good use, something we need to investigate back home. Having said that they have invested heavily in machinery and technology. Also, it was nice to hear as a Suri breeder that they recognise Suri fibre as being superior.

Our afternoon was spent taking a visit to the Ice Maiden exhibition (a preserved mummy discovered high in the Andes).

Friday 10<sup>th</sup> November- A glorious hot and sunny day – Arequipa does seem to have the best weather. We set off for the Colca Canyon taking in The National Reserve of Alpacas and Vicuñas on the way. This was a trip of about four hours on good roads and off-road tracks. We reached the top of the world (or it seemed like it); a high plateau of about 5000 metres. Feeling light headed again we soon descended into the very scenic Colca Canyon and then to our hotel. The hotel was set amongst stunning views with its own resident alpaca that came into reception. It had been brought down from the hills at birth after its mother died and had been hand reared by one of the staff. It was about 8 months old and I think beserk male syndrome will soon be upon them (either that or it will end up on the barbeque; something some of us tried while staying here. Barbequed alpaca - very nice and low in cholesterol)

Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> November – we were all woken at 5 am for an early start to see the Condors. Much to our disappointment after waiting a few hours they didn't show. The scenery was great though. In the afternoon we drove back to Arequipa.

Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> November – This morning we had a city trip taking in a lovely monastery and various churches and then once again we packed up and headed off for the airport for the flight to Lima.

Monday 13<sup>th</sup> November - the trip is nearly over now – just a chance to have a stroll down to see the Pacific Ocean and have a ice cream in McDonalds (yes they get everywhere). Late evening we depart for home, suitcases bulging with all things alpaca. What a wonderful time we had – the hotels and service were good, the people very pleasant and the country as a whole was breathtaking. I did come away a little sad at the immense poverty encountered. We all tried to help in our own way by purchasing from roadside stalls and giving a few coins for photos, but coming home to Christmas and seeing all the shops really made me think.

Thank you Alpaca World for running the competition and a big thank you to Peruvian Secrets for supplying an excellent itinerary and holiday.