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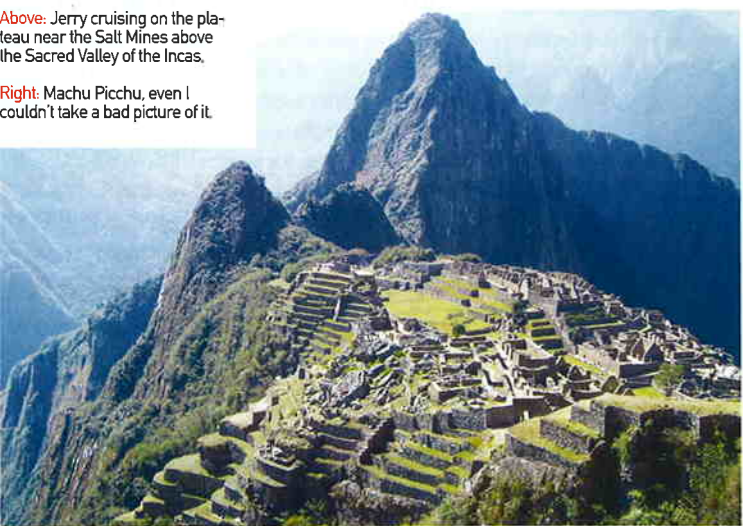
THE ANDES TO THE AMAZON

# Peruvian Gold

Peru offers 93 of the world's uniquely defined geographical zones and it's one of the few places on Earth where life goes on as it did 1000 years ago. For a group from Brisbane it was a two-week trailbike adventure spanning an amazing country, from the dizzy heights of the Andes through the Amazon and into South America's deepest canyon.

Above: Jerry cruising on the plateau near the Salt Mines above the Sacred Valley of the Incas.

Right: Machu Picchu, even I couldn't take a bad picture of it.



We were four friends from Brisbane: John, Jerry, Trish and me, planning a trip through the European Alps, when Jerry mentioned Peru and "roads less travelled". Peru is on the West Coast of South America, roughly equivalent in latitude to North Queensland, extending east over the Andes into the Amazon jungle and is host to attractions like the Inca ruins, Nasca Lines and Lake Titicaca. John, Jerry and I have been riding off-road adventures together for a few years now. Trish has almost no off-road experience, but accepted my argument of "you'll be right".

Cusco, the central city of the Inca Empire, is high in the Andes at an elevation of 3300m. Our plane from Lima was early - typical of the notoriously unreliable schedules - and we

had a few anxious moments hanging around the car park waiting for our tour guide. Alex rocked up on an XR400 with a pick-up in tow for us and our luggage, and adventure became reality.

After settling into our hotel we enjoyed a welcome dinner with our hosts: Alex the tour guide and proprietor of PeruMotoTours, and Daniel, a professional archaeological guide (with a degree in South American culture). We were very pleased our hosts spoke good English and were as happy to see us as we were to be there. Altitude sickness is normal above 2500m and we all felt varying degrees of the symptoms; headache, dizziness and breathlessness. The trick is to take it easy for the first day or so and don't eat too much.



Above: Winding our way up to the 'Abra de Amprasse' at 4200m. One of the three passes we encountered over 4000m.

Below: Nicely refreshed after some delicious watermelon at a local bar hidden high in the Andes.

Below right: Young locals at Pisac Inca ruins are always available for a photo - for a price.



Alcohol should be avoided too, but we didn't see much abstinence in this city, which catered well for backpackers.

Cusco means navel. It was the centre of the Inca civilisation, which flourished for around 500 years until the Spanish invasion of 1532. That was when the Conquistadors accomplished the seemingly impossible by

good fortune and daring, and as a result Peruvians today are typically a mix of European and Indian peoples called Mestizos. Spanish is the primary language, with the native language Quechuan common in the villages. Our guides were fluent with both of these languages, but not too sure about Jerry's (Irish) English.

## DAY 1 - THE BIKES

John, Jerry and myself were on Honda Falcons, a Brazilian-made, electric-start, dual-sport version of the XR400. Trish had a similar incarnation of the 250 called a Tornado. Alex suggested these bikes when we booked the tour and we were sold on the idea of compliant suspension, comfy seats and electric leg. Other bikes, like the XR600, were available if you wanted them. The bikes were all in good condition and shod with new Pirelli MT21 tyres. The first thing we noticed about our steeds was the lack of power due to the high elevation and 84-octane fuel, a bit different to the GS1200, KTM950 and XR650 that we normally kick around on. Our first outing was a neat ride around the cobbled

streets of Cusco and visits to the local Inca sites of Saschayuan (pronounced sex woman) and the Sun Temple, where Daniel used to work. He pointed out the Indian influence on European art like "The Last Supper" with the traditional feed of guinea pig snuck in or the religious figures with mouths full of (illicit) drugs.

## DAY 2 - VALLEY OF THE INCAS

We said goodbye to Cusco, eagerly anticipating the next two weeks crossing the Andes into the Amazon jungle, back over to the high plains and the Colca Canyon finishing at Lake Titicaca. Alex was riding an XR400 with our gear in the Hilux 4WD support vehicle, Daniel rode along in the Hilux