



PERU TO THE AMAZON
Peruvian Gold

Above: Ascending through the seemingly endless cycle of valleys and passes.

Right: No-one else here to enjoy this remote Andean valley but us bikers.



with our mechanics, Richard and Efran. This day was all bitumen as we crossed into the Sacred Valley of the Incas on the Urubamba River where we visited the ruins of Pisac, the salt mines at Salinas and the amazing amphitheatre of Moray high in the mountains. I had the opportunity to ride back into the valley via one of the typical mountain trails prevalent all through the Andes. Apart from being an absolute hoot to ride, it's amazing to think these trails have existed for centuries and are still used today by the locals. If you happen to find yourself in Cusco with a couple of days to spare I recommend you see Alex about his enduro tours. You are, as he says, "in motor-cycle paradise".

DAY 3 – MACHU PICCHU

No trip to Peru is complete without visiting the awesome Inca city of Machu Picchu perched high in the mountains and only discovered in 1911. There is no vehicular access so you have to catch the tourist train that follows the Urubamba River to the town of Aguas Calientes, where a bus connection takes you up to the city. The more adventurous can walk the Inca Trail. Simply sensational.



Right: Locals doing it hard selling their goods at Palapampa Pass at 4900m. These people are tough.

DAY 4 – QUILLABAMBA

We had paid our tourist debt to the Incas and were now heading into the mountains towards our first high pass. The twisty tarmac turned to dirt and the distant snowcapped peaks got nearer as we approached the pass of Abra de Malga at an elevation of 4,400m. To put this in perspective, Kosciusko is around 2,200m. Surprisingly, a family lived right at the pass in a typical mudbrick dwelling. The kids quickly donned our gloves and mucked around while we marvelled at our position on top of the world. We continued winding down the other side, punctuated by some interesting shortcuts as the terrain changed from alpine to forest and eventually levelled to follow a river. I was following John for a while watching him nail the formed berms when he waved me

through. I upped the pace a bit so he couldn't get a real good butcher's at my dodgy style. Soon I was behind Jerry and the bikes were feeling pretty good at this lower altitude so I started showing him a wheel, as you do. We reached our destination of Quillabamba with rather large grins on our faces. This town is very provincial Peru and it was interesting wandering through the markets, where it seemed everything could be repaired, even light globes. John had to stay in touch with his work while on the trip and was able to find internet cafes in the most remote places. Just don't get caught there when school gets out! Given the majority of the workers we saw carried picks and shovels, one can imagine big changes on the way with the next generation of Peruvians.

DAY 5 – QUEBRADA ONDA

The feeling was now tropical as we continued following the valley to our waterfall lunch spot and on to the village of Quebrada Onda. Things were definitely getting more remote and bikes were certainly a bit of a novelty as Trish found out when she was swamped by locals in a village while repairing a flat. There's not much to Quebrada Onda; you wouldn't have picked our hotel from the surroundings. Daniel was our chef for the night as there wasn't a restaurant to be seen. I bought some beers from a store and we really enjoyed being in the back of nowhere on the other side of the world.

Right: Not quite sure what a skull, bowl and pizza oven have in common – and we didn't ask.

DAY 6 – LARES

Lares is known for its natural hot springs and is something of a tourist attraction, albeit a remote one. We arrived just as a load of tourists were grumpily heading back to their bus. I soon realised these poor sods had been sitting in a 4WD bus all day and probably expected more than just the basics for all that discomfort. For us, however, it was a different story. What a beaut finish to a day of great riding, relaxing in these hot pools, which were a



bit like good Indian curry: mild, medium and very hot (with a similar colour). Amazingly, our accommodation was right there at the pools: five small mud rooms just big enough for a bed. There was no electricity, just candles and no-one else.

Daniel was preparing the meal again and I was thinking it just doesn't get any better than this. Oh ... the fifth room was really a shop, which sold beer.



DAY 7 – PISAC

By this time Trish had become very comfortable on the dirt. Cocky even. And contrary to her earlier fears wasn't holding up proceedings. She did, however, come unstuck on a concrete spillway testing the green stuff for traction.

A short time later we were at the pass of Abra de Amprasse at 4200m and then descended back to Pisac in the Sacred Valley of the Incas, completing an amazing loop of the region. We spent the afternoon market shopping and relaxing in our stylish hotel resort, The Royal Inca Pisac, where John clocked up a \$100 phone bill 'checking in'.

Left: If you are wearing footwear then expect a hammering from the shoe shiners. Don't think that wearing thongs will make you exempt either.