

**Peru and Bolivia 2017**  
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Thank you to everyone who has asked how Peru and Bolivia was. Here is a short description of how awesome our students were and what an amazing time we had in South America.

We flew to Lima (the capital of Peru) before taking an internal flight to Cusco. This is an amazing colonial city high in the Andes. The Incas chose Cusco as their capital city. We could immediately see buildings made from their characteristic carved stones. They didn't use any mortar so carved them to fit perfectly. Because of this, their buildings have survived earthquakes much better than many of our more recent attempts.

We arrived in Cusco at the same time as the county's teachers were on strike. (These had apparently been going on for months.) We saw almost daily marches in protest. We were also there at the same time as the Peruvian Independence celebrations. So, with the protest marches came parades. The local church just behind our hostel seemed to be key in these celebrations. Its worshipers did seem to love their firecrackers, which they let off regularly throughout the day and night!



The altitude was a challenge. Not only was it difficult to move quickly, our brains seemed to be full of cotton wool for a few days. Despite this we had a list of jobs to do: changing money, buying food and provisions for the next phases, getting phones that work in country etc.

After a few days, our group split. Half (our Year 12 students) went to the volunteering phase with Miss Charles, whilst half (the Year 11s) came on the trek with Dr Dixon.

We drove higher into the Andes to the trail head, which was deep in a region the Incas called the Sacred Valley. The last few miles were on very steep, precipitous roads which hugged the edge of a canyon. Cars coming in the opposite direction made for interesting moments. Here we pitched our tents for the first time. The views of the snow-covered mountains were as breath-taking as the altitude!

The next day we trekked (slowly!) up to a beautiful green lake. The paths were steep and the views were amazing. We could see and hear mini avalanches amongst the glaciers.



The next day we started the Salkantay Trek. This is not the traditional Inca trail, which is considered a little touristy for an expedition. Ours was harder, longer and higher! (Of course, the Incas walked throughout the Andes and so many tracks and paths are Inca trails.) We trekked upwards for two days to reach the actual Salkantay Pass at over 4600m. One of our Outlook Expeditions guides who has been on fifteen trips, said this was the hardest he had ever done on any continent! Despite this, our students were amazing. We were so proud of the way they supported each other when the going got tough. And it did get tough (for staff and students alike)! The four-day trek ended at Aguas Calientes. This town is in the valley beneath Machu Picchu.



Machu Picchu is 1700 steep steps up from Aguas Calientes. We set off at 4am to get there when the park opened two hours later. We climbed a little above Machu Picchu and sat and watched as the sun rose above the other peaks. The clouds lifted to reveal the 'lost' city of the Incas.

The ruins seem to hang from the edge of the cliffs; terraces to provide food cut into them. Stone walls made from giant perfectly-carved boulders are still standing centuries later. Again, the amazing Incan engineering holds them in position still. This really is one of the wonders of the modern world; number three of the Lonely Planet top 100 destinations anywhere.

We returned to Cusco and set off the next day for our volunteering phase. We went to an orphanage called Azul Wazi. A retired policeman called Alcides set this amazing place up ten years ago, with no support from local government. It was an amazing place and he was a truly inspirational man. He is literally saving the lives of street children, providing them with a safe place to grow up.

We stayed for four days and built a large retaining stone wall (see the before and after images on the top of the next page). This meant hours of moving two truckloads of large stones and mixing lots of cement. Our students were so great. They worked so hard. The pile of stones we moved in the first afternoon was supposed to take the whole of the next day!

We donated four of our old school laptops and two bags of sports kit. (Thank you to those who donated these.) The orphans and Alcides were very grateful. Both the laptops and sports kit will be used every day and make a real difference.

The days finished with a communal game of football. Our Outlook Expeditions team sadly lost to Azul Wazi. Home field advantage and the altitude might have had something to do with it!





As the days passed we all grew extremely fond of Azul Wazi, Alcides and the young people. It really was very sad to leave. The journey back to Cusco was a quiet, reflective one. We were all touched by the generosity, kindness and welcome we received from these young people. Isn't it funny that often the most generous people are those with the least? We do hope that our school can support Alcides and Azul Wazi in some way in the future.



We then said goodbye to Peru and took an overnight bus into Bolivia. We were supposed to visit Isla del Sol on Lake Titicaca but a standoff between two local villages meant it was unsafe for us to do so. Instead we had an amazing campfire on the beach to celebrate a team member's birthday. The next day we travelled onto La Paz. This is the highest capital city in the world. Again, we found this increase in altitude difficult. La Paz is an amazing city. It is not so colonially-charming as Cusco but is equally as awe-inspiring (albeit a little edgier). It is situated in a deep valley which means the poorer housing at the city's edges cling to the steep cliffs. We took an amazing cable car ride to the top of one of these cliffs (see photo on the next page). Snow-covered mountains make an amazing backdrop. And at night the lights merge in with the stars making it difficult to see where Earth ends and the heavens begin.



Another overnight bus took us deep into Bolivia to the Salar de Uyuni (salt flats). These are the world's largest. One third of the World's lithium is found here so we are all likely to hear a lot more about this place in the future as we begin to struggle to make batteries. This was once part of the ocean and over millions of years was lifted up with the Andes to form a lake. The water slowly evaporated to leave behind the salt. We took a four-day tour through the region, starting with the Salar itself. Pure, clean, white salt stretched as far as the eye could see and allowed us to take amazing, perspective-shifting photos! It is not often we get to stand on miniature versions of our students...

The next few days we saw stunning volcanoes, deep blue, yellow and green lakes, snow-covered peaks, geysers and amazing rock formations. Finally, we came to a giant lake, made blood-red by billions of plankton that were fed upon by thousands of pink flamingos.

The last night we slept in a homestay at nearly five thousand metres. The night was clear and the stars were amazing. We saw a beautiful Milky Way.



We returned to La Paz for a final celebratory meal out before flying home. The twenty-eight days had flown by. It really was an amazing trip. The itinerary was superb. Our leaders from Outlook Expeditions were brilliant. And so were our students. We could not have asked for anything more from them. They represented our school so well. They overcame their own challenges including some difficult upset tummies, local foods, mosquito bites, squat toilets, cold showers and freezing nights. Their independence and confidence grew in front of our very eyes. We really were blessed with them, and our choice of countries.

We took our final team photo in arrivals at Heathrow (below). Please say well done to our students when you see them.

