

# INCA LAND PERU

AMITABHA GANGOPADHYAY



INDIA • SINGAPORE • MALAYSIA



## **Notion Press**

Old No. 38, New No. 6  
McNichols Road, Chetpet  
Chennai - 600 031

First Published by Notion Press 2019  
Copyright © Amitabha Gangopadhyay 2019  
All Rights Reserved.

ISBN 978-1-64587-195-8

This book has been published with all efforts taken to make the material error-free after the consent of the author. While every effort has been made to avoid any mistake or omission, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that neither the author nor the publisher or printers would be liable in any manner to any person by reason of any mistake or omission in this publication or for any action taken or omitted to be taken or advice rendered or accepted on the basis of this work.

While every effort has been made to avoid any mistake or omission, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that neither the author nor the publishers or printers would be liable in any manner to any person by reason of any mistake or omission in this publication or for any action taken or omitted to be taken or advice rendered or accepted on the basis of this work. For any defect in printing or binding the publishers will be liable only to replace the defective copy by another copy of this work then available.



*As we entered through the main entrance, a dark cloud was looming over the mountains. We walked along the gravel path and climbed up the slope of the hill. There it was, right in front of our eyes - the majestic ruins of Machu Picchu. Guarded by Huayna Picchu and the magnificent range of Andes Mountains, it stood there in its glory of the bygone days. I have no idea how Incas found such a place to build their fortress, so isolated from the rest of the world and so well guarded by the beautiful mountains. I have seen hundreds of pictures, and I have dreamed of Machu Picchu in my sleep, but nothing could parallel the beauty that I was watching in awe, no camera could capture the majesty of its existence. My jaw dropped, and I was speechless. John was telling us its history, but I was not listening. I was in a trance, moonstruck by the beauty of Machu Picchu! Right that moment I realised deep inside me that my love for Machu Picchu is eternal and the romance would never end.*



# Inca Land Peru - Our First Layover in Mexico City



## First Layover – Mexico City

To tell you the truth, I have not met anyone who does not have the aspiration of viewing Machu Picchu at least once in their lifetime. Since my heydays of yesteryears, I always wanted to see Machu Picchu with my own eyes. And it had been my dream all along! Although the dream hadn't come true for one reason or another, 'a true love never dies'.

I was at work when I heard a "Ping" in my computer. I glanced up and saw an email has popped in my inbox - Aeroméxico has just announced a US\$350 Calgary-Lima return airfare! I almost fell from the chair. That's an incredible offer! True, I usually travel on budget airline tickets, but wow, so cheap! How could it be real! And that is how it all started. One big uncertainty I was still facing was whether Suman would come with me this time. Suman doesn't like to travel, but I was determined to convince her to come along with me to Peru. This kind of a deal doesn't last long... there are plenty of hawks like me who just wait for such deals.

Knowing that Suman would push back showing hundreds of reasons why she couldn't join me, I was desperate to convince her fast so that the tickets wouldn't vanish. But it was not an easy job. As usual, she was not willing to travel, and I never stopped nagging her while keeping an eye on the flight availability. In a couple of days, there were only a handful of tickets left, and I sent her a May-Day text with an ultimatum that I was going to buy two tickets regardless of whether she would come with me or not. Suman finally gave up, but warned me, "Nine days, including the travel dates, not a single day more; otherwise I am not coming," she laid her condition firm.

"Yes, indeed, Your Highness," I said and made sure the itinerary did not cross the line. Yay! Finally, the dream came true. Yes, *it's time for Machu Picchu, baby!*

Sure, Machu Picchu was the jewel of the crown in our itinerary, but we squeezed some more. It was actually a seven-day trip if we excluded the travel time. I must admit that I have a bad travel habit: When I travel alone, I pack activities back to back like there is no tomorrow. It's go, go, go all the time! But with Suman travelling with me, I had to be careful and cut down my bucket list. Besides, I was a bit worried about the altitude sickness in Cusco. At over 11,000 feet, the oxygen level is low and things can go wrong if one is not careful! Travellers often suffer from altitude sickness! Many had suggested that we spend a few days in Cusco just to acclimatise to the altitude before heading to Machu Picchu. And too bad, 'a few days' we didn't have. So, we budgeted just the first two days in Cusco. No, it's not that we would sit down for two days inside a hotel in Cusco... there was plenty to do in and around Cusco.

"You know, once we complete the tour of Cusco and Machu Picchu, let's make a trip to see the famous Nazca Lines," I tried to convince Suman before I booked our tours. Sure, we couldn't squeeze Lake Titicaca or the Amazon cruise in this trip, as much as I would have loved to, as there was simply not enough time! "Okay, fine, let's do Nazca this time then," Suman agreed. And, of course, we wanted to explore the beautiful city of Lima!



This must have been a promotional fare, as Aeroméxico was starting its service from Calgary for the first time. The route was to fly from Calgary to Mexico City in its first leg, then change aircraft and fly to Lima from Mexico City. I never travelled Aeroméxico before and at such a low cost I was not even sure what service to expect. But we were dead wrong. Wow! What a splendid service! I do travel a fair bit, but I hardly ever find an agent from the check-in counter coming down to greet me in

the line-up and taking my documents for check-in. Perhaps, this gesture was a part of the promotion; but nevertheless, we were sold. We loved it! We boarded the flight, stacked our luggage in the overhead bin and slumped into our seats. The flying time to Mexico City was around 5-6 hours from Calgary, and it was a red-eye flight. Unlike some fortunate travellers, we both sleep poorly during overnight flights, and we just dozed on and off during the flight. A sudden jolt during the landing in Mexico City woke us up. I checked my watch; it was close to 6:30 am, and our journey began.

It was pandemonium at the international arrival terminal in Mexico City Airport. Multiple lines snaking from the arrival gates poured into one common area where the definition of lines disappeared altogether and a sea of people were jostling to fit into a stream of moving mass, apparently all trying to reach the immigration counter somewhere beyond the sea of people... welcome to Mexico! Well, looking at the snail pace of the moving mass to the immigration counter, we figured it would be at least 2 hours before we could actually complete the immigration & customs and then collect our luggage and check-in for the next flight to Lima. Thank God that our flight to Lima was scheduled to leave in the evening, so no problem there. But my worry was: *Would Alejandro wait for us?* Alejandro Toledo from Marriott was supposed to pick us up from the airport and take us for a city tour after we refreshed a bit in the hotel. *Good luck!* I thought. So be it if he wouldn't wait for us. I wouldn't blame him. Who was going to wait that long just to pick up a couple of passengers? My estimate of the wait was not off-track. It took us just under two hours to complete all the formalities, and then we came to the arrival level, finally! I was thinking whether I should make a precious roaming call to the hotel from my cell phone with limited credit or if we should take a taxi. We were sceptical of the second option, as we were warned by the



hotel not to hop into an unknown cab. *Might as well give them a call for pick-up*, I thought. Surprise, surprise! A gentleman was waiting, holding our name tag! Hey, I was impressed! Perhaps, Mexican cabs are used to such long delays in the airport, but nevertheless, it was beyond our expectation. "Buenos dias," I greeted. (Well, I know my Spanish vocabulary is limited to 'Spanglish', but I couldn't resist trying a bit!)



*Courtyard Marriott,  
Mexico City*

Alejandro spoke perfect English. So that was really handy for us. Marriott was almost nestled within the terminal, and it took only a 5-minute drive for us to reach there. We were required to book the hotel for one full night anyway, although we were leaving in the same afternoon... rules! That suited us just fine, as we needed a good shower and a hearty breakfast anyway. We walked towards our room after check-in. Nice hotel, actually! The ambience was excellent; soft light was pouring down through the frosted glass ceiling of the hotel as we were walking past the main lobby and the patio. Certainly, we were game!

## Mexico City

We just had a few hours in hand to get a whirlwind tour of Mexico City before flying out to Lima. I knew that we wouldn't even scratch the surface of this huge city in a few hours. But we had to do the best we could with the time we had. As a matter of fact, Mexico City was a bonus for us due to the stopover. We hopped in the car with Alejandro at the wheel.



"Well, you know we have a tight timeline. Where can you take us within this short time, Alejandro?" I asked.

Alejandro is a practical man with a pleasant personality. "Well, Tab, I know we have roughly 4 to 6 hours. Let's drive through the city a bit and then we can go to Basilica." We knew it was a bit of a stretch. Whatever we could do in such a short time would be a treasure for us. The best bet was to leave it to Alejandro. "Go on, I am listening..." I was curious.



“Well, after Basilica, we drive out of the city limit and drive further to see the pyramid.”

“Pyramid?” I was taken aback; surely I was not expecting this. “Which one? Can we make it in such a short time? How far?” A barrage of questions came from us.



“Teotihuacan.” Alejandro seemed confident as he kept his eyes on the road. He had chalked out the plan well in advance. Bingo! “Well, let’s rock and roll,” I was bubbling with excitement. The car was sweeping through Mexico City on this bright sunny morning, and we were absorbing everything around us like a pair of hungry hawks. Well, not all neighbourhoods gave me a warm and fuzzy feeling, and I sure wouldn’t take an unknown taxi or take a stroll



alone, especially when travelling here for the first time; but it is the same story in any big city. We felt the same even in LA and in Chicago, so why blame Mexico City? Once I was lost in the middle of the night driving through a rough neighbourhood in New York City, and I could see shadowy figures hanging around the street. When I slowed down, someone approached my car. I recall driving like a mad dog, trying to get the hell out of there. All big cities have good, bad and the ugly; it is just a matter of keeping your eyes and ears open when travelling to such a place. Soon, we arrived at the famous Basilica. Hey, neither Suman nor I are religious, and our main interest was to see the Basilica as a tourist destination, just like any other tourist.



Alejandro parked the car in a roofed car park - he knew his drill - and we got out of the car to take a walk down to the Basilica. From what we could see, all the way from the parking lot to the Basilica, there were shops everywhere, selling everything needed for daily mass or baptism or souvenirs. And the place must be popular—many parents were carrying their newborns to the Basilica to receive blessings.



"It is a big thing here," Alejandro said. We entered the place right in time when the church service was about to start. We looked around, and wow! We were awed by the architecture of the Basilica, the paintings on the wall and the grandeur of the building. Just loved it! We attended the service and joined the parade with the clerics after the mass—just a ritual. Once the mass was over, after an hour or so, we headed back to the car.



We drove outside the city limit. It was almost mid-day, and the hazy sun was trying to brighten the day up. As we cruised along the highway, we could see brick houses by the roadside, shanty towns and colourful houses clustered on top of the hills; they were passing by like a slideshow. They all reminded me that this was the heartland of Mexico. "Look at the skytram," Suman pointed out through the window. "Yes, they are used for public transportation," Alejandro said, keeping his eyes on the road. Wow, *that's a novel idea*, I thought. I sure liked the skytram as a mode of public transportation. Perhaps the concept is not new, but this was the

first time I saw such novel use of a technology for public benefit that was otherwise extensively used for entertainment. Viva Mexico!



It was noon time when we arrived at the pyramid site. And I was awed! I haven't seen the pyramids of Egypt and so couldn't compare them with Teotihuacan. But definitely it was a marvel of architecture. We climbed up and down, went to different parts of the pyramid, and we were thrilled to witness such a marvel, especially for the first time in our life.



"You know something?" Alejandro continued to talk on our way back to the airport. "There are other small ones; there is one, take a look at that," he pointed out to a small pyramid at a distance. "Archeologists are still finding the small ones. That's why this area is reserved and no constructions are allowed." I didn't know the history of the place, but it was a takeaway for me to dig into later.





It was about a forty-minute drive back to the airport. Given our morning experience in the arrival terminal, we thought it would be a good idea to reach the airport early. Our flight was at 5:00 pm, and we arrived at the airport around 2:30 pm - just in time to check in for an international flight. We picked up our luggage and said goodbye to Alejandro. It was a short meeting, but we loved Alejandro. Really, each time I go and visit a new place, especially in a so-called 'developing nation', the people always amaze me. So simple, so down to earth! In the name of civilisation, I think we are trapping ourselves in a more and more complex bubble in the western world where the term "common sense prevails" now is a distant memory.



The departure procedure was smooth, not like the experience we had on arrival. Once all the formalities were over, we realised that we didn't have lunch, and we were hungry. Our flight was due to arrive at Lima after 9 pm; well, not a bad idea to grab some well-deserved lunch before we boarded, we thought. There were a few nice little restaurants in the departure lounge. We ventured into some Mexican dish and nachos; they were great. Suman thought it was the best nachos she ever had! We were still finishing the nachos when the boarding was announced. *Oops, let's not miss it... the dreamland Peru is calling us!* Yes, we were tired because of the lack of sleep on the plane last night. But the excitement of visiting Peru wiped out our tiredness. The flight took off on time. I looked out the window. The sprawling Mexico City was fading away in the sunny afternoon as we climbed up and up. Slowly, the city disappeared as the plane climbed above the cloud and the seat belt sign was turned off. We leaned back on our seats and relaxed. I looked out of the window. The plane was still climbing up, swimming in a turquoise blue sky. Slowly, the sunlight faded away, giving its space to the descending evening! I closed my eyes! The dreamland Peru wouldn't be a dream anymore! It would be reality very soon!







*Mexico City airport, leaving for Lima*

