

**SOUTH AMERICA TRAVEL JOURNAL**

**PERU 2000**

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02/20/00 12P TEXAS

I am waiting at the airport and am leaving for a South American adventure.

I will be heading down south. As always, I am a little nervous at the start of my sojourn.

This has been a glorious first year of marriage. Rachel is the absolutely best. She is the true fulfillment of all of my dreams.

Last summer we went to Washington, D.C. with Yolanda, Lauren, Rachel, and her parents. We were at the U.S. Capitol on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July watching the fireworks over the Washington Monument. It could not have possibly been any better.

During the past holiday season, we took the whole family to Las Vegas. An excellent time was had by all.

02/20/00 4P TEXAS

I am waiting here in Dallas to catch the all night flight to Lima, Peru.

I can't say that I am that excited about arriving in the middle of the night and then having to spend the night at the airport. Of course, there was little other choice.

The alternative would have been to try and catch a cab in the middle of the night from the airport into Lima only to come back out at 7 a.m. for the connecting flight Cuzco.

The safer course seems to be to spend the night at the airport. Perhaps I will find some other Yanks in the area.

02/21/00 12A TEXAS

It is truly the middle of the night and the plane is continuing toward Peru.

My life has indeed taken a dramatic turn since my initial adventure in 1995. In the last five years, I have truly come back from the abyss and have been blessed beyond my wildest dreams.

As I have been with the drink for sometime, perhaps a bit of rest is in order before landing.

02/21/00 2A PERU

I am here and waiting at the airport in Lima. It is the middle of the night. The flights here were fine, although I managed to spill wine on myself.

This feels like a third world country and I am just a bit worried. Of course, there are many around me. Perhaps it is the late hour of arrival that has me apprehensive?

I saw a taxi driver ask some dude if he needed a ride and then attempt to pick his pocket. Shameful.

There are other sojourners trying to catch a few zzz's before the morning flights.

I read *The Green Mile* by Stephen King. It is a fantastic book. I highly recommend it.

I feel a little out of place; like I don't belong. I do not like feeling unsettled. I'm with some other Americans trying to sleep in a corner of the airport (with my arms entangled around my backpack and with one eye open).

02/21/00 4A PERU

I tried to sleep but was finally awakened by a man traveling with a rooster. No kidding! I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen the yardbird with my own eyes.

The airport is starting to bustle with activity and I am beginning to feel more comfortable. I am hungry (that is a good sign).

02/21/00 12P PERU

I am sitting here at the Plaza De Armas in Cuzco on a glorious day. I am rejuvenated after the long haul. The cathedrals are magnificent. This is the hub of local activity.

I feel like I have stepped back in time. The resemblance of the locals to the ancient Inca is uncanny. There are many traders here selling their wares.

I am sitting here at a local sidewalk cafe sipping a Coke. I told the loved ones back home that all was well and indeed it is.

I have sampled a local delight (appetizer). Steamed clams and shrimp topped with a cousin of pico de gallo. Very tasty.

I sure wish my loved ones were here, especially my beautiful wife.

I have moved on to a combination of caldo and seafood stew. It has rice, squash, potatoes, and shrimp, all in a seafood broth.

As if I didn't already have enough to eat, now a chicken on the parilla with rice and a side salad of potatoes and squash.

I am stuffed and ready to tackle the afternoon proceedings here.

02/21/00 3P PERU

I am inside a magnificent cathedral with a tremendously ornate alter of gold. I feel so blessed that my journeys continue. I am the only one here. It is quiet. Outside, however, crowded.

I sure wish I could capture the magnificence of this sacred place. I am reminded of my past.

02/21/00 9P PERU

Today was a good day. I am tired. After an afternoon and evening of walking through the city, I had a nice dinner at a local restaurant. It's relaxing to eat in silence and watch the crowd.

I am staying at a hotel that was originally built as a monastery in 1592. It is clean. Tomorrow, the train and hike to Machu Picchu.

02/22/00 5A PERU

I am on the train toward Machu Picchu. We are traveling to the sacred Inca Valley along the Urubamba River. There are many villages along the way. There were apparently some earthquakes here last week, three I am told.

There are all sorts of interesting characters on the train. I am in the cheap seats.

I had a Cusquena beer last night with my dinner. It was heavy and flavorful. Actually, I had three but that's okay.

02/22/00 8A PERU

I am gone from the train and I am now on the hike in the area of Machu Picchu.

The Inca Trail is lonely this time of year. I haven't run into many people along the way.

The altitude is still tricky; about 10,000 feet. Thankfully, I am in respectable condition and have plenty of water with me (although it is heavy to carry).

I will say, however, that hiking in these parts causes me to work up an appetite and I did not sufficiently fill my pansa before departing at the early hour this morning.

02/22/00 10A PERU

I am still hiking toward Machu Picchu and trust that I will be there in short order. I sense that I am close.

**This part of the trail is rather narrow (perhaps five feet). One wrong step and I fall several hundred feet. If that happens, I would not be found as none of the five billion people on Planet Earth know my location.**

**Am I really that far removed? Life is so strange. The terrain is mountainous, but thick and lush, almost like a dense forest. It's also wet and muddy (good thing I have excellent gear).**

**I need a good bath. Perhaps I can find a waterfall nearby?**

**I have run into a couple of people along the way who are headed in the same general direction. I have also passed several villages, including the one closest to Machu Picchu; it is called Aguas Calientes.**

**I have been hiking alone for the last several hours and am taking a break to drink some much needed water and to write in my journal. Truthfully, I am also fatigued. My backpack seems heavier in these parts. The elevation is 10,000 feet and the air is thin.**

**02/22/00 11A PERU**

**I have made it and am at home with Machu Picchu. I am overlooking the magnificent ruins with no company, except for my thoughts. It is so very quiet and serene here. You can almost hear the sounds of silence. I have taken many pictures and hope they will turn out to be worthy of some consideration.**

**It is fantastic to be here. I can't begin to understand how they built it or where they all went.**

**This is indeed a spiritual place, whose force and power can be felt if you are willing to open your mind to the prospect. The energy of this temple has resonated through time.**

**02/22/00 1P PERU**

**I am back in the general Machu Picchu area after a side hike along another narrow trail. It was a bit risky, but fun.**

**I took a side trail that seemed to lead to nowhere and followed it for about an hour before turning back. The views were spectacular of Machu Picchu from above.**

**You must have dreams or life is not worth living. Is that right? I have dreams. I am fulfilling one today.**

**At this stage, having a cold beer would be nice. I need to eat. I bought some fruit and a sandwich of sorts from a local street vendor early this morning.**

02/22/00 3P PERU

I am sitting here overlooking the ancient Incan ruins. It's raining pretty steadily here. The clouds are looming low and ominous.

Earlier, I saw some dudes partaking of an old friend. I have given it up.

I am having a truly wonderful time. It is hard to believe that I am really here.

My thoughts are of my state of mind and being, peaceful. I know many people who would like to visit this sacred place.

02/22/00 5P PERU

I am virtually alone at Machu Picchu. I am embracing the solitude.

I am I said. To no one there. And no one heard at all, not even the chair. (Neil Diamond).

The sun is setting over these vast ruins. They are absolutely stunning. I see the last vestiges of people leaving for the last train back to Cuzco. In a minute, I will be completely alone.

I hear nothing but the running waters of the Urubamba River. I am strong and alive today.

02/22/00 7P PERU

I was alone until I hooked up with six Brits. It was an excellent happy hour. It reminded me of Chris and Kathy from Australia.

I am now alone in a village watering hole with my third Cusquena, listening to native tunes.

The drink is taking hold of me and my tongue is loose; like the moose.

I wish my family could savor these delicacies. They are delicious.

My life is full. I am embracing that which is offered; or am I creating opportunities (probably both).

02/23/00 7A PERU

It rained hard last night and I had some interesting dreams involving old friends who spent the night here. I suppose they are here in spirit.

I am at my favorite perch, looking at the dense fog but my thoughts are taking me away.

The sun is starting to come up but the fog remains. I am sometimes in a bit of a fog myself. I suppose I am like my photos; many good but some not so good.

I am staying at a local inn, clean rooms. The place is small, but what else do I really need?

As with other viajes, I have been reading. My fourth book on this trip is a Stephen King novel - - The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon.

I just heard a rock slide, a bit scary. It makes me wonder if it a precursor to a temblor? I hope not.

I have seen some people, but very few that seem to be traveling alone.

Time seems to stand still here. This place has a rich history, going back, way back. I am not the first to track these ancient ruins and not the last.

02/23/00 12P PERU

It has been a glorious morning and inspection of these fine premises. I took a nap earlier and was awakened by the rain falling on me.

I don't want to but am afraid that I must go. It has been a mystical, almost religious, experience coming to these ruins.

I feel blessed and grateful to have made this journey but it is not at an end.

Hasta La Vista Baby! to the Incan ruins of Machu Picchu (Old Peak).

02/23/00 9P PERU

I am back in Cuzco after hiking and taking a train back. I did make a tactical error in arriving at the train station too soon. As such, I had to wait a long while with no food or drink. Dumb.

Tomorrow, La Selva Del Rio Amazonas. The adventure continues.

02/24/00 3:30P PERU

I made it to the glory of the Amazon Jungle and River!

My guide is Cleever. I found Cleever via the Internet and was able to facilitate his hire accordingly.

We made arrangements to meet in the jungle town of Iquitos.

He is very young (early twenties), but his references check out. He has previously guided for National Geographic Explorers.

As added information, I flew from Cuzco to Iquitos, a small town that serves as a starting point for sojourns into the Amazon. The trip was uneventful via LanPeru Airlines.

After meeting Cleever and loading up the boat, we headed down the Amazon and Napo Rivers.

I am bringing what I can carry, as directed by Cleever before I came to these parts. "Bring what you can carry", he says. Actually, it's really not very much.

The accommodations about two hours down river are very rudimentary. There will be no more baths for a few days.

This is where it all began in so many ways. My senses are beginning to catch fire as this drama unfolds.

I am listening to macaws and wondering what the next few days have in store. I also hear what sound like chicharras or cicadas. This jungle is alive and kicking.

It is amazing that it will just be Cleever and I for the next several days.

I wish I could call the loved ones back home to let them know I am okay. Hopefully they appreciate that I have planned every last detail to this trip and that I am indeed safe.

02/24/00 6P PERU

I just got back from an excellent hike through the rainforest and jungle.

We saw poison arrow frogs, mantis, fire ants, bullet ants, macaws, toucans, monkeys, tarantulas, millipedes, and some wild species of plant life.

Cleever says that there is a tree that we saw which has poisonous sap which woodpeckers get on their wings and then bathe off in shallow ponds to kill fish upon which to eat. Cool.

Cleever is an excellent rainforest biologist/ecologist. It's just he and I.

Because the clay is so thick, some of the trees have the roots well above ground. The rainforest canopy is high, over 100 feet.

I am alone. I hear nothing but the sounds of the selva (jungle). Cleever has gone off to catch catfish and piranha for dinner. Yummy.

02/24/00 9:30P PERU

I just got back from a night boat trip along the Amazon River. We saw a viper and a caiman. Also, we saw the Southern Cross and Scorpio constellations along with the clouds of the Milky Way. It was a regular concert of sound out there. Very loud. Truly amazing.

Cleever did manage to bring a Crystal cerveza, which is quite good considering that it is not cold. My thoughts are of la selva and what an absolute fantastic place this is. It really is a jungle out there.

Earlier, I heard a tree fall in the rainforest. That answers the old question, if a tree falls in the forest does anyone hear it? Yes.

02/25/00 6:30A PERU

I did not have a particularly restful night under the mosquito net. I had plenty of company all around the mosquito net. There were grasshoppers, crickets, bugs, and frogs of every sort all over the net.

The cold bath this morning with river water reinvigorated me. I do not feel particularly clean, but it is better than nothing (barely).

I hung out after that with capybara who was in the area. He looked good enough to eat and considering our skimpy diet, he would have been very good on the grill.

We had a snack of native bananas before starting out very early morning hike.

02/25/00 9:30A PERU

We are on a glorious mission going further into the jungle and the view is spectacular. The water is heavy, but it is an absolute necessity.

After a 2 ½ hour hike, we jumped into the canoe and headed further down river and further into the jungle.

The boat is slow, but we are in no hurry. I can't believe my eyes. We have seen river dolphins as well on this ride.

02/25/00 6P PERU

We are much deeper into the jungle and just got back from a hike to a black lagoon. The boat ride here was excellent. Cleever and I hiked for several hours in the afternoon to the lagoon, eyeing toucans, hoatzin, butterflies, leaf cutter ants, etc., along the way.

The hike and the lagoon were awesome. We grabbed another boat at the lagoon and made an inspection. It rained hard but I embraced the water and drank it up like an old friend.

I feel the spirit of the jungle and savor it completely. I am again at home and at peace, one with nature.

02/26/00 1:30A PERU

The rain all evening and all night has had a spiritually cleansing effect on me. It is truly soothing. I am so far removed from civilization that my re-emergence will be like a type of rebirth.

I love my wife. I look forward to seeing her again soon.

02/26/00 11:15A PERU

We had a good ride even further into the Amazon jungle today followed by another hike to another lake (this one covered in giant Lilly Pads).

We saw thousands of ants on the hunt. It was hot and humid due to the rains. The jungle was particularly thick and difficult to get through.

I have seen thousands of plants, birds and insects. It is simply amazing.

On the way back toward camp, we saw more pink river dolphins at the mouth of the Napo Tributary.

Later, we did another hike deep into the rainforest and then we made camp.

Last night, as with the other nights here, dinner was pan fried Piranha and catfish. The Piranha has been very bony but somewhat tasty. The catfish was, well, catfish.

02/26/00 4P PERU

I am on top of the world, or at least the rainforest.

There is a spectacular view here that is absolutely incredible. There is a canopy walkway that was built for Amazon researchers and scientists.

We are truly in the thick of the jungle and it is primitive.

It is quite a hike to get into these parts but it doesn't get any better than this.

Soy La Selva.

La selva is coming alive as darkness nears. Soon, the concert will start. Tonight I am the audience.

Cleever is an excellent guide, a real ribereño. He is an expert of the rainforest and jungle.

I forgot to mention that Cleever uses the money that he makes as a guide to pay for his niece/nephew to go to school.

Apparently, if you don't have money, you may not be going to school in these parts.

If you do have a measure of money, you can go to a school where they teach English.

Cleever's father, the grandfather to his niece/nephew, takes the family boat every morning so that his grandchildren can get to school.

There are many small villages in these areas, most with no name. There are no roads this thick into the jungle. Everybody seems to have a family boat of sorts.

02/26/00 9P PERU

Just got back from a night hike where we saw many spiders, tarantulas, leaf cutter ants, crickets, etc.

Cleever says there are some guides that will not come this thick into the jungle because it is extremely remote. Why didn't he tell me this before we got here? I don't feel unsafe but the fact that he mentions that is a bit disconcerting.

02/27/00 12A PERU

The jungle is extraordinarily loud. It is fantastic to be here at night.

I am awake because I had to get up and go to the bathroom.

It is a chore to get dressed, climb out from under the net with all kinds of bugs all over me, walk to a spot where I can go to the bathroom that is far enough away from the tambo where we are staying, take care of business, and then come back only to climb in along with some bugs.

02/27/00 6A PERU

I wanted heavy rains in the thick of the jungle and I got them. It was super to have the big rains falling all night.

This has been a glorious journey, a true fulfillment of dreams and yet another rebirth.

The Amazon is a wild place and the solitude has brought me peace.

We start to trek back to civilization today, a long hike followed by a long boat ride to Iquitos. Tomorrow, the long plane ride home.

The dawn is breaking, it is early morn. I dreamed of snakes in my tambo. It normally rains at night when it cools down.

The night was thick, without a moon. The inhabits gathered round. I am indeed on fire.

02/27/00 9A PERU

After another night of piranha and catfish. I am truly ready for something different.

For breakfast this morning, I had what I have had for a good many days now, fruit.

We start a three or four hour hike back toward the river's edge and our boat.

It seems as if it will be quite humid today (again).

I think the water we have been drinking for some days now is starting to taste a bit stale. Given my thirst, however, there is really no other option. I would love a cold bottle of water.

02/27/00 1P PERU

We have now found our boat and are on the way back Iquitos. I thought we were lost, but Cleever found his way.

The adventure is coming to an end.

The Amazon is indeed a mighty river. It is a real treasure to behold. Truly awesome.

02/27/00 5:30P PERU

I am now back in Iquitos and staying at a small inn on the edge of the jungle.

There is not much time left here so I am going to try and savor it.

I must say that I am getting excited at the prospect of seeing Rachel. I love her so very much and can't wait to share the adventure with her.

Now that I am back in the area of Iquitos, I am beginning to feel like I am re-familiarizing myself with civilization.

02/28/00 7:30A PERU

Abuelito died on this day many years ago and my thoughts are of him right now. He was an absolutely wonderful grandfather who taught me so much. I will never forget him.

I forgot to mention that I hiked from the jungle inn over to Iquitos last night and went to a local cantina to sample some of the local culture.

They fried up some catfish (which I truly did not want again) and offered up some Crystal cerveza to the sojourner from Texas.

The place was called El Toucan (the toucan).

I sat alone for about three hours and watched the local crowd while sipping on cool beer.

My flight leaves at 10 p.m. tonight. I am flying into Lima and will spending the day there before the long haul home.

02/29/00 12A PERU

I am coming home. We have left this place and are heading north towards the homeland.

02/29/00 1A PERU

I had a very good day sightseeing in Lima with my new friend, Carlos Alarcon. He is a dude that I met when I arrived in Lima from Cuzco after flying there from Iquitos.

He and I had some rap, and he offered to guide me with his son all over Lima. Given that I arrived at 10 a.m. and that my flight was not until 10 p.m., it seemed like a good opportunity to maximize my brief time here.

Although I was initially worried because I had never met him, the vibes felt right and it turned out to be a good experience. We talked about politics, about our country, about his country, about children, etc. We were all over the place.

However, I feel sorry for the lady next to me as I have not properly bathed in some days.

As soon as I got to Lima, I tried to give myself a sponge bath in the restroom (but wonder whether that helped any).

Perhaps most importantly, the first thing I did upon arrival in Lima was to get a bottle of cold water which was (I submit) the best bottle of water I will ever have in my life.

02/29/00 11A TEXAS

I am home to Rachel. The journey is at an end. The mission was successful. Next stop, Antarctica.