

Episode 86: Picturesque Peru

Summary

Nick and Wendy talk about the country Wendy listed as her second favourite in the world: Peru. They talk about Peru's archeological sites and incredible nature.

Transcript

Nick: Today Wendy and I are continuing our little series talking about some of our favourite countries that we ranked in Episode 50. And, Wendy your number two was Peru. So that's pretty high!

Wendy: Yeah, I guess it is pretty high, and it's been a while since we've been to Peru, but yeah, I have very, very fond¹ memories of it. And I would like to go back one day because I feel like we didn't completely explore it and there was still more left to be discovered.

Nick: I think we did pretty well. Uhh, we were there for about five weeks, so that gave us a pretty good idea of the whole country. But it's one of these countries that has many, many things to see. So, yeah, it's certainly possible that there were other great things that we missed.

Wendy: Yeah, it has a lot in terms of landscapes, there's incredible mountain landscapes in the Cordillera Blanca. There's desert, uhh, there's all different kinds of wildlife, and then you have the really strong indigenous² culture as well, and lots of fascinating archeological sites that have been left behind by the Incas. Umm, and, yeah, there's ... obviously there are some really famous places like Machu Picchu, but there are also probably dozens of other, lesser-known sites, that are equally fascinating.

Nick: Yeah, I think one of the interesting things about Peru is that essentially all of the really famous sites are in the south of the country. Machu Picchu like you mentioned, Cusco, which is sort of the gateway to it, umm, the Nazca Lines, Lake Titicaca, uhh, even the colonial city of Arequipa - they're all in the south, and so because Machu Picchu is such a big draw³, Peru draws a lot of tourists. And they'll often stay for, I don't know, a week or two and focus on that part of the country. We actually came overland from Ecuador, which is north of Peru, so we

¹ fond: loving, affectionate

² indigenous: native to the region/country (the pre-Colombian population of Peru, in this case)

³ draw: attraction

came into the north. And we so it was weeks before we saw this kind of mass tourism in the south. I thought that was really great to spend some time in the north as well.

Wendy: Yeah, because there weren't very many tourists there, and so it did feel, in some ways, much more authentic. And we did go to some of these lesser-known sites that we had pretty much to ourselves, uhh, because there weren't many other visitors. But they, you know, were definitely worth visiting.

Nick: Yeah, there was a lot of interesting stuff in the north. There was this colonial ghost town⁴ that we went to, uhh, there was an archeological site called Chan Chan which was very interesting because it was made out of mud-brick. It was just these labyrinth passageways with this interesting decoration and it was quite unusual, we've never really seen anything quite like that. And the other thing that I really remember from the north is that we went on this day trip and visited these sarcophagi⁵, which were - it's hard to describe - but they were essentially in a cliff-face. They were in a shelf, if you like, that was in a cliff face. And so the culture, the civilisation who had made these sarcophagi decided to put them in a place that was incredibly inaccessible to anybody else, so that the tombs couldn't be robbed, or people couldn't damage them, or anything like that. So they must have constructed these bridges or ladders or things like that to deposit these sarcophagi, which were vertical, so they were upstanding, upright⁶. And they were, uhh, you know, the full size of a human. And so there was just this row of these, and we could only see them, as modern visitors, from a lookout point on the other side of the cliff. And so they were quite far away. But you could just imagine how difficult it must have been to have deposited them there in the first place.

Wendy: Yeah, and it's not like anything I've ever seen before, and I'd never heard about it before, umm, so that was really interesting. And we did get a bit closer to them if I recall correctly.

Nick: Yeah, it's a funny story, that we were on this little tour, where they were maybe eight people or something, and it was a day trip that you had to do to get out to these things. And everybody else was from Peru, they were all domestic tourists except for the two of us. And so we were walking back along this path, and the guide suddenly yelled out, 'Australiano! Americana!', which is what he knew us as, by our nationalities, and then he took us up a separate path to see one of these sarcophagi very close up. And he didn't tell the others. And then he explained to us that he doesn't take Peruvians there because he's worried they might damage it or they might tell other people who might come back and damage it, that he'll lead the foreigners there if he has foreigners on (in) his group.

⁴ ghost town: town that has been abandoned and no longer has any inhabitants

⁵ sarcophagi: monumental coffins for housing dead people (singular: sarcophagus)

⁶ upright: in a vertical position

Wendy: Yeah, and I think he saw that we were genuinely interested and, well, he just trusted us for whatever reason even though he hadn't known us for very long. And so it was an immense⁷ privilege, really, to get up close to these amazing artefacts.

Nick: And so we spent probably a couple of weeks in the north and, yeah, we really enjoyed that. We saw our friends Richard and Jo who we had met in Burma a couple of years before, and they happened to be travelling in Peru around the same time. And then eventually we went down and decided, 'OK, it's time to start doing all these famous things here in Peru.' So obviously we went to Machu Picchu. We spent all day there, we spent eight or nine hours in Machu Picchu. It's really a site that you can spend a long time at because it's, you know, it's obviously an incredible place.

Wendy: Mmm-hmm. We did not do the trek, uhh, to Machu Picchu that people usually do. What is it called?

Nick: The Inca Trail.

Wendy: The Inca Trail, yes.

Nick: So it's a four-day trail but the problem with it is that you have to book very far in advance and because we were travelling overland, we couldn't really be sure with dates and things like that many months in advance, so unfortunately we weren't able to do that. Umm, we did our own little version of that. We walked up from Aguas Calientes, which most people don't do. You can take a bus or something up, but we decided to walk up, umm, so we did walk to get there in our own way. Umm, but it's an amazing site. The other interesting thing is that we visited a lot of Inca sites. We visited about four or five other ones as well and I thought that was interesting to give a different perspective. And I remember that at each one we went to, we felt that there was something different or something worthwhile that we'd seen at that one that we hadn't seen at any other ones, or it was just slightly different in a way that made it worth going to.

Wendy: Yeah, definitely. And, I mean, we are interested in history and archeology and things like that. I have heard people say things like, 'Oh, if you've seen one, you know, pyramid in Mexico, then you've seen them all and you don't need to go to any others.' And we would disagree with that. Umm, we always think it's worth it to see different sites because, generally, you do find something unique in each one.

Nick: Definitely. Another really interesting thing that we did was that we took a little plane ride over the Nazca Lines.

Wendy: Mmm-hmm.

⁷ immense: huge, great

Nick: And the Nazca Lines are these lines, or shapes, of mostly animals and things like this which are in the desert in the southern part of Peru. And it's very, umm, it's a mystery as to what they are or how they got there. They can only really be seen properly from the air, uhh, but they were built, or they were created many hundreds of years ago. So it's just this huge mystery but, yeah, you can take a little flight for, I don't know, half an hour or something. It cost us about fifty dollars, I think, each. And, uhh, you just fly over and you just look out and you can really see these enormous shapes. There's a monkey, there's some birds, there's an alien-type creature and it's all very unusual.

Wendy: It is, yeah. Uhh, yeah, the reason they can only be seen from the air is because they're so large that you can't really comprehend it when you're looking at it there next to it on the ground. Umm, but, yeah, given that aviation⁸ had not yet been invented at the time when these things were created, yeah, it is hard to fathom⁹ why they were created and we don't even know who created them or for what purpose. But, yeah, another really fascinating part of Peru that I'm glad that we got to see.

Nick: Yeah, it's amazing thinking ... looking back at it now, that, yeah, there's so many different aspects to what you can see and do in Peru. Even within the historical sites, they're all completely different. Different civilisations: Inca, pre-Inca, umm, and things like that. Umm, but like you said right at the beginning, there were also natural sights as well. We did a hike to a place called Laguna Parón, which was a very green lake with snow-capped mountains in the background and that was an amazing walk.

Wendy: Yeah, and I would love to go back and do some more hiking, because we were not very experienced hikers at that time when we went to Peru. So doing long treks seemed a bit overwhelming¹⁰ for us at that time, and so we did not do that. But I know that there are some great multi-day treks that you can do, uhh, in the Cordillera Blanca for example, which is a very high mountain range with some beautiful snow-capped mountains.

Nick: Yeah, I also believe that there are some alternative Inca trails as well, because the actual Inca Trail is so popular and booked out so far in advance, and they have to limit the number of people who do it so that they don't ruin the landscape and the nature around it. So, yeah, I think there are a couple of alternatives that you can do, or even to other sites in addition to Machu Picchu. So, yeah, there's all kinds of hiking opportunities in Peru. So, yeah, maybe you're talking me into it. Maybe we should go back!

Wendy: Alright, well we do have plans to go to South America later this year, so we'll see.

⁸ aviation: the design and use of aircraft

⁹ fathom: comprehend, understand

¹⁰ overwhelming: too daunting, too great a challenge

Nick: We will, but, uhh, definitely Peru, it's one of the most famous countries on the whole continent and, umm, it's an incredible place, so if anybody has the opportunity to go, you should definitely do it.

Wendy: Absolutely.

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Nick and Wendy like northern Peru?
2. What special opportunity did Nick and Wendy have in northern Peru?
3. Why does Wendy want to go back to Peru?

Exercises

Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.

1. When you're on a plane, you have to put your seat back in the _____ position for take-off and landing.
2. In a lot of countries around the world, the _____ population has been badly treated by colonists.
3. Charles Lindbergh is an important figure in the history of _____ because he was the first person to fly non-stop from North America to Europe.
4. It's hard to _____ why the president is going ahead with this policy when the majority of his supporter base have said they don't like it. He's going to alienate his biggest fans.
5. If a mine or a coal factory shuts down, the town that built up around it can often become a _____ as people move away.
6. The _____ for Roman emperors were often made out of porphyry, an expensive marble that they liked because it was purple, the royal colour.
7. He had always been quite _____ of her, but she saw him only as a friend and eventually married someone else.
8. They wanted to travel to South America, but they didn't speak Spanish and didn't know how to get from place to place, and the whole idea just seemed too _____, so in the end they didn't go.
9. They are building a hydroelectric dam on the river. It's an _____ project that will take years to complete and cost billions of dollars.
10. The Eiffel Tower is a big _____ for people who go to Paris, but there are many other things to see and do there as well.

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Would you like to go to Peru? Why or why not?
2. Would you prefer to see the lesser-known sites in the north of Peru with fewer tourists or the famous sites in the south with many tourists? Why?
3. Why do you think the [Nazca Lines](#) were created?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. Because the attractions there were lesser-known but still interesting, and there were not as many tourists.
2. They were able to see a historic sarcophagus at close range which the domestic tourists were not told about.
3. She wants to go back and do some more hiking in the mountains.

Exercises

1. upright
2. indigenous
3. aviation
4. fathom
5. ghost town
6. sarcophagi
7. fond
8. overwhelming
9. immense
10. draw