

Anita's Travel with Friends
EXPLORATION, EDUCATION, ADVENTURE!
Sharing travel information and experiences

July 2005

Welcome to the second edition of *Anita's Travel with Friends* newsletter.

I've been looking forward to sharing exciting upcoming plans, and adventure experiences with you all. I've just been so involved with planning this year's adventure to *Peru & Bolivia* that I have been delinquent in letting you know about it, and sharing the wonderful experiences of the last one to *Africa*

And long-term planner that I am, I have that ever-evolving dream-list of new places I want to go and favorites that entice me to plan return visits to re-experience in greater depth the things that resonated in my soul.

So here we go. . . again!

- **Andean Adventure – Taking off September 17th**

Peru & Bolivia are steeped in history, rich with culture, and scenically stunning. With the help of a stack of guidebooks, internet itineraries research, and a survey of all the friends I could find who have traveled the high country of these amazing destinations, I was able to find and embellish a route that takes in all the Frommer's "best of " points and experiences available to this area. At the same time, our plans include out-of-the way places and unique encounters accessible to small groups with flexibility and spontaneity.

The three week trip will combine the best elements of incredibly dramatic and beautiful scenery, cultural exploration of traditional villages and markets, and immersion in fascinating archeology and history. Both Peru & Bolivia have multiple UNESCO World Heritage Sites we will visit. Peruvian food is excellent, and Sucre, Bolivia is reputed to have better chocolate than Switzerland.

Our trip starts in Lima and travels southward, through the Sechura Desert to visit the Ballestas Islands (Peru's Galapagos) and the famous Nazca Lines. Leaving the coastal plains we climb into the Andes to Arequipa, a beautiful and famous colonial city and the gateway to the spectacular Colca Valley (The valley of the condors).

Flying to Cusco, we have time to acclimatize to the 5,000 foot altitude change from Arequipa before visiting the famous Sunday markets at Chinchero and Pisac, and the important and beautifully located Inca fortress of Ollantaytambo.

Machu Picchu is indisputably the most famous and dramatically beautiful of the World Heritage sites and the must-see destination for almost everyone traveling Peru outside of the jungle section. Friends who have visited tell me that no matter how many photographs you have seen, experiencing the real thing is indescribable.

After visiting Cusco's many striking attractions, we go overland to Puno, to tour Lake Titicaca islands, both the floating reed ones of the Uros, and the beautiful and hilly villages of Amantani

and Taquile. A special and unique experience awaits, as we are hosted overnight on Amantani by native families.

Crossing the border here to Bolivia, we explore the highest major city in the world, La Paz., its native and colonial areas, witches market, and nearby Moon Valley. A short flight brings us to Sucre, known as the White City, a UNESCO World Heritage Site because of its history and lovely colonial architecture. The next day a drive through unique panoramas of mountains and valleys reveals the capital city of Potosi. Although a small city, it houses what some claim is the best museum in South America, and is also another World Heritage Site.

After the return flight to La Paz, we have an opportunity to further explore the city, and visit the Tihuanaco ruins, the most impressive in Bolivia, before enjoying an evening folklore show, celebrating our travels, and bidding farewell to the Andes.

West Coast travelers can usually find reasonable round-trip tickets to Lima, and return from La Paz to Lima on one of two daily flights. Our tour ends in La Paz on October 9. Mid-September and early October is late spring and early summer at this latitude, and usually dry. Temperatures are expected to be pleasantly moderate during the day, but drop steeply at night due to the altitude.

Prices for this tour are \$2,639 at current exchange rates, including two internal flights, ground transportation, day tours, lodging, breakfasts, some lunches and dinners, and the services of an experienced Peruvian leader throughout the trip, and local guides at some sites.

The maximum group size is eight, and there are only three places left. Contact me immediately if you are interested and I will email you the detailed itinerary.

Travel tip: Take \$100 in \$1 bills. (New is nice, and almost universally accepted.) They often come in handy for tips, small gifts, and incidental expenses where change is difficult, and you are out of local currency. It's worked well for me for several years.

Recommended reads:

Frommer's Peru 2nd Edition, Neil Schlect, ©2004. One of the most complete and easily readable guidebook series, full of "best of" choices along with practical and complete information for getting the most out of your trip. 468 pages.

Insight Guides Peru, ©2003. The hundreds of evocative photographs are worth the price of this extremely attractive and well-organized guidebook. The detailed cross-referenced full-color maps are very worthwhile. A joint project with The Discovery Channel printed on heavy weight glossy paper, it will stand up well to normal travel wear and tear. A tiny bit light on practical matters, it still contains a good range of information on lodging, restaurants, and other necessities. 358 pages.

Adventure Guide Bolivia, Vivien Lougheed, ©2004 Hunter Publishing, Inc. The most up-to-date Bolivia guide I could find, it is 533 pages of very comprehensive practical information organized primarily around different areas. If you don't mind tearing the book in sections, you can pack lighter. Some of the most interestingly unusual information included is specific to individual artists and musicians. As you might expect from the title, the book also includes the best places for hiking, biking, canoeing, horseback riding, skiing, and all other kinds of outdoor fun.

A Companion to Africa (the PBS Series), John Reader, Photographs by Michael S. Lewis. ©2002 National Geographic Society. I checked this book out of the library before my inaugural trip to south and east Africa last year. When I started reading, I couldn't put it down. History, geography, economics, ecology, all compiled with the most intriguing essays and beautifully descriptive photographs imaginable. As the dust jacket blurb says, "A

wonderful, extravagant tapestry of peoples, flora, and fauna, *Africa* is as colorful, as beautiful, as alluring, and as endlessly fascinating as the magnificent continent it celebrates.” I couldn’t wait to add it to my library and give it as a gift to two friends who traveled with me to these fascinating lands.

.. I Wonder How High Is An Elephant’s Eye?

Botswana, September 2004

There were ten of us perched on our stair-step seated four-wheel drive vehicle for the first of a series of land and river safaris in Chobe National Park. “Look! A giraffe!” “Over there! Is it some kind of antelope?” Our excitement was immense as we exclaimed at the initial wildlife sightings. Rambo, our guide/driver, explained that the large brown animal with long gracefully curving antlers was an eland.

But Chobe is most famous for its elephants, numbering close to 45,000.

As we approached the mud banks of the shallow Zambezi River tributary, large herds of the pachyderms ambled along the opposite shore. Swinging their trunks over their backs to spray themselves with water or dust, their gray hides soon matched the muddy brown of the riverbanks. Babies followed their Moms, holding a long skinny tail in the curve of their miniature trunks. While Mom gave herself a shower, Baby would walk a few steps into the water, lie down, roll over, and splash about in the big mud puddles left by eddies of the current during higher water times. Sometimes, the slope was too slippery for them to easily get back to the shelter of Mom and a helping trunk would descend, perhaps wrapping around the littlest ones and hauling them up to rejoin the herd.

After half an hour or so of observation and photography, we left the riverbank to cruise through the brushy hills with their patches of broken trees showing the damage caused by the resident behemoths.

Rambo said, “The elephants come down to water in the morning, then come back across the river midday to find a shady spot where they can rest and feed.” About then, we saw a really big elephant coming up the hill toward us. Rambo stopped the vehicle on the road and whispered, “He is going to cross the road in front of us!” As the elephant approached the road just a few yards away, he stopped behind a spindly bush one third his size and lowering his head, peered at us through the leaves like he was hiding. His trunk swinging and body swaying side to side, he stood in one place, contemplating whether it was safe for him to cross the open roadway. Everyone stayed silent and still, cameras at the ready. Then he stepped onto the road, approaching us on a slight diagonal. I zoomed in with my 400mm lens and took head shots, then partial head shots, then.. . all the camera lens could see was his eye. He was coming at us!! Tensing myself for a collision, I jerked the lens down – and found that the elephant was still 15 yards away and still crossing the road. Not getting ready to charge and knock us over!

Whew, what a relief! We all had a new respect for this close encounter of the huge kind.

- How to Build an Adventure in a Resort Paradise –

Puerto Vallarta, May 2005

Resort vacations are not usually my style. But I needed an after tax season Spring Break, and my friend Pat found a real deal, just over \$300 for lodging in a timeshare for a full week. Plus, Puerto Vallarta is close, three to four hours by air through Phoenix from Orange County. We rented a car, and used our guidebook to get us out of town and explore the surrounding countryside, villages, churches and markets for at least half the time we were there.

My favorite place was the village of Sayulita, about two to three hours north of Puerto Vallarta. Off the main road, right on a beautiful bay- front beach, and no resorts or big hotels. There are a handful of charming small places to stay, and plenty of interesting restaurants, a sprinkle of handicraft stores, and suppliers for backpackers, campers, and outdoor recreational activities. The town itself is made most charming by the preponderance of brilliantly, wildly colorful buildings and a very lay-back and hang-out friendly feel. No crowds of shoppers looking for exclusive resort wear or showing off expensive jewelry here. I plan to go back.

Another day, we finagled a real deal on a small aircraft tour of a couple of small mountain towns, Mascota & Talpa. There were only four of us along with the pilot and guide, and it was Barbara and Don's first small plane ride. It was fun to share their excitement, especially while landing on a dirt runway in Mascota. We visited a family agave distillery which makes the local drink, raicilla. And toured a beautiful old unfinished cathedral, the main parts surrounded by arch-interspersed walls but open to the sky. Next we took off for the few-minute flight to Talpa, where the festival for the crowning of the virgin was nearing culmination. Thousands of pilgrims congregate in the town, some proceeding on their knees through the stone streets and up the broad steps to the church. The town plaza and surrounding streets are full of vendors selling souvenirs, religious items, and of course, food and drink to the pilgrims. One of the specialties of the town is guava candy, cooked in huge copper pots and rolled out on slabs to solidify before being cut and packaged.

Puerto Vallarta itself is very pleasant. We most enjoyed the Sunday afternoon stroll on the Male'con, the attractive seaside promenade dotted with contemporary fantasy sculptures which fascinated the kids. Aztec pole dancers performed near dusk, playing wood flutes and drums on a tiny platform high above before they fall outward and sail gracefully through the air as their spiral-wound tethers unleashed them gradually until they could reach the ground.

Returning home from a week of relaxing was landing enough for me.

Travel Tip: Comprehensive car insurance in Mexico costs more per day than the car rental fees. (I think I calculated the premiums to be in excess of \$10,000 per year if coverage were bought to cover every day.) Plan to rent a car only on the days you want to get out of town, and check with your credit card companies in advance to see what coverage would be available if you charged the rental to their card.

- **Where are you Dreaming of?**

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Egypt and Jordon (probably January 2007). . . .Japan. . . .Greece againGalapagos and Chile. . . .Portugal and the Northwest Coast of Spain. . . .Iceland. . . . Back to Burma. . . . and Africa.

Where do you want to go, and when? Share your favorite travel experiences, tips, and photos. (Yes, I'll have photos in the newsletter by the next edition.) And let's make plans, get together, and go!

Quote of the Month

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes."

Marcel Proust

Bon Voyage

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This newsletter is a non-commercial communication between friends. Any travel arrangements made will be a collaboration of individuals, and each participant will be responsible for their own transportation to an agreed upon departure point, payment of fees, visa and passport arrangements, and any trip cancellation or medical insurance.