

# DESIGN



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# ADVENTURE IN THE ANDES



The main attraction in Chinchero is the market and the wonderful artisan shops where they weave and sell alpaca clothing. We were able to interact with the local women and girls who create these beautiful works of art while being entertained by llamas and alpaca who loved being fed!

## Why Peru should be on everyone's bucket list

text by Phyllis Harbinger | photography by Phyllis Harbinger

**THIS WINTER, MY SISTER TREATED ME TO THE MOST FASCINATING TRIP** as a gift for designing and overseeing the renovation of her new Upper East Side apartment. From the moment we stepped off the plane in Cusco, the luxurious and welcoming nature of the people engulfed us as we were quickly immersed in their culture. A luxury SUV was stocked with hot thermos cups of indigenous Coca tea, used to help us acclimate to the higher altitudes as we traveled to the Sacred Valley.



We were forewarned about the numerous microclimates and arrived for our trek to the Summit of Machu Pichu (left) dressed in layers. At Ollantaytambo (below), the concentric circular geometry of the ruins took our breath away.



The topography changed by the minute as we climbed the mountains through various microclimates in this ancient Inca and pre-Inca region of the country. Along the way, we saw Alpaca, sheep herders, woman and men of the Andes dressed in traditional garb, tending the land and herding their sheep.

The mists traveled through the valley engulfing verdant green covered pitons while the river ebbed and flowed in and out of view. My creative energy came alive and I was already developing a color scheme for my next project, inspired by the variety of green shades, tints and tones of the landscape.

Arriving at Ollantaytambo, an ancient Inca village and unfinished palace, our private guide and driver introduced us to the most magnificent archaeological

wonders of the region. The Concentric Circular geometry of the ruins took our breath away. Famous for the agricultural terraced topography, each terrace embraces its own microclimate and is held expertly in place by hand-cut stone walls.

After a gourmet artisanal lunch, we drove through a few towns and villages and were deposited at The Sol y Luna Hotel—a five-star Relais & Chateaux property. As we drove through the gates, I felt as if I had been transported to a magical secret place. To me it represented a cross between the vortex you experience in Sedona at the Enchantment Resort and the illusive nature of the mountains in Sante Fe, New Mexico.

Artfully planted gardens with exotic and local flora and fauna, modern architecture juxtaposed with circular casitas and a quiet solitude to savor. Had





Phyllis Harbinger and her sister enjoyed an adventurous trip in Peru.



Before heading to Peruvian cities Cuzco and Lima, the sisters explored Incan ruins and colorful markets filled with hand-crafted items.

we truly know what this place had to offer, we would have booked a longer stay. Mountain vistas and views at every turn, a luxurious spa, great food and staff that could not do enough for us. Each night after dinner, we returned to our rooms to find the beds turned down and a hot water bottle nestled between the sheets for each of us! I did not know that this was a tradition in Peru and it's one I would like to continue stateside.

The next day we were off to visit an amazing village of Chinchero and the Salt Mines of Salinas. Unlike traditional salt mines, it is nestled into the mountainside and comprised of 5,740 small pools called pocitos. Discovered and used since the time of the Incas, they are fed by a saltwater hot spring deep in the mountain. The village of Chinchero sits high above the rest of the Sacred Valley. This lovely little place is lost in time and stole our hearts.

The following day our trek to Machu

Pichu began. We boarded the Vista Train in Ollantaytambo for a scenic ride through the valley, allowing us to view the mountain tops as we traveled to one of the main hot spots on my personal bucket list.

We spent two days in amazing Machu Pichu. It's a World Heritage site and was certainly a highlight of our trip. It is astonishing that a civilization could build a wondrous village in such a remote location. Even today with our advancements in technology, it is hard to imagine how they engineered and quarried the stone miles away and built this multi-faceted village complete with temples, storehouses, homes and terraced agricultural farmland.

That night we traveled to Cusco—the prize of Peru. Cusco is a city of culture, beauty and grace. We stayed at the Inkaterria, a converted monastery where our suite was a mix of antiques and modern appointments. The last stop on our Peruvian adventure was

Lima. My sister and I were again completely surprised by the architecture—a mix of ancient and modern, the climate (there is never a clear blue sky) and the culture.

One of the highlights of our stay in Lima was a private tour of the oldest home. Tucked away behind a non-descript door, and only open by appointment, it's still owned by the original family of conquistadors since the 1600s. To see hand-painted tile floors, colonial furnishings and fresco walls lovingly preserved by the family was a special treat!

We also saw a recently discovered Inca city near the bohemian neighborhood of Baranco and visited a furniture gallery before returning to the Hotel Miraflores which is in a tony part of town, up on the cliffs above the ocean. Our views from the room were spectacular and we also had a VIP lounge where we spent our last night enjoying the sunset and reflecting on this amazing part of the world! ■

