



A unique view of Peru

KAREN DOYLE from TravelManagers in Melbourne reports on an agent famil with Unique Latin America to Peru.

AS WE arrived for lunch in the small mountain village of Choquecancha, the local women sprinkled flowers in our hair.

Later, we found ourselves having a mystical encounter with a shaman, who read our futures in coca leaves – a very moving and emotional moment for each of us.

These were just two of the memorable highlights I shared with four other lucky agents who recently experienced a luxurious 11-day famil to Peru, courtesy of Unique Latin America and two of their Peruvian clients.

We enjoyed the very best of Peru, staying in boutique properties such as the elegant Casa Republica in Lima and El Mercado and El Retablo art hotels in Cusco.

The famil began with lunch at Casa Republica Hotel and a city tour of Lima, the colonial ‘City of the Kings’, where we learned about its interesting history and various neighbourhoods.

The next day we flew to the Incan city of Cusco, situated high in the Andes. We took some time to acclimatise to the altitude before exploring the city on a walking tour with Mountain Lodges of Peru (MLP).

Wandering along the cobblestone streets, we admired the intricate stone walls and visited major attractions including the Plaza de Armas, the Cathedral and San Francisco Church.

Another of the trip highlights was the ‘Sacred Valley & Lares Adventure to Machu Picchu’, a luxury five-day program run by MLP. The itinerary was special because it included cultural immersion with mountain communities who still live a traditional lifestyle handed down by their ancestors centuries ago.

Each day we chose between different adventures, including moderate to exhilarating hikes, engaging cultural

activities, visits to archaeological sites and museums en route to Machu Picchu.

Each mountain lodge in the MLP group had its own distinctive charm and character. Lamay Lodge came complete with resident llamas and a hot tub in the grounds while Huacahuasi Lodge had private hot tubs on all the balconies overlooking the valley below. Soaking in the Jacuzzi while sipping a ‘vino tinto’ was a wonderful indulgence after a full day of exploring.

Another highlight of the trip was arriving at sunrise to experience awe-inspiring Machu Picchu – ‘The Lost City of the Incas’ – in all its glory. The ruins were truly magical and looking down on the ancient historical site sent goosebumps down my spine.

Next, we flew to Iquitos in the Upper Amazon to explore the Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve, Peru’s largest protected wildlife refuge. We explored the reserve on a three-night cruise onboard the luxurious *Delfin III*, courtesy of Delfin Amazon Cruises.

The *Delfin III* featured floor-to-ceiling windows to enjoy the dramatic landscape and view the wildlife as well as providing exquisite Amazonian cuisine, wine and exotic cocktails – Pisco Sour and Chilcano. We enjoyed a few of these in the hot tub on the sun deck, of course!

Each day we were escorted by expert naturalist guides on different activities – skiff rides, jungle hikes, kayaking, swimming in the river and fishing for piranhas as well as visits to indigenous villages along the river.

We saw lots of wildlife including pink river dolphins, sloths, caimans, monkeys and many different birds.

This famil trip allowed us to fully immerse ourselves in the culture, history and diversity of Peru – a truly inspiring journey which I can now share with my clients.

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Above left: Baby sloth spotted during three-night cruise on *Delfin III*. Above right: Fishing for piranhas. Below: Karen Doyle (front) with agents exploring the Ancasmarca ruins

