



Sports volunteer Ken Ogata with students in Urubamba as they receive donated balls



Going to Machu Picchu? There are lots of different ways to get there. Read our article on the backdoor route to the ruins that could save you some money and also prove to be a little more of an adventure.



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## Face-to-face contact with local culture is part of your experience

One of the nicest observations I've made since being Information Manager for Projects Abroad here in Peru, is that volunteers adapt so well to the new culture that is thrust upon them during their first few days.

I wouldn't say that everyone takes to Peru like a duck to water, there are the odd cases of extreme altitude sickness, stomach problems while adapting to new foods, and the odd bout of home-sickness, but these are rare. I visit projects throughout Peru, most of which are here in the Sacred Valley near our offices. On these trips I'm usually skulking around in the corners with my camera, watching the interaction between volunteers, partners and the children, adults or even animals. It's impossible to capture the feeling of those visits, even with a good photo. Volunteers very quickly settle in to a routine, becoming attached to their placements and caring for the people they work with. Even with a camera stuffed a few inches from their faces they are enjoying what they are doing. Some of the placements require a lot of energy, our Care placements being a prime example. The children are noisy at times, full of energy and require constant supervision in and out of the classroom. Care volunteers become temporary role-models for the kids they are working with and they are often seen being led by the hand around the premises to be shown 'interesting' things that the children have spotted. The patience they demonstrate in this task is tremendous and it always brings a smile to my face when I'm following them around.

My other role is organizing social events. These are once a week and could be a walk, a cooking class, a museum visit, salsa dancing or even pottery with some local craftsmen. This is a chance to see our volunteers out of placement and as a group. The events are varied and appeal to different crowds but we usually get a good mix of people attending. Socials can also involve interaction with local people. In the case of the pottery workshops and cooking classes our volunteers can ask questions, see how local people work and live and it's another angle on Peruvian life that regular tourists wouldn't get to see. Last month we had a fantastic cooking demonstration in a local restaurant with a great chef. We cooked 'Lomo Saltado' and volunteers saw the entire process, some volunteers also had a go too and everyone devoured the results in seconds. Volunteers were asking for cooking tips, lists of ingredients and our local chef was happy to share his secrets with them. This dish is delicious when well prepared, yet sadly it can be tough and tasteless in some cheaper local restaurants offering bargain lunch menus. For some of our volunteers it was a gastronomic awakening that has tempted them to eat out in nicer establishments.

Getting stuck in to local culture is the best way to get the most out of your placement. I hope you'll enjoy these experiences during your time with us at Projects Abroad.





**'El Establo' is set in stunning surroundings**

### INCA PROJECT

April sees the rains easing off in our region and the mountains enjoy a last flurry of lush green before the slow and steady heat begins to dry out the vegetation and change the landscape once again. Paths that were once overgrown will recede a little and agriculture shifts gear for the coffee harvest.

At the Inca Project our volunteers will be finally able to make some firm plans for regular site visits around the region. Work on excavations and trail maintenance can begin again in earnest and they won't be trekking through puddles and muddy fields anymore which takes a toll on energy levels. Resident archaeologists Zenobio and Jhon will be able to extend further along the supposed link between known sites and the ruins of Machu Picchu, hoping to confirm a physical connection between the two. This, if proven, would be of huge importance to the region of Cusco and a credit to the dedication of our hard-working team in Huyro. We wish them the best of luck this year in their site visits.

On a personal level, project supervisor Dan O'Shea was taken ill at the beginning of the month. Dan has been coordinating efforts in Huyro for some years and is basically a local in the community. All of us here in Cusco at the office wish him a full and speedy recovery so he can get back to doing what he does best at El Establo.

### MEDICAL PROJECT

In April I visited our Medical volunteer Alexander Milgrom at the Lorena Hospital in Huancaro, Cusco. The hospital is being rebuilt right now, so the temporary buildings aren't perfect, but I found Alexander in fine spirits working alongside a doctor in the emergency department.

Alexander has been blogging about his time on the project and you can read his thoughts [here](#). We chatted for a while and he told me he had been enjoying his time at the hospital. As a medical student from the US, this is good experience. The day I visited

he had helped removed dead tissue from someone's leg "definitely seeing some action" was his comment about that. We encourage all our volunteers to blog about their experiences on placement and in Peru in general to help those who haven't yet signed up to get an idea of what to expect when they arrive. Hearing tales of daily activity from other volunteers is the best way to get a feel for what is required to have a positive experience here in Peru. If you're thinking of coming to volunteer, please start blogging as soon as you arrive, the best blogs get published on our social media platforms.

Cusco is investing millions in a new hospital complex and it is hoped that it will bring much needed facilities to a city with a growing population. In the meantime it's the efforts of doctors working in sub-standard conditions that maintains a minimum level of care for locals. Alexander is contributing his time and efforts to making this transition less arduous for all concerned.



### The care programme thrives on volunteer innovation and energy

#### CARE

This month we have had a lot of excellent volunteers helping out at our twelve nursery schools throughout the Sacred Valley.

Amalie Nørrelund from Denmark was at Cuyo Chico, Henrik Søgaaard also from Denmark worked at Huquqi, Justin Wong from the UK was lending a hand at Sillacancha, Daisy Payne from the UK and Ayla Schenk from Denmark were both at Huayocari, Eirin Heiseldal from Norway worked in Yucay marquesado, Johanna Müller from Germany was at Cuna de Yucay and Clara le Tourneux from Canada worked at the Media Luna nursery.

This large group have been incredible. All of them were there in the mornings to welcome the children in the mornings and support the staff in the activities each and every day. It is incredible how quickly time passes and these past days and weeks we have said goodbye to a large number of these lovely new friends who have been with us, some of them, for many weeks. Their patience and

hard work has been a huge boost to this programme and we wish them well on their onward travel.

Luckily, we now welcome new volunteers Christine Jenichl from Austria and Grace de la Cruz from the USA to the Care programme and we hope they have brought lots of energy with them for the work ahead.

#### NUTRITION

Björn Andrews and Johanna Müller, both from Germany have been a fantastic team on our nutrition project over the past months. Finally, after many weeks of working side-by-side their paths have separated and Björn has gone travelling while Johanna has switched projects to Care for her remaining time with us. These two, fantastic volunteers have done an amazing job. Our project partner Miriam even shed a few tears when the two of them finished their last day. She said that they had been angels who had managed to help bring important information to families in great need of help. She said she would miss them terribly and that they

had been a joy to work with. Watching the two of them working with local families was lovely; their confidence and easy-going manner made the people they worked with feel very comfortable, which was important when they worked one-on-one with people in their homes.

Malnutrition in our region is devastating. Without help from volunteers like Björn and Johanna many families would not be receiving the support they desperately need to make better eating choices.

This month also saw the arrival of new nutrition volunteer Soren Clarkwest from the USA who will be working in Cusco on our nutrition project there. We welcome him to the team and look forward to following his progress during his six week stay.

Both Care and Nutrition are areas where our volunteers have direct contact with the people they are helping and we have been so fortunate to have worked with so many excellent people so far this year.



### New academic year off to a great start



**Volunteers and teachers together**

Volunteers on our teaching programme continue to deliver English lessons to their students in schools along the sacred valley. This month we have seen a lot of volunteers using songs in their classes which has been a great motivator. Teaching supervisor Jessica Marroquin has been visiting our volun-

teers to observe them in lessons and coordinate with their teaching supervisors. Volunteers Mikaylie Page and Nisha Patel were part of our Teacher Training initiative in January (pictured left with their students) and they are still with us, delivering lessons to high school students now and using the experience they gained from Teacher Training to make their lessons more interactive. We have a range of nationalities and ages on our Teaching programme and all of them are doing a fantastic job. Below is a photo of a recent visit to Mikaylie's school 'Valle Sagrado' in Urubamba.



## Sport in the Sacred Valley



**Training is tough at the Apu Pitusiray academy**

In April we said goodbye to which is now based in Harin. Jonas Rindon who has been with us since January. Jonas dedicated his time mostly to football time here and we wish him well at the Apu Pitusiray academy, on his return home. We have two

other volunteers with us in April. Ethan Weise, is doing both volleyball and basketball, he has been both at the Conservation project in the rainforest and the Inca project in Huyro and now joins us for a stint on sports. Volunteer Matthew Claring Bould is helping with volleyball and football. Matthew played Australian rules football back home and told staff here that he was seriously impressed by the standard of the young boys in the football academy.

Rainy season has come and gone so now begins the cold spell until July. Days are hot and sunny but the mornings and evenings are freezing cold in the Sacred Valley.



**Denise Blake cooking with a local family and meeting the Regional Director of Education**

Denise Blake is a professional, veteran teacher from Canada who joined our Teacher Training programme in January of 2014.

Denise immediately made an impression when she arrived for the first meeting of our teacher training volunteers. Teaching is a skill that is perfected over years of exposure to the classroom and Denise's contribution to this important initiative was immense. Sixteen volunteers were to deliver classes to high school teachers to improve their language skills and take this knowledge into their own classrooms to help local children progress in the study of this important language. Our nervous volunteers didn't have any teaching experience so Denise was quick to take charge and offer suggestions that made everyone feel more confident.

Denise is a primary school specialist and here, for six weeks, she would be teaching adults.

"This is a huge difference but I'm loving it, the students are all keen to learn and it's a very different perspective on my profession".

Denise was paired with a young North American volunteer and she immediately saw this as both a challenge and an opportunity. After her first full day of teaching with her new partner she had nothing but praise for his efforts.

"...he is doing an amazing job, I'm leaving him alone for the mostpart, letting him get on with it. He's a natural".

Her teaching partner benefitted from Denise's organizational skills dur-

ing afternoon planning sessions as they were the only group to have a whole week's lessons prepared in advance. Denise was generous with her advice and took time to make sure the other teaching pairs had the resources and information they needed to deliver professional and successful lessons. She was often approached with questions and always had an answer and suggestions for activities that would make a task more interactive for students.

Denise lived in Cusco for the



**Chatting with students**

duration of her placement and walked to work some days. She had decided to volunteer as part of a year's sabbatical from her Canadian teaching position, a decision she feels was a great opportunity to see something else of the world. Her time with Projects Abroad in Peru was supposed to be split between Teacher Training and the conservation project at the Taricaya Animal Rescue Centre and Reserve, but sadly floods in the Puerto Maldonado area caused her visit to her second project to be postponed.

poned.

"I was really looking forward to the conservation project, but mother nature, or as the Incas called her, Pachamama, had other ideas. Due to the flooding I will return during my summer which will also be the dry season in Peru. So I still have a reason to return to Peru, and something else to look forward to."

Denise was placed with the most advanced students of English of the 120 who participated in the programme. Her students were delighted at having an experienced teacher to talk to and they learned a lot of new techniques from Denise during private discussions as the weeks went by. Denise brought dynamism, energy and invaluable experience to an essential project in our destination and her contribution will have long-lasting effects on countless thousands of high school students whose teachers trained with Denise during her short time in Peru.

In her spare time, Denise managed to travel and see some of what Peru has to offer by visiting some famous sites of interest, and she also ventured into the cloud forest with some fellow volunteers.

"It was great not only to do a lot of traveling, but to experience the real Peru, away from the tourist spots with other volunteers. Our age differences did not matter, we were all experiencing the beauty of Peru together, they pulled me out of my comfort zone, and I'd like to think I gave them balance."



## Backdoor to Machu Picchu Decoded



A rather dramatic title for what in actual fact is simply an option for those of you wishing to visit the ruins without using the somewhat expensive train option favoured by mass-tourism.

The 'backdoor' route is by road heading for 'hidroelectrica' which is the last remaining train station on the route devastated by floods back in 1998. From here you can walk to Aguas Calientes for free and admire the stunning scenery on the way. The route is hugely popular with backpackers, the adventurous and the thrifty. It offers some unique cultural experiences that you wouldn't get on the rather sterile (if comfortable) train service.

Agencies offer what they call 'Inca Jungle' packages; four-day adventure options with downhill mountain biking on day one, a hike on day's two and three (with optional zipline) and the ruins on day 4 with a return to Cusco the same day. These cost from \$170 but it's advisable to pay as much as you can

afford to ensure the experience is a positive one.

Some brave souls decide to go it alone. It's perfectly possible to arrange your own transport to hidroelectrica from Cusco and here's how to do it:

Day 1: Go to 'Terminal Santiago' in Cusco (ask a taxi driver) and get in a minivan bound for 'Santa Maria'. The cost is around 30 soles per person and the journey takes a little over 4 hours, passing over the 'Abra Malaga' a peak at 4,316 metres above sea-level. Once in Santa Maria a minivan or taxi will take passengers (once they're full) for 10 soles per person to Santa Teresa an hour away. From Santa Teresa to Hidro is another 20 minutes by road and then you can walk the 2 and a half hours to Aguas Calientes or wait for the 4:39 train costing \$18 per person (35 minute journey). Stay the night in Aguas Calientes then get up early for the ruins and if you wish you can do the same journey in reverse to save money, or you can take the train back to Ollantay-

tambo or Poroy for around \$50 per person.

An interesting option on this route to Machu Picchu is to stay somewhere like Santa Maria, Santa Teresa or a smaller population in-between, called Quellomayo.

There's a section of old Inca trail between Santa Maria and Quellomayo that can be accessed from just past the town of Santa Rosa (a taxi can take you there). This walk takes you up to an amazing lookout point and then drops down past local farms to the main road and the footpath to Quellomayo, and onwards to Cocalmayo's hot springs near Santa Teresa. Advice on the Inca trail section can be varied but check out recent forums online for the latest. The trail is well-worn by the 'Inca Jungle' trekkers so it's hard to get lost, but make sure you do some research before heading out. Googling 'alternative routes to machu picchu' will also throw up more info on this route. Go for it! Have an adventure!

## Beautiful pictures growing all around us.

Peru's natural beauty, its landscapes and ruins, are always appearing in magazines and newspapers. The diversity of microclimates and the impact of Peru's deserts, plains and jungle regions make for some incredible photography.

Peru's biodiversity is far richer still, with plants, birds, animals and insects to keep entomologists, twitchers and botanists busy for decades.

What grows, crawls, flies or creeps through Peru's landscapes is often harder to catch a glimpse of, but it's well worth taking a look around you when you're out and about. Here are a couple of shots, one of 'achiote' which is a natural dye used in food and clothing whilst the other is of the discarded outer casings of the 'cicada', an insect that lives most of its life underground. Creepy yet fascinating.



## Photo Competition April's Winner! PERU



This month's winner is Henrik Søgaard from Denmark from his trip to Taquile Island on lake Titicaca. Congratulations Henrik. The entries keep getting better and better, please keep sending in your photos to [andrewbruton@projects-abroad.org](mailto:andrewbruton@projects-abroad.org) See the winning photo [HERE](#)



## Peruvian Gold in the Spotlight

This April 10th at 7:30pm in Wahsington D.C. there will be an exclusive exhibition of Peruvian Gold, open to the public. This is a National Geographic event that will be showing off pieces from Peru's incredible collection of ceremonial artefacts, some of which have travelled for the first time to the United States.

Peru is inextricably linked with this precious metal, it is what brought explorers to our continent, in search of the fabled city of Gold 'Paititi'. The Spanish removed tons of gold from the Inca ruling class that then crossed the Atlantic to the King (admittedly the British did steal quite a lot of it from the Spanish en-route). People still associate Peru with lost cultures, hidden treasures and mysterious ancient practices which makes tickets for events like this one extremely popular (even at \$50 per person).

The exhibition is pitched at anyone and everyone with an interest in Peruvian culture or in metalwork in general. The National Geographic website says:

*'Marvel at centuries of dazzling craftsmanship in gold and silver as we explore the treasures of Peru's rich pre-Inca heritage. To celebrate the opening of the new National Geographic Museum exhibition Peruvian Gold: Ancient Treasures Unearthed, Fredrik Hiebert, Nat Geo's Archaeology Fellow and the exhibition's curator, will be joined by Cecilia Bakula Budge, director of the Museum of Peru's Banco Central de la Reserva. These experts on Peruvian art and archaeology will explain the significance of these masterpieces in precious metal, as well as other rare objects from Peru's glorious prehistory.'*

Peru's temples and palaces were ransacked thoroughly during the conquest of the sixteenth century, but to this day there are small pockets of treasure being unearthed. Some people still hold out

hope that a large reserve of Inca gold could still exist, which was successfully kept from prying Spanish eyes. With so many satellites and private mines cropping up this is becoming less and less likely, but the dream still persists.

Gold mining, in its illegal form, is a blight on the Peruvian territory, causing untold damage and contamination in the interior where nobody is exercising control. A recent film [Amazon Gold](#) (click for YouTube trailer) followed illegal miners in Peru's tropical interior and documented the destruction and poverty that follows this industry. So, hundreds of years after the Inca's treasures were removed, the search for gold is still making the news. If you're in or near Washington and have the chance to visit the exhibit then I imagine it will be fascinating as it isn't often that the experts themselves are on-hand to explain in detail about the history of the objects you are admiring. I expect security will be fairly tight.

## Chicharron

The classic Peruvian fried pork dish. If this is done well, and it often isn't, you will weep tears of joy and swear for ever more that you will only ever eat pork this way.



Mouth bomb



## Ingredients

- 2 Kilos pork meat (ribs are best)
- 1/4 kilo red onion (thin strips)
- A few sprigs of fresh mint
- Salt to taste
- Oil
- Lemon/Lime



## Preparation

Cut the pork into cubes with the skin still on. It's going to go in the pan just with some water and will cook in its own fat and a little salt. Put the pot on a slow heat and when all the water has been absorbed or has disappeared the pork should fry in its own fat, you can of course add a little oil if you wish. It cooks itself, eventually you'll end up with a crunchy pork miracle. Usually served with fried sweet potato, boiled potatoes, boiled corn (choclo or 'mote' as it's called once off the cob) and the onions and mint help balance the meal and help with digestion of the pork.