

MACHU PICCHU PERU:

PRE-TRIP TO AMAZON CRUISE

JANUARY 18-23, 2009

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TOUR REPORT
MACHU PICCHU PRE-TRIP TO AMAZON RIVER CRUISE
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By Steve Hilty

This short itinerary provides a dramatic contrast to the steamy lowlands and overwhelming biological diversity of the Amazonian cruise that followed this trip. This is a tour through high mountain valleys carved from powerful rushing rivers, a trip through high Andean grasslands and, most of all, a trip through history. It is, by all accounts, a region of colorful markets and of remarkable people dressed in distinctive but regionally varied clothing. Women carry babies, wrapped in bright blankets, on their backs. Men with broad sandal-clad feet, bent under heavy loads, move with a quick shuffling gait, all amidst majestic ruins, ancient terrace-rimmed valleys, and beside puna lakes shimmering beneath ultraviolet skies. Our route took us through traditional villages, past *Usnea*-draped basaltic cliffs, into mossy woodland inhabited by sprightly tanagers, and among deep, cold valleys where dawn comes slowly to restless hummingbirds chasing retreating shadows in endless pursuit of flowers.

Lago Huacarpay and the high puna grasslands of Abra Malaga provide an excellent cross section of high Andean birdlife ranging from ducks and gulls to multi-hued species such as the Plumbeous Rail, White-chested Sunbeam, and Many-colored Rush-Tyrant. In addition, the hotel grounds around the Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel offer an oasis of birds, flowers, and tranquility amidst a cacophony of hawkers of souvenirs, tourists, noise, and congestion in the little town of Aguas Calientes. The hotel grounds, mined to the hilt with orchids, flowering *Heliconia*, bird-of-paradise, *Centropogon*, and dozens of other flowering plants, offer hummingbirds, multicolored tanagers, and other small birds a diverse array of places to forage and seek shelter. Inca Wrens, first observed around the Machu Picchu ruins in 1965, were not formally described until 1985. Curiously, these wrens may not have been present during the years of intensive surveys and collecting following the discovery of Machu Picchu in the first half of the last century.

During our day in true “high country” we found hummingbirds dancing in morning sunbeams, a lovely mountain-finch singing in crisp mountain air, and Black Siskins, canasteros, and ground-tyrants in windy puna grasslands. Ultimately, we sought in vain the elusive Stripe-headed Antpitta, which answered our calls but would not approach. Nevertheless, there were lovely Red-crested Cotingas and other species large and small for all to appreciate. There were also young children, whose few words of Spanish and stoic expressions conveyed their willingness to pose stiffly for passing photographers in return for apples and a few food items. All of this occurred at altitudes above 13,000 feet while ground-tyrants and llamas looked on from a distance.

This land of the Incas is a sensory experience—one to see, to smell, to touch, to feel, and to hear. Images of this distinctive land—its people, music, and wildlife—will be with you for years to come. The combination of birds, scenery, and history is incomparable. The rocky ruins, as always, remain impressionable, mysterious, and evocative—the more so perhaps because so little is known of their origins, and because of the breathtaking location. The ruins of Machu Picchu are indeed one of the world’s great travel destinations, but they are, in themselves, just a brief chapter in a long and fascinating history of human occupation of the Urubamba River Valley.

Hd - heard

Boldface and underlined - rare, uncommon or of special interest

LIST OF BIRDS:

Taczanowski's Tinamou	<i>Nothoprocta taczanowskii</i> ; well-studied and photographed at close range; rare
White-tufted Grebe	<i>Rollandia rolland</i>
Neotropical Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax brasilianus</i>
Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Black-crowned Night-Heron	<i>nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Fasciated Tiger-Heron	<i>Tigrisoma fasciatum</i>
Puna Ibis	<i>Plegadis ridgwayi</i>
Torrent Duck	<i>Merganetta armata</i>
Speckled Teal	<i>Anas flavirostris</i>
Yellow-billed Pintail	<i>Anas georgica</i>
Puna Teal	<i>Anas puna</i>
Cinnamon Teal	<i>Anas cyanoptera</i>
Ruddy (Andean) Duck	<i>Oxyura ferruginea</i>
Mountain Caracara	<i>Phalcoboenus megalopterus</i>
American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>
*Rufous-breasted Wood-Quail	<i>Odontophorus speciosus</i>
Plumbeous Rail	<i>Pardirallus sanguinolentus</i>
Common (Moorhen) Gallinule	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Andean (Slate-colored) Coot	<i>Fulica ardesiaca</i>
Black-necked Stilt	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>
Andean Lapwing	<i>Vanellus resplendens</i>
Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>
Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>
Pectoral Sandpiper	<i>Calidris melanotos</i>
Andean Gull	<i>Larus serranus</i>
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>
Spot-winged Pigeon	<i>Patagioenas maculosa</i>
Band-tailed Pigeon	<i>Patagioenas fasciata</i>
Eared Dove	<i>Zenaida auriculata</i>
Black-winged Ground-Dove	<i>Metriopelia melanoptera</i>
White-tipped Dove	<i>Leptotila verreauxi</i>
Mitred Parakeet	<i>Aratinga mitrata</i>
White-collared Swift	<i>Streptoprocne zonaris</i>
White-tipped Swift	<i>Aeronautes montivagus</i>
Green Violetear	<i>Colibri thalassinus</i>
Sparkling Violetear	<i>Colibri coruscans</i>
White-bellied Hummingbird	<i>Amazilia chionogaster</i>

Green-and-white Hummingbird	<i>Amazilia viridicauda</i>
Speckled Hummingbird	<i>Adelomyia melanogenys</i>
Chestnut-breasted Coronet	<i>Boissonneaua matthewsii</i>
Shining Sunbeam	<i>Aglaeactis cupripennis</i>
White-tufted Sunbeam	<i>Aglaeactis castelnaudii</i>
Collared (Gould's) Inca	<i>Coeligena coeligena</i>
Violet-throated Starfrontlet	<i>Coeligena violifer</i>
Great Sapphirewing	<i>Pterophanes cyanopterus</i>
Booted Racket-tail	<i>Ocreatus underwoodii</i>
Black-tailed Trainbearer	<i>Lesbia victoriae</i>
Tyrian Metaltail	<i>Metallura tyrianthina</i>
Blue-mantled Thornbill	<i>Chalcostigma stanleyi</i>
Long-tailed Sylph	<i>Agelaiocercus kingi</i>
Masked Trogon	<i>Trogon personatus</i>
Highland Motmot	<i>Momotus aequatorialis</i>
Golden-olive Woodpecker	<i>Piculus rubiginosus</i>
Andean Flicker	<i>Colaptes rupicola</i>
Slender-billed Miner	<i>Geositta tenuirostris</i>
Bar-winged Cinclodes	<i>Cinclodes fuscus</i>
Wren-like Rushbird	<i>Phleocryptes melanops</i>
Puna Thistletail	<i>Schizoeaca helleri</i>
*Azara's Spinetail	<i>Synallaxis azarae</i>
Creamy-crested Canastero	<i>Asthenes dorbignyi</i>
Streak-throated Canastero	<i>Asthenes humilis</i>
Montane Foliage-gleaner	<i>Anabacerthia striaticollis</i>
Streaked Xenops	<i>Xenops rutilans</i>
*Stripe-headed Antpitta	<i>Grallaria andicola</i>
[Andean Cock-of-the-rock Red-crested Cotinga]	<i>Rupicola peruvianus</i> <i>Ampelion rubrocristatus</i>
Sclater's Tyrannulet	<i>Phyllomyias sclateri</i>
Ashy-headed Tyrannulet	<i>Phyllomyias cinereiceps</i>
White-crested Elaenia	<i>Elaenia albiceps</i>
White-throated Tyrannulet	<i>Mecocerculus leucophrys</i>
Tufted Tit-Tyrant	<i>Anairetes parulus</i>
Torrent Tyrannulet	<i>Serpophaga cinerea</i>
Mottle-cheeked Tyrannulet	<i>Phylloscartes ventralis</i>
Streak-necked Flycatcher	<i>Mionectes striaticollis</i>
Many-colored Rush-Tyrant	<i>Tachuris rubrigastra</i>
Smoke-colored Pewee	<i>Contopus fumigatus</i>
Black Phoebe	<i>Sayornis nigricans</i>
Andean Negrito	<i>Lessonia oreas</i>
White-winged Black-Tyrant	<i>Knipolegus aterrimus</i>
Rufous-naped Ground-Tyrant	<i>Muscisaxicola rufivertex</i>
*Golden-crowned Flycatcher	<i>Myiodynastes chrysocephalus</i>
Tropical Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus melancholicus</i>
Brown-bellied Swallow	<i>Notiochelidon murina</i>
Blue-and-white Swallow	<i>Notiochelidon cyanoleuca</i>

White-capped Dipper	<i>Cinclus leucocephalus</i>
Inca Wren	<i>Thryothorus eisenmanni</i>
House Wren	<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>
Gray-breasted Wood-Wren	<i>Henicorhina leucophrys</i>
*Andean Solitaire	<i>Myadestes ralloides</i>
Swainson's Thrush	<i>Catharus ustulatus</i>
Chiguanco Thrush	<i>Turdus chiguanco</i>
drier	and open regions
Great Thrush	<i>Turdus fuscater</i>
Brown-capped Vireo	<i>Vireo leucophrys</i>
Red-eyed Vireo	<i>Vireo olivaceus</i>
Thick-billed Euphonia	<i>Euphonia lanirostris</i>
Hooded Siskin	<i>Carduelis magellanica</i>
Black Siskin	<i>Carduelis atrata</i>
Tropical Parula	<i>Parula pitiayumi</i>
Slate-throated Redstart (Whitestart)	<i>Myioborus miniatus</i>
Spectacled Redstart (Whitestart)	<i>Myioborus melanocephalus</i>
Russet-crowned Warbler	<i>Basileuterus coronatus</i>
Cinereous Conebill	<i>Conirostrum cinereum</i>
Blue-backed Conebill	<i>Conirostrum sitticolor</i>
Capped Conebill	<i>Conirostrum albifrons</i>
Oleaginous Hemispingus	<i>Hemispingus frontalis</i>
Rust-and-yellow Tanager	<i>Thlypopsis ruficeps</i>
Highland Hepatic-Tanager	<i>Piranga lutea</i>
Blue-gray Tanager	<i>Thraupis episcopus</i>
Blue-and-yellow Tanager	<i>Thraupis bonariensis</i>
Palm Tanager	<i>Thraupis palmarum</i>
Saffron-crowned Tanager	<i>Tangara xanthocephala</i>
Blue-necked Tanager	<i>Tangara cyanicollis</i>
Beryl-spangled Tanager	<i>Tangara nigroviridis</i>
Silver-backed Tanager (or Silvery Tanager)	<i>Tangara viridicollis</i>
Plumbeous Sierra-Finch	<i>Phrygilus unicolor</i>
Ash-breasted Sierra-Finch	<i>Phrygilus plebejus</i>
Chestnut-breasted Mountain-Finch	<i>Poospiza caesar</i>
Black-and-white Seedeater	<i>Sporophila luctuosa</i>
Band-tailed Seedeater	<i>Catamenia analis</i>
Plain-colored Seedeater	<i>Catamenia inornata</i>
Rusty Flowerpiercer	<i>Diglossa sittoides</i>
Black-throated Flowerpiercer	<i>Diglossa brunneiventris</i>
Masked Flowerpiercer	<i>Diglossa cyaneus</i>
Bright-rumped Yellow-Finch	<i>Sicalis uropygialis</i>
Greenish Yellow-Finch	<i>Sicalis olivascens</i>
*Chestnut-capped Brush-Finch	<i>Buarremon brunneinucha</i>
Rufous-collared Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia capensis</i>
Golden-billed Saltator	<i>Saltator aurantirostris</i>
Black-backed Grosbeak	<i>Pheucticus aureoventris</i>

Yellow-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius thilius</i>
Dusky-green Oropendola	<i>Psarocolius atrovirens</i>

MAMMALS

Vizcacha, seen at ruins

Alpacas and llamas (domesticated)