

# MACHU PICCHU, PERU

February 17-22, 2015

## GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

February 23-March 3, 2015

Route: Seattle—Dallas—Lima—Cusco - Flying American & Avianca Airlines

Route: Cusco—Lima—Quito—San Cristobal - Flying Avianca

Route: San Cristobal—Quito—Miami—Dallas—Seattle - Flying Avianca & American Airlines

### Travel Day

Most of us decided to drive down to Seattle the night before and stay in a hotel as this day is going to be a long one. Our first disappointment of the trip was that American would not check our bags all the way through to Lima as it was not all on the same reservation. New rule as of February 1 she informed us at check-in, stating a new government regulation. We threw down the bullshit flag as Delta had no problem doing it for another person traveling with us. Now we will have to pay luggage fees to Avianca once we land in Lima and pick up our bags. Oh well, just another adventure in flying.

When we landed in Lima we all had to clear immigration and pick up our bags, even those who did get their bags checked all the way through. We cleared customs and they did want to look in our camera box as they scan all your bags one more time. We did overwhelm the agent so Bob and I just opened ours and then she waved everyone through. The Avianca Airways counter is just around the corner and as we get there one of the employees comes out and checks us all in on the machine. That made it super-fast and now we just have to go to the counter and hand over our bags. Since we had just flown in international, they did not charge us any luggage fees. That saved us \$40 or more since their weight limit is 1 bag 23 kilo, yahoo we always like that! It's now 2:00am and this airport is hopping. Hope and Allison came in on earlier flights and were waiting for us at check-in, while Steve and Shiela flew in a few days ago and Hugh's flight arrives a little later. All the eateries are open so we take advantage and forage for food. At 4:00am we decide to go through security and get to the gate. Not much down there so be sure to eat before going to the gate holding area. The rest of the group joins us as we pile on the plane for our last flight to Cuzco. It's a short hop, just over an hour and we are super excited to



get there. Be sure to sit on the left side of the plane when flying into Cusco because the view of the Andes is incredible. We gather all the luggage and meet our guide Fernando just outside baggage claim. This huge sign for the local beer catches our eye, which apparently if you drink too much you will grow giant noses and look like the people on the sign. Interesting. They have a big bus waiting and before we depart we have to get our bug out bags packed with everything we need for the next 3 days. We are only taking backpacks up to Machu Picchu and the rest is being held at the Pure Peru office until we return. Our quick tour of Cuzco is nice, the city is growing quickly and is actually very clean, which is always a nice surprise. Once out of the city it is about a 1:45





minute drive to Ollantaytambo where we will be spending our first night. It's about 9:00am when we reach the hotel Pakaritampu. We have a quick bite to eat and then we dress and decide to head back into town for some sightseeing. We catch a "tuk tuk" outside the door and it is 1 Sole for a ride into to town. We wander around and the see a procession crossing the bridge. It is in observance of Ash Wednesday as the parade through the



town blessing everyone. The group decides that we want to visit the local Inca ruins but the entrance fee is \$25... so most of us opt for the free Inca ruins across town. The view is amazing and helps us get in shape for our



upcoming Hikes at Machu Picchu. Afterwards we make our way back to the resort for happy hour to try the famous Pisco Sour. We overwhelm the bartender with our large group but we finally all get our first Pisco sour and they are good! Afterward we go in to town again to forage for food. Our guide told us to eat at Papas but it





is closed so we venture on looking for Cuys (which is guinea pig). No luck on that one and we stop at another place but it just feels wrong so we move on to a pizzeria in the main square. The food is decent as most everyone is falling asleep in their plates so it's time to go. We fall into bed and I think it was 30 seconds before I was out.

## Day 2

The group was up and raring to go after breakfast which was a wonderful buffet. The train is just a quick 5 min walk down the road. We are early as usual so we have to wait for our train to pull in after the next train. We are



in car A and have assigned seats. The car is full and we have the vista dome windows so we can see everything. The train ride was spectacular! A quick 1 1/2 hour ride with some of the most spectacular scenery. Once we arrive at the station the hotel people are there as well as Fernando. We transfer all our stuff into whatever we need for the day, and then hand the rest off to the hotel staff. It will catch up with us at the hotel once we check into the Sanctuary Lodge. The bus ride to the top of Mach Picchu is about 25 min and it is very scenic. It amazes



me every time I look out the window. Once at the top we unload and head toward the entrance. Fernando is our



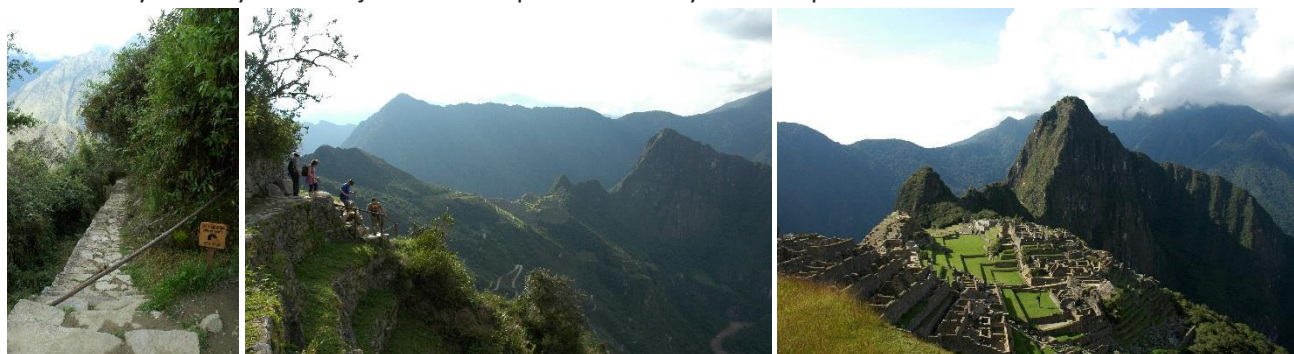
guide as we navigate our way thru the hordes at the main gate. We spend the next 3 hours exploring Machu Picchu from every angle. Simply amazing! Back at the entrance we get all our tickets for bus rides, trains rides, etc. It is time for Fernando to leave and head back to Cusco and time for us to have lunch. The hotel does a buffet lunch and the food is really good. I hand out all the paperwork for tomorrow's entrance, bus ride down the hill and train tickets. After lunch, everyone is headed off in different directions. Most of us decide to do the



hike to Sun Gate. Bob and I are a bit behind everyone else and realize that we have a very short window to get up there. It is almost 3:30 pm and we have to be out of the park at 5:00pm. The only time we stop is to catch our breath and we keep moving. We are nearing the top and see team Anacortes is up there enjoying the view. As



we come around the last turn we see the park ranger and he tells us we are “Tarde!” and have to head back down. Are you crazy? I didn't just huff and puff all the way to the top of this mountain to be turned around



before reaching the summit. We tell him just one picture as we race past him and quickly snap away. It is such an incredible afternoon as the sun starts to set. This is where the Inca trail enters Machu Picchu, the ranger is yelling “Vamanos! Vamanos!” and trying to get us to go back down the trail. We barely made it by the skin of our teeth! A couple of turns into the descent two young girls are coming up and we told them what was going on and sure enough that ranger turned them around before they made it to the top. Bummer. There are not too many people left on the mountain now, and it is magical. We made it down in plenty of time and got our passports stamped to mark this great occasion. Time for a couple of cold Cosquena beers and we wanted to check out the hotel grounds. There is a hot tub up on the hill with a perfect view of Huyana Picchu. There is a Pisco tasting at 6:00pm so we hustle back to shower and get ready. We meet Joseph the bartender who is going



to educate us in all the different types of Pisco. We give them all a try and then try to figure out if we can taste the difference between them all. After that he shows us how to make Pisco Sours and gives us the recipe. Since we just had a small taster we all order full glasses and then it's time for the slideshow. The slides are all old shots of when Machu Picchu was discovered and how they cleaned it up. Amazing all the work they did and how it looks today. Time for our dinner reservation, and by now we are all starving. Alcohol is also included along with our meals, and they have some very nice bottles of wine to choose from. The food is incredible and we stuff ourselves until we can barely keep our eyes open. We waddle up to our room and look forward to a great night of sleep. At about 2:30 am our room got really hot so I was trying to open the window and just as I opened it a flash of lightening and a loud clap of thunder happened. Scared the living bah-geez-us out of me! I toss and turn the rest of the night as I am stewing about the big hike up Wayna Picchu. I check the weather outside at 5:30 am to see if there will be a sunrise as we want to go to the sun temple. It is completely fogged in, so back to bed to catch a few more z's before we have to get up. I checked a few more times and realize it just is not going to happen this morning.

### Day 3

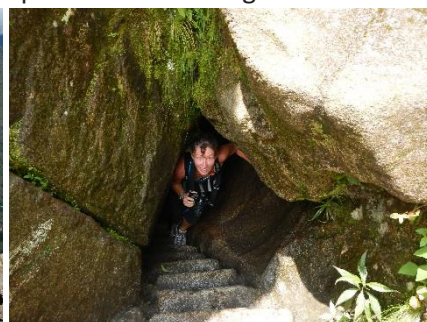
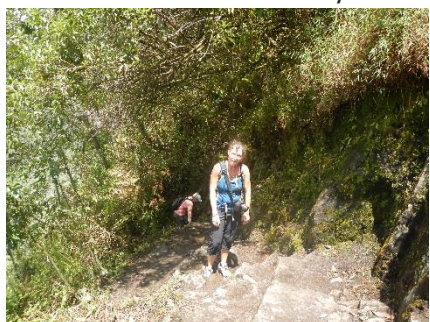
We decide to get up around 7:00am to start packing up. We wander downstairs to a delicious Buffett breakfast with more food than you can eat. Our hike start time is 10:00am so we have to have everything separated out for the hotel staff to take to the train station so we don't have to haul it around. We check out and then hike



over to the entrance of the hike. Here we have lots of llamas wandering around and one llama was trying to get a free meal off all the hikers. They finally open the door and you have to sign in your name, age, and departure



time. I'm very nervous as it did pour down rain last night and I'm worried about how slick it's going to be. It's a tough hike with a vertical gain of about 805 feet. People are coming down so you have to stop and let people by which is ok, as you need to stop so you can breathe! We reach the top in about an hour, which is a good pace. There is one section where you have to climb under a boulder in a very tight spot almost crawling on the



ground. It is a very tiny squeeze through. At the very top it is huge boulders and everyone is leaping around like a billy goat. Me on the other hand, is clinging to the rocks and doing my best butt slide so I don't fall off! Dale helps me down and now the fun begins for the big trek to the bottom. We pause for a nice snack break and



water and then we start down. The steps are steep and you are almost coming down backwards. I decided to just not look down and only look at the step in front of me. Going down was almost more difficult than going up because now your quads are just screaming at you. The evil part about the hike was when you finally reached the bottom it was all uphill to exit the park. When we signed ourselves out we had done the





hike in 1 hour 55 minutes. We were pretty proud of ourselves. Back to the hotel to sit and relax with a couple of cold ones and a bit of lunch. The whole group finally shows up and all 9 of us (Kelley, Bob, Dale, Peggy, Steve,



Shiela, Allison, Hope & Hugh) made it to the top. Way to go team Anacortes! Next, we have to catch a bus back to Aqua Calientes so we can make our train reservation. Because we made such good time on the hike we are early with plenty of time to catch any bus down the hill before 2:00pm. The buses keep running non-stop and as soon as they fill one, another is there to take their place. The road down to Aqua Calientes is just switchbacks with steep cliffs and the drivers go like a bat out of hell. There are buses coming up and I can't believe that they have not crashed into each other before. It is a well-oiled machine. Once at the bottom it is just a short walk to the train station where we pick up the rest of our luggage from the hotel staff. Once our train is announced we get in line to board our car, the nice thing is with the Vistadome train is that you have assigned seats so no worries about a place to sit. Normally the train would take us all the way back to Cusco, but this time of year they do not run that far so they dropped us at the small town of Poroy and then we boarded a bus for an 1 ½ hour ride back to Cusco. On the train it is

very nice and they serve drinks and snacks while traveling. This time they had a fashion show of baby Alpaca clothing, which is so soft and amazing along with a costumed Wolf character dancing up and down the aisle. Not really sure what he was all about other than it was a local dance custom. It was great entertainment as well as



another shopping opportunity. Once at the station we quickly boarded the buses and away we went. Once we arrived at Cusco, Fernando was waiting to transfer us to the hotel Casa Andina private collection. After checking in, all our bags were waiting for us in our rooms, so a quick shower and clean clothes and off to the restaurant for dinner. Everyone is exhausted after the hike and all the travel so off to bed for a great night of sleep.

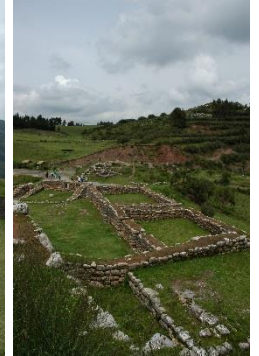
Day 4

The hotel offers a wonderful buffet breakfast with made to order eggs and plenty of fruit, pastries, bread, cheeses and much more. We have our usual Coca tea to help combat the altitude, but I think we just drink it because this is the only place we will ever get it. We meet Fernando at 9:00 am for our city tour, so we load on the bus for a short ride up into the hills of Cusco. Our first stop is the Tambo Machay, which is a place that the





nobles or kings could possibly stop by as a resting place. The next stop was Pukapukara, meaning “red fort” some say this is a military check point and others say that when the Inca ruler would visit Tambomachay then his



army and servants were left to stay here. Then the next stop was the maze Q’Enqo which was used as an astronomical observatory. It is a religious spot and they used to perform rituals here. Time for a little shopping



opportunity so we stop the bus at a small store that has artisans doing silver work, painting and Alpaca knitting. Here they showed us how they make all the silver jewelry and how to tell the difference between a true



Peruvian sweater made from Alpaca versus Llama. Most rare was the Vicuna (which is not actually Alpaca) which a scarf might cost you around \$600 US dollars. Baby Alpaca, which really means the first shearing of the Alpaca, is the next highly sought after yarn and so on down the line. The worst would be made from Llama which is scratchy and itchy and most vendors try to pass it off as something else. Plenty of imitation out there made of synthetics so it was nice to have a little knowledge before buying. Then we stopped at the largest of all the ruins called Saqsaywaman. By this time we were all starving so we took a break for lunch at Fernando’s Ice cream parlor called Qucharitas. Here we had a nice sandwich or Panini along with some iced coffees. He also has wonderful ice cream, sort of like a cold stone in the states where they add fresh fruit to the ice cream on a frozen slab. Everything was delicious as we quickly finish as we still have a few places left to visit. We are on foot





now close to the main square as we stop to visit several Cathedrals. They are over the top, built with so much gold and silver it is mind boggling. We don't have many photos and there is no photography allowed inside the churches. It is about 4:00 pm and we have kept Fernando well beyond our time limit, so we say our goodbyes and head back to the hotel. Time for a little pre-packing as our flight is out very early in the morning. Bob and I decide to make a last minute shopping run and to make reservations for the group at Incanto for dinner. Fernando had suggested this restaurant if we wanted to try Cuy, which is Guinea Pig, a local favorite. Back at the hotel we meet up with the group at 6:30pm and the rain has started to fall, so we grab umbrellas and to the short walk to the plaza. The restaurant was fantastic with great food and drinks. Steve ordered up a couple of plates of Cuy so we could all have a taste. I have to say the overall verdict was a thumbs up and very tasty. You did have to work at it as it was quite small and a bit boney. I ordered the Alpaca steak for dinner and it was delicious and Bob had the Lomo Soltando beef dish another wonderful local specialty. Time to make our way back to the hotel to finish packing since we will be departing at 6:15 am.

## Day 5

Nothing like a 4:30 am wake up call to really start off your day. Ugh, I don't think I slept at all last night. A little breakfast and some last minute packing before we all congregate down at reception. Fernando is right on time with the big bus to fit us and all our bags for the 15 minute ride to the airport. We are flying Avianca again but this time the luggage will cost us as they only allow 22 kilos per person total. A little luck was on our side when the agent went to charge Karma, her machine wouldn't work. After a couple of visits from a few supervisors, she handed Karma her tickets and said she was good to go. She had also started working on our tickets before that so we didn't have to pay for our overweight bags either. I think the entire group was able to get on with no overweight luggage fees. Fernando walks us upstairs where the security line starts, so we say our goodbyes. He was such an excellent guide, I hope someday in the future our paths will cross again. Our flight departed a little late but we arrive on time in Lima. We have about 45 minutes to make our next flight, which probably wouldn't have been too much of a problem except we sat there for 15 minutes before they opened the door. We quickly hustle out and try and figure out where we are going when we realize we are in baggage claim. Bob says he will wait by the corner for the rest of the group to show them the way while the rest of us go upstairs for the departure gates. Past the first security was quick to let you in but it is a long way and now we have some sort of immigration stop. We are never going to make it. I ask one of the people there that we had a tight connection so she pointed me to the crew line. The group follows and I finally make my way to the counter as she quickly



stamps my passport and I am running to the gate. Wouldn't you know it, it has to be the farthest gate away. There is no one left at the gate, everyone is loaded as I fly up to the counter. I tell them there are 11 of us and they are stuck in immigration. They are holding the plane for us, but I wasn't going to board until all of the group was with me. A couple of agents start heading back towards immigration to see if they can hurry the process. The group is hustling down the hall one by one and last but not least is Bob and Scott. We all made it!! A little hot and sweaty and thankful that we were at sea level for all the running! I'm not sure how well that would have went at 10,000 feet. Once we arrive in Quito, immigration and customs was a breeze and our luggage was waiting for us. Outside we look for someone with a sign with our name on it. Huh, nobody here. That's odd, I have never had that happen before. We move off to the side while I dig out all the information and then find a guy from some tour company to help me. He finds me an information gal who quickly calls the hotel and apparently there is some mix-up as they had us coming in at 10:00 pm tonight. Not to worry, they will send the van and should be there in about 20 minutes. So 40 minutes go by and now it's time for Lori & Scott to fly in and we can see their plane has landed. We connect with them and right after that the transfer company finally shows. I take one look at the van and know that there is no way that us and all our luggage will fit. The group jumps in the van and we take what luggage will fit and then Bob has to hang out at the airport and wait for us to return. Of course they say it is only 15 minutes away, so the driver will be right back. I think they have some sort of timing issue in Quito because it took 30 minutes to get to the hotel. Poor Bob he is stuck waiting for the bus to come back and of course it was a good 90 minutes before he finally arrives. Everyone is by the pool enjoying a



cold beer, which we quickly grab one for Bob so he can cool off. We are staying at the Rincon de Puembo Hotel, which is a very nice place, with a lovely pool and grounds. A couple hours by the pool always helps everyone relax a bit before we make a decision about dinner. Nobody feels adventurous tonight and we are too tired to wander around so we opt for dinner at the hotel. The menu was quite varied and all the food we had ordered was very good. It is only about 7:00 pm and we are done. The last 3 remaining group members will arrive tonight at 10:45PM so they won't arrive at the hotel until midnight. We will see everyone in the morning.

## Day 6

Another early morning wakeup call at 6:00 am so we can get ready to fly over to the Galapagos. Our last 3 people all made it in safely last night just a little past midnight, so they were able to get a pretty good night sleep. Breakfast starts at 7:00 am and we have a departure time at 7:45 am, so we hit the restaurant right on time. The hotel is used to dealing with groups as you don't order they just bring you food. We first start out with a fresh fruit plate, then a fresh fruit smoothie and then they bring you a plate of scrambled eggs with a cheese empanada. All our luggage is ready to be loaded and we are standing there waiting for the transfer company. They finally show up little late, but at least they have a big enough bus for all of us and our luggage. As we depart out on the main highway the traffic is at a standstill. Not good, we are already a bit behind schedule since it took a while to load all the luggage. It is a typical Monday morning traffic jam due to construction. When we get to the airport it is a mad dash, first you have to go through security, then you need to purchase your tourist card \$10 per person. Luckily Byron from the transfer company helps take care of the tourist card so everyone can hustle off to the check in counter for the flight. So again, we face the battle of the overweight luggage fees. This time no one got charged except 3 people, which we were still trying to figure out why, seemed to just be random. We don't have a lot of spare time by the time we get to the gate before we start loading on the plane. Once we are in the air, the flight over to Guayaquil takes only 30 minutes where we touch down to let some people off. We have a 45 minute layover, but we are not allowed to depart the plane. They finally load some

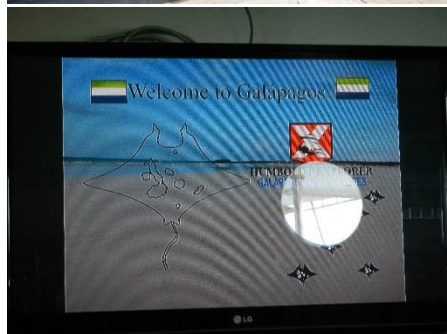


passengers on the plane and we finally take off again for another 1 ½ hour flight. On the plane we are reading all the paperwork we have to fill out and on the back it starts asking all these questions about plant, animals, fruits, seeds, blah, blah, blah. Well, we have a large bag of trail mix in a ziplock bag and some dried figs. We start passing it all out as it has to be eaten before we land. They are very strict on what comes into the Galapagos Islands, to make sure nothing invasive will take over. Once you pass immigration you need to pay your \$100 park



entrance fee in cash. Then you move over to a table where they will inspect the inside of all your bags looking for anything you might bring in. All our luggage showed up, so just outside the door our boat crew is waiting for us so they can load up a truck with all our gear. The group loads into a passenger van ready to

relocate us to the harbor for pickup. Once at the harbor there are fur seals laying everywhere, on boats, platforms etc. The crew is finally ready for us and the dinghy ride is only 5 minutes to the mother ship. Once on



board the crew does a dive/boat briefing on all the ins and outs of the boat. Time for some lunch and then we



are off to diving. Everyone is a bit nervous as they try and remember where everything goes. Once in the water we check our weighting to make sure we can get down easily. The max depth is about 24 feet, with sand, urchins, Sea lions and a little Moray. Back on the zodiac, Cindy has lost a weight pocket so we decide to jump back in and see if we can find it. Bob, Scott, Juan Carlo and myself make a line and start cruising the bottom. It only took about 5 minutes before we located the pocket. Yahoo! Time for a warm shower, then a welcoming party to meet all the crew and then a briefing about the tomorrow's schedule. Finally the dinner bell has been rung so time to eat and then we need to work on getting some cameras set-up. I'm falling asleep typing all this so it must mean time to go to bed.

## Day 7

Up at 6:20 am for our pre-breakfast snack and then we are suited up and ready for some diving. Our first dive will be a slow drift off of Santa Cruz Island. The visibility was about 40 feet and we are looking for anything big to swim by. We spot one solitary Hammerhead way out in the blue. This is a good sign and we eventually saw a few more, and a White Tip Reef Shark, Galapagos Shark, Turtle, Rays, Morays and lots of fish. Back to the boat for a



nice breakfast and then dive 2. This time we had a huge school of Mobula Rays just swimming out in the blue, it has to be the biggest school I have ever seen. Another Hammerhead, White Tips, and some big Rays. Back on the boat we enjoy some lunch and then we are going to do a land visit on North Seymour Island. As soon as we land



there is a tiny seal pup crying for its mother. He follows us up the rocks crying as the guides tell us to be sure he doesn't touch us. As we walk around this very desert like island there is a ton of life here. We see some larger fur seals, a type of Gull, Marine Iguana, land Iguanas and lots of Frigate Birds. There are even baby Frigates with all their white fluffy feathers trying to stay out of the sun. The sun is blazing hot and I think all of our skin is melting so time to go back to the boat. As soon as we are loaded up, the crew pulls anchor and we are on our way to Wolf & Darwin Islands. We have our fingers crossed for great animal encounters and a smooth crossing. It's such



a beautiful afternoon we grab some cold beer and enjoy the ride from the top deck. Before we even get our first



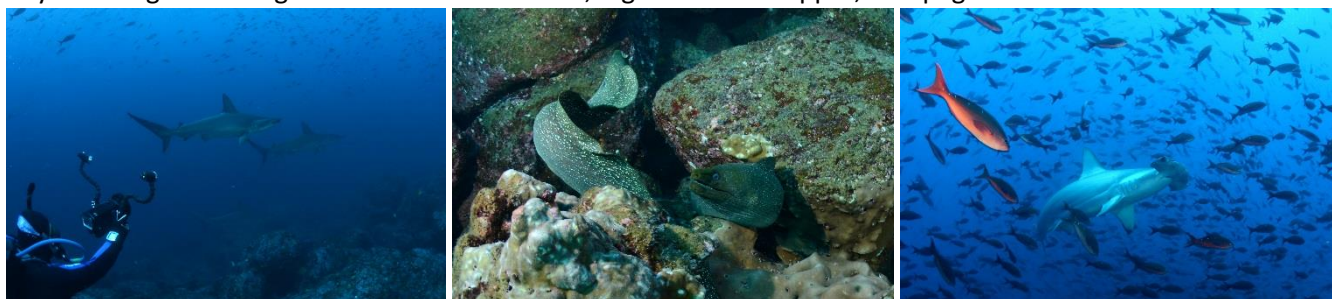
beer down the fire alarm sounds and we all quickly run to grab our life jackets and go to the muster station. Most of us forgot our shoes, so it was a good learning lesson. At 6:00 pm we have a meeting about the currents we will encounter up at Wolf & Darwin and how we will handle emergency issues. This was a great talk so that everyone is prepared for tomorrow's dives. Time for dinner and then we will motor all through the night hopefully arriving around 6:00 am.

## Day 8

We arrived at Wolf Island around 6:00 am which I think was right on time. Another 6:20 am wake up call, a quick bite and briefing and we are on our way to diving. This will be some very challenging diving due to currents and surge. We quickly drop down on Shark Bay dive site, head for the rocks and try and hunker down. We do a bit of



watching in the blue for sharks and a few Hammerheads swim by which was very exciting. Juan Carlo signals us to move on as he wants to be where the most action is. The current has picked up so we drift a ways and then hook in to watch more Hammerheads and a few Galapagos Sharks come by. This will be a 4 dive day so we eat breakfast and then onto the next dive called Landslide. More current=more sharks. Lots of Hammerheads this time and quite a few more Galapagos Sharks. They glide in the current and make it look effortless, while we are hanging on by our finger nails. The third dive we went to Landslide again as it had more happening than Shark Bay. Once again some good Hammerhead action, big school of Snapper, Galapagos Sharks and loads of fish.



Lunch time and a little siesta and we are getting ready for dive 4. Juan Carlo wants to know if we want to do a new place as he wants to dive the channel between Elephant Rock and Wolf. I hear the words "narrow, v-shaped channel" and I can pretty much guess what we are in for. The dive starts out all smooth and calm and you think to yourself, "oh, this isn't that bad" when all of a sudden someone pulled out the bathtub plug and we are flying! The other group is hunkered down right in the strongest part as we come upon them and try not to wipe them out. We get washed out the other side of the channel and the current is swirling, going up and going down. Wheeeee! This is so much fun. My strobe arms are splayed straight out and I am lucky my camera is still in one piece! We all catch our breath and then Juan Carlo tells us to turn around and go back. Is he kidding? Sure



enough we reach the end and the current raging in our face. Bob and him swim out to a big rock and look like two flags in a hurricane. The rest of us stick to the rocks, but it isn't just the current there is also a big surge, so it flips us back and forth over the rocks. All the while you are trying to dodge the Scorpion Fish and the big Moray Eels we keep putting our hands next too. Ok, enough of that so we bail and start to hit the safety stop and a fur seal comes and checks us out, he seems a little leary and doesn't want to play much. Time for some cold beer on the top deck and they even have the hot tub up and running. The sunset perfect on the water tonight but we



still did not see a green flash. The crew picked up a couple of fresh fish from the fisherman so it is grilled fish tonight which was wonderful. Time to do a little camera work and then off to bed as tomorrow will be a 5 dive day. Yikes, that's a lot of diving for this place, everyone better eat their Wheaties in the morning.

## Day 9

This day is going to be a big one. Five dives are scheduled, two at Wolf and 3 dives at Darwin. Our first dive was at Shark Bay and it was good but not a lot of shark action. Second dive at Landslide was pumping! Tons of Hammerheads, some big walls of a school of them came by. Plenty of Galapagos Sharks as well. Great dive to



finish off diving Wolf Island. We motor for 3 hours toward Darwin, we have dolphins along the way and even Pilot Whales but none stick around long enough for us to jump in with them. Our first dive at Darwin's Arch is amazing. So many fish that you can hardly see the sharks through the fish. Lots of Hammerheads, definitely not as many Galapagos Sharks here. We did have more Eagle Rays, and big ones. Also, lots of Turtles. Another dive at Darwin's Arch and we have some Hammerheads and a huge Tuna came through that scared all the fish back to the reef which was really cool. When we return to the boat there are several Silky Sharks at the back of the



boat, most of us just choose to put our heads in the water to check them out, but Phil decides he's going to jump right in. After we unload the skiffs we decide to jump in and swim with the Silky's. This has got to be crazy!



The one thing I know about Silky's is that they are very aggressive. And sure enough as we are coming past the back of the boat they literally bump your dome port on your camera and head straight for you. Yikes, at least we all returned with our fingers and toes attached. Our final dive is on Darwin Island for a night dive. For the most



part they don't allow night diving, but Juan Carlo seems to think we are worthy since we survived the death dive the day before. The night dive had many Moray Eels, Lobster and more Turtles than I have ever seen sleeping on the bottom. Time is up and we are back on the boat for dinner. If I go to bed right now I might get 8 hours of sleep. We are all exhausted!

## Day 9

Another gorgeous day on the water. We are still at Darwin where we will do 2 dives and then move back to Wolf for 2 dives and then we start the long crossing back to the main group of islands. Our first 2 dives on Darwin were not as good as yesterdays, we did have some Hammerheads but nothing like before. On the second dive



we did have 2 schools of Horse Eyed Jacks which were huge. It will be 3 hours to get to Wolf so we have lunch and do a bit of relaxing. The water is still very calm with just a swell coming in. We are diving Landslide again as this has been consistently the best for shark activity. The visibility has diminished from the day before but we



have Hammerheads even in 30 feet. We swim out to the edge of the reef, find our spots and sit and wait for the action to start. We have huge schools of Hammerheads come by and some go right over our heads along with lots of Galapagos Sharks. This is what we have been waiting for! Turtles are everywhere, huge schools of fish,



sometimes the fish are so thick you can't see the sharks through them. Our last dive which was at 4:00 pm was a bit dark as the clouds have started to roll in and the visibility has dropped to less than 20 feet. We have more Hammerhead action and many Galapagos Sharks as well. Our time is up so we get back on board and start our 16+ hour crossing. It is starting to spit rain but we take our cold beverages up to the sun deck and enjoy our last



sunset at Wolf and Darwin. After dinner, Leandro puts on the video he shot and sometimes I wonder if I was on the same dive as him. He has gotten some amazing Hammerhead footage. The group is fading and everyone starts heading to their cabins. It is barely 8:00 pm, but that's a good indicator on how much work it is to dive in the currents and swell.

## Day 10

The water is flat calm when we wake up and the skies are cloudy today. Hopefully the sun will make its way out sometime as the water down here at Fernandina is cold, 60's cold, brrrr. We will be wearing everything we brought. We won't be diving until almost 7 or 8 AM since we had to motor against the current all night. We are super excited for today since this stop is not on their itinerary. After having a long discussion with the crew Bob and I felt that this was worth making a change for. As the crew describes Fernanadina as "A very special place" unlike any other place in the Galapagos Islands. And if their eyes are lighting up at the mention of it, I know we have to go. We have to get permission from the owner and they have to get permission to change their itinerary and that always equals one thing, money. We arrive at Fernanadina just a little before 8:00 AM so we are right on schedule. Our first dive will be to 70 feet to find the Red Lipped Batfish, so everyone adds every layer they



brought as we don't really know how cold it will be. We backroll in and get a big surprise that this dive is going to be COLD! We make our way down and sure enough at 70 feet on the sandy bottom we have the crazy looking batfish all swimming around and divers all trying to get a picture. Did I mention the cold?? At this depth I think



my 7mm full and 5mm hooded vest with a diveskin and electric shirt are barely enough to keep me from shivering. We did find one Seahorse and the Torpedo Ray which apparently has an electrical shock. Time is up thank goodness as I am shivering bad now. Back on board we quickly try and warm up with a hot shower and hot cocoa. Our suits stay on since we are going right back in and this time we are staying shallow to see the Marine Iguanas feeding on the algae. At 15 feet with all this on it is actually comfortable and we start to see plenty of Iguanas diving down and hanging on to the rocks for dear life.

We are being tossed around like ragdolls in the surge trying not to smash our dome ports into a rock. This was amazing to see them in the water! Back to the boat once again to drop off tanks and then straight back into the



boat to snorkel close to shore to see the thousands of Iguanas on the rocks and swimming on the surface. We also see the fur seals and flightless Cormorants sitting on the rocks trying to warm up. Time is up and back to the boat for our final dive of the day. We are jumping back in to see Iguanas and hoping that a Penguin comes by. We did not see any on the dive but we did see a few on the surface. Back on the boat it's time for lunch and I think that it is around 1:00 Pm but it is 3:00 PM! Wow, where did the time go?? Everyone looks exhausted as we



sit down to lunch, but it was an amazing day, one we will sure never forget. As it is only here that you will see these animals in their natural habitat. Time to relax and talk about today's adventure as we spend the rest of the day motoring to our next island. As we enjoy the view we start to see some fins sticking out of the water. We think they are shark dorsal fins and there must be small sharks at the surface. Juan Carlo comes up top and we



point out the fins and he says they are Mola Mola fins. We are a bit skeptical when all of a sudden one leaps out of the water and sure enough it is a huge Mola Mola. It leapt a second time and we are wanting to stop and jump in but he says as soon as we get close they will go deep. Not sure we believe him 100%, but we have a long way to motor so I guess we are out of luck. We enjoy a nice dinner and watch the video of the day and everyone is already heading towards their bunks. I think it might be 7:45 PM. Nighty night.

#### Day 10

Our last day and night on board the boat. We motored most of the night and are now anchored off of Cousins Rock. Here we will do two dives and then start making our way back to San Cristobal. On the first dive we have a few Fur Seals come by and play. There is a huge school of Barracuda and Tarpon at the surface, when we reach



the point we find 6-7 Eagle Rays circling around and they came really close to us. We enjoy them for a short time as it is time for us to go. An hour break and we are right back in the water on the same dive. We see a couple of the spotted Eagle Rays still hanging out and then we start to swim back to play with the Seals. Phil was the first to spot 2 big Manta Rays practically at the surface. We quickly ascend as the giant one circles back around twice for us to enjoy. Our time is up so back to the boat to rinse gear and get it drying out before lunch. Time to do a bit of pre-packing before we go into town this afternoon. We have lunch at noon and then a crew toast at 1:00 pm and then we are kicked off the boat until tonight. The dinghies take us into the dock of Santa Cruz where the bus picks us up and is taking us up into the highlands of Rancho Manzanilla. Which is sort of a sanctuary or



natural habitat of the giant Tortoises which these people let them roam freely all about their property. They can come and go as they want, they are not fenced in, nor fed. It is amazing to see these animals which look so prehistoric, lumbering around in the fields. Just walking 20 feet looked like a huge effort. After our visit there we



then were dropped off at the town of Port Arroyo, here you can visit the Charles Darwin Research station (which was closed up due to the fact that it was Sunday and 4:00PM). Most everyone wandered through town and did a



little shopping before meeting up at the Il Giardinios restaurant for dinner. Juan Carlo shows back up to have dinner with us and when we are finished the bus is there to whisk us back to the boat. It is about a 20 minute ride from town to the dock. Once back on board everyone quickly starts to pack as tomorrow morning we have to have our bags ready to go by 8:00AM. We will motor 5 hours to San Cristobal and anchor up sometime in the wee hours of the morning.

## Day 11

Everyone is up early moving around doing all their last minute packing, and showering. Breakfast is at 7:30AM and then Leandro is taking all our luggage to the airport to check it in for us and then he will be back to take us to shore at 9:00AM. Apparently we will wander around town for 2 hours before the bus will take us back to the airport. It is a sunny day so I'm sure that it will be sweltering in town. Once on shore the bus takes us a short ride up to the interpretive center, which explains the history and evolution of the Galapagos. We are here for about



40 minutes and then we will go back into town and wander in the heat for the last hour and a half. Unless you are a die-hard shopper there not much else to do in town, other than look at all the Seals lying about literally everywhere around the waterfront. You name it they lay on it from park benches, sidewalks etc. We go to the post office to have our passports stamped to prove we were here in the Galapagos, which killed about 5 minutes. Other than that we grab a cold beverage and have a seat at one of the food stops along the sidewalk. Finally, the bus shows at noon to take us to the airport which is all of 5 minutes down the road. We already have our boarding passes so we really only need to go through

security. Our plane departed on time and we did still have to make the 45 minute stop in Guayaquil on the way back, before landing in Quito. We touched down around 6 ish and we are leaving Phil, Cindy and Troy at the airport since their flight back to the states departs tonight at midnight. We say our goodbyes, grab our luggage and look for our transportation to our hotel for the night. Outside the gate is Diego waiting to take us to his hotel for a quick overnight before our early departure in the morning. It takes 1 taxi, 1 van & 1 truck to get all the people and luggage to fit for the "15 minute" ride to the hotel. Once we pull off the highway I actually believe that it is going to be 15 minutes until we hit the dirt road under construction. This road is the 4 wheel off road vehicle needed to maneuver the dips and bumps to get to this hotel. At one point we pass a backhoe sitting over a deep hole or trench and when I look down I see a man's head about 1 foot away from our tire! Nothing holding up the sides of the ditch in case it collapsed or stop us if we were to accidentally slide into the trench. I guess it's just another day of work for the guys in Quito. We finally make it to our hotel which is the Hotel Casa de Hacienda La Jimenita. The front gate looks like we are storming the castle or entering Jurassic Park. Once



inside we pull around to the back and start to unload all the luggage to the rooms. The rooms are very big and beautiful inside and we have learned that this property has been in Diego's family for over 100 years. Since the new airport was built close by, they decided to turn the property into a hotel because there is literally no place to stay out by the new airport. After throwing all our bags in our room we make our way to the main lodge to have some dinner and enjoy the beautiful crackling fire in the big fireplace. We are greeted by Diego's French Bulldog François, who I think really runs the place. We sit down to enjoy a home cooked meal before heading back to our rooms for the night. Diego says they run a night tour to a recently discovered Inca tunnel, but we are just too tired to take him up on it. Our departure the next morning will be 4:15AM so most everyone calls it a night.

## Day 11

I wish we would have had more time to explore and enjoy this hotel and if we ever come back to Quito I would certainly stay here again. Everyone is up and ready to go, except Allison who has now fallen to the strange stomach bug that has plagued several people in the group. She is willing to travel so off we go to the airport. Check-in was easy as well as security. We never had to pay over weight luggage fees and no departure tax, so our wallets are a little fatter which is always nice. Everyone is on the same flight to Miami and then we part ways with people going every direction. Bob and I have our Global re-entry cards and this is the first time we have been able to use it. I have to say it is a breeze and you do make it through all the customs and immigration lines super-fast since they have separate lanes. The only hold up is waiting for your luggage, it doesn't matter how fast you get down there, if your luggage is last off you don't have much of an advantage. The only thing Miami still has not figured out is the TSA pre-check line. This time they actually had signs up, a separate lane, but it was all closed down. Last time I was through here they didn't even have that so I guess maybe they are making progress. At this point Bob, Karma and I are on the same flight and we all made it to the gate. Hopefully everyone else had made their flight connections. We have a tight connection in Dallas so hopefully the 3 of us will make that flight. The airport in Dallas was crazy busy due to a snow and ice storm two days before. There were tons of people who missed their flights and were scrambling to get on any flight home. No problems for us, we squeaked in and out of there between storms. Flight arrived in Seatac on time, we picked up our car and drove back to Anacortes.



Bob and I would like to thank everyone for joining us on our South American adventure. We had an incredible time and hope you all did as well. From Machu Picchu to the Islands of the Galapagos, it was a trip we will talk about for a lifetime.

Vamanos! Vamanos!



# MACHU PICCHU, PERU

FEBRUARY 17-22, 2015

## Anacortes Diving Adventure Team



Steve, Hope, Karma, Dale, Kathy, Kelley, Fernando (guide) Allison, Peggy, Bob, Scott, Sheila, Hugh

# GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

FEBRUARY 23-MARCH 3, 2015



Phil, Steve, Peggy, Allison, Dale, Cindy, Scott B, Kathy, Troy, Kelley, Hope, Karma, Scott P, Bob, Lori, Hugh