

South American Small Group History and Culture Tour

Reading List

Turn Right at Machu Picchu: Rediscovering the Lost City One Step at a Time

by Mark Adams

What happens when an unadventurous adventure writer tries to re-create the original expedition to Machu Picchu?

In 1911, Hiram Bingham III climbed into the Andes Mountains of Peru and “discovered” Machu Picchu. While history has recast Bingham as a villain who stole both priceless artifacts and credit for finding the great archeological site, Mark Adams set out to retrace the explorer’s perilous path in search of the truth—except he’d written about adventure far more than he’d actually lived it. In fact, he’d never even slept in a tent.

Turn Right at Machu Picchu is Adams’ fascinating and funny account of his journey through some of the world’s most majestic, historic, and remote landscapes guided only by a hard-as-nails Australian survivalist and one nagging question: Just what was Machu Picchu?

The Last Days of the Incas

by Kim MacQuarry

The epic story of the fall of the Inca Empire to Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro in the aftermath of a bloody civil war, and the recent discovery of the lost guerrilla capital of the Incas, Vilcabamba, by three American explorers.

In 1532, the fifty-four-year-old Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro led a force of 167 men, including his four brothers, to the shores of Peru. Unbeknownst to the Spaniards, the Inca rulers of Peru had just fought a bloody civil war in which the emperor Atahualpa had defeated his brother Huascar. Pizarro and his men soon clashed with Atahualpa and a huge force of Inca warriors at the Battle of Cajamarca. Despite being outnumbered by more than two hundred to one, the Spaniards prevailed—due largely to their horses, their steel armor and swords, and their tactic of surprise. They captured and imprisoned Atahualpa. Although the Inca emperor paid an enormous ransom in gold, the Spaniards executed him anyway. The following year, the Spaniards seized the Inca capital of Cuzco, completing their conquest of the largest native empire the New World has ever known. Peru was now a Spanish colony, and the conquistadors were wealthy beyond their wildest dreams.

But the Incas did not submit willingly. A young Inca emperor, the brother of Atahualpa, soon led a massive rebellion against the Spaniards, inflicting heavy casualties and nearly wiping out the conquerors. Eventually, however, Pizarro and his men forced the emperor to abandon the Andes and flee to the Amazon. There, he established a hidden capital, called Vilcabamba—only recently rediscovered by a trio of colorful American explorers. Although the Incas fought a deadly, thirty-six-year-long guerrilla war, the Spanish ultimately captured the last Inca emperor and vanquished the native resistance.

Peru: Elite Power and Political Capture

by John Crabtree (Author), Francisco Durand (Author)

While leftist governments have been elected across Latin America, this Pink Tide, as it has been called, has so far failed to reach Peru. Instead, Peru represents a particularly stark example of state capture, in which an extreme concentration of wealth in the hands of a few corporations and pro-market technocrats has resulted in a monopoly on political power. In the wake of the 2016 general election, John Crabtree and Francisco Durand provide a close look at the ways in which Peruvian elites have been able to consolidate their position at the expense of genuine democracy.

In their timely analysis, Crabtree and Durand offer a particular focus on the role of mining and other extractive industries, where extensive privatization and deregulation have contributed to extreme disparities in wealth and power. In the process, they provide a unique case study of state development, by revealing the mechanisms used by elites to dominate political discussion and marginalize their opponents, as well as the role played by external factors such as international financial institutions and foreign investors. The significance of their findings therefore extends far beyond Peru and illuminates the wider issue of why mineral-rich countries so often struggle to attain meaningful democracy.
