

Day 3 - CUSCO - PISAC - OLLANTAYTAMBO - AGUAS CALIENTES

Woke up extremely well rested and feeling good. Explored the city on foot and made my way to travel agent recommended by hotel for machu picchu excursion. went in pretty well versed on the scene and the best plan. older woman travel agent, spoke no english, but i did ok. Leaving that afternoon, for two days, \$60.00 roundtrip ticket on backpacker level train plus two nights hotel in aguas calientes with private bath and hot water at \$15.00 per night. plus her commission of \$8.00 and another 5% or \$5.00 for me to charge it on visa, for a total of \$108. My one blunder was not understanding the return ticket was two days later, but at 5:30 in the morning, allowing only 1 day at machu picchu. it was my error to not carefully read the ticket she got me, she also wrote the times on the receipt. basically this means i would leave that afternoon, arrive at night, be able to go to machu picchu at dawn, then spend another nite at the mountain, and then return, which is a pretty standard package, two nites but only one day at the site.

I did return to the agency on my return and expressed my feelings about the problem, only to be told there would have been no space on those later trains, it just wasnt an option for booking that late, the day before, like i was.

also, the girl from the aguas calientes hotel was cool enough to offer to change my train ticket to a later train, which had to be done in person, with my passport, but that would have taken valuable time from my ruin visit. she was able to change it, but only til 9:30 am.

Plan was to take colectivo (group taxi) or bus from cusco to pisaq to visit the ruins there, then

make my way to Ollantaytambo to catch a 7 PM train.

later learned that I needed to take Cusco to Calca bus, which goes thru Pisac. the Cusco-Urubamba-Ollantaytambo route is much more travelled, as I would find on my easy return that way.

Hotel directed me to several street corners for colectivo taxis. I was immediately besieged by solo taxi drivers trying to charge me \$25. for a trip that would cost \$1.00 on the bus. Hotel had told me the cost for a group taxi would be \$5.00, so I knew I was running into some problems.

set off to walk to a different corner a few blocks away that I was told was the bus stop.

so now I've spent an hour on this, all with full pack on my back. enough is enough, sometimes you have to value your vacation time and pay up to do things faster. I found the first taxi, asked him how much to Pisac, he said 45/s, which is \$16. and away I went.

upon my return a few days later, i would find the bus stop i couldnt find that first day, it was only a few blocks beyond where i was. the other problem i discovered was i needed to be finding the cusco-calca bus in cusco, not the cusco-pisac bus, which i had been asking for. pisac is the middle stop on that bus line. but i digress.

cool ride from cusco to pisac in the taxi, took about 30-45 minutes, he dropped me off at town square, at base of mountain and ruins. i read i would have to take another local taxi to ruins, found one for 10/s, \$3.50. he drove me up the mountain to the entrance to the ruins. all these different sites use one tourist ticket, boleto touristica, which also allows access to the museums and sites in cusco, everything except machu picchu and some of the big churches. i bought this already in cusco (\$45.00) and they punch each site as you visit. the local cab dropped me off at entrance to ruins and drove away, which would later prove to be a big mistake

so its now around 4 pm, im starting pisac ruins, and i have a 7 Pm train to machu picchu, leaving from ollantaytambo, several towns away. i walk the long path to the ruins and explore, its an amazing site with mountains all around. this site was also never sacked by the spanish, so its very intact. its at a high elevation, and i was wearing my backpack and got pretty tired.

i returned to the main gate and there were 4 cars / taxis there. i went to each, but each one was waiting for passengers who hired them to wait and bring them back.

so now its 5 pm and im realizing im gonna have a problem.

after waiting 30-40 minutes with nothing happening, i go to plan b, money. i go to each one and say ill give you 80 soles (\$27.), about 10X the normal fare, just to drive me down the mountain. again, its worth \$27 not to screw up my train and night. one says sure and away we go. it just means a 20 minute trip to take me down the hill and then come back and get his passengers.

he asked where else im going, and i tell him ollantaytambo, and he says the people he's carrying have hired him to go to urubamba, the next town on the way, and he can take me all the way to the train station, for another 30/s (\$10.), we agreed on 75/s for the trip.

we waited for his passengers, a couple from belgium. of course they were the very last people off the mountain, but arrived at 5:30, the driver assured me he would have me at the ollantaytambo station by 6:30 for my 7 pm train.

The views were amazing as we drove through the sacred valley. theres a lot of resort type properties that offer outdoor activities and horseback riding. When i return to peru ill spend a lot more time in this area.

we arrived at their hotel in urubamba. they were cool and even pointed out that i shouldnt pay

the driver as they had paid him a lot already for the trip, but

we continued on as night fell and arrived in ollantaytambo by 6:15. the whole city is still an pueblo type city with all cobblestone streets. he dropped me off near the train station and i was on time for the train. the little alley leading to the station was filled with food and souvenir vendors and i had a boiled corn on the cob with locally produced salt. the kernels were huge, 3-4 times the ones you see here. it was good but lacked the sweetness of white corn. i wonder if they have big popcorn.

The train ride was comfortable, greyhound bus type seats with snacks and drinks served on carts. backpackers and families and tourists. i did see a lot of families with small children both in cusco and other sites, seems to be a safe place for a adventure vacation. Roundtrip Ollantaytambo-Machu was \$60. There is a more expensive vista dome service about \$120 roundtrip and a super luxe [hiram bingham train](#) , also operated by orient express, costs \$588. roundtrip from cusco, its a day trip and includes all food and drinks with white glove service on the train and private guides, etc.

Arrived at Aguas Calientes station and was met by girl from the hotel holding a big [IMA SUMAC](#)

sign. Walked 15 minutes straight up the main street to the hostel / hotel. i was wondering what i was going to get for \$15 per night. i read up on some alternatives and was prepared to find plan b if it was too bad.

Followed the girl up the hill and was first to check in and get my room. really basic, clean, window right over the main street. no cars but a lot of bar noise. also some nasty looking electric wires strung right in front of the open window.

Bathroom was clean but parts of the wall and ceiling were raw cement and unfinished. Hot water in shower, but bad shower head so one thick stream of water, good pressure but seemed to be missing the center part that creates a more showery stream.

By this time it was 10 pm. Walked around a little and stocked up on food and water and juice in one of the many little markets on the main street. got a bunch of apples and oranges, the oranges were amazingly sweet.

Went to bed to prepare for 5 AM departure for machu. Lots of street noise from discos and restaurants but that really doesnt bother me, especially after a real long day.