

Lake Titicata

After a quiet but pleasant evening in our hotel on the banks of Lake Titicata, we met our new local guide Jose, and boarded a private luxury speedboat for our day exploring Lake Titicata and the historic floating islands.

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Lake Titicata is the highest navigational lake in the world and is absolutely huge. It spans two countries- Peru and Bolivia and from one side to the other is over 100 miles! Luckily for us, our destination for the day was closer to Peru, and the city in which our hotel was located- Puno. It took just 20 mins or so to travel by boat from our hotel to the floating

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islands of Uros.



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These islands are just incredible. They are hand made of reeds by the Uru people who live on them, and have a life span of just 23 years.

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With the help of our Jose translating, we learnt about the process of these islands being made, which is just remarkable and how this small group of people live - on islands that float. They are skilled crafts people and we were shown around their houses and given demonstrations of how they build the islands, maintain them and some of the items

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which they handmake on the island to sell to tourists. The community includes a school, mini hospital, and is just incredible.



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Like all the other places in Peru that we've been lucky enough to visit, the colours here were bright and vivid and we thoroughly enjoyed the ladies singing to us. We had the opportunity to buy handmade crafts here before being rowed across to another island within the group of Uros on a reed boat. Yes, that's a boat made out of reeds! It was a re-

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laxing way to travel with no motor on board.
It was just fascinating here.



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After our visit to the Uros island we boarded our private boat and were taken a bit further out, around 40km to another island on Lake Titicata, Taquile Island. We loved that we could spend time on the top deck of the boat, accessed by a ladder!

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Taquile is a UNESCO island, made so because of the high textile skills that the locals, the *Taquileños*, have. The island is completely traffic free and has little houses and small holdings dotted around. The landscape is rocky and wild and has views not only over Peru but also Bolivia.

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The island men exclusively do the knitting and it is taught at a very early age. The women here weave. We were shown another really interesting demonstration about how these crafts were done, before given time to browse some of their stalls. Naturally we bought some souvenirs!

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We were treated to another live music performance too. We were in our element!

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Following these demos, we were led on a lovely walk of around a mile or so before being looped round to a local house turned into restaurant for us, where we were served the best quinoa soup I've ever tasted followed by fresh trout. Absolutely delicious!

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Sadly it was almost time for our adventure on Lake Titicata to come to an end, but not before a rather choppy to say the least boat journey back to our hotel, where we enjoyed a relaxed evening. Tomorrow is a very early start as we have a train adventure to look forward too!

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Puno (Lake Titicata) to Cusco

It was a very early start, but we were all excited- today we were travelling on one of the most scenic train journeys in the world, a journey which would take us across the Andes in 1920s Pullman carriages, from Puno to Cusco.

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At 7am, whilst being serenaded by a lady on an accordion, we boarded a traditional 1920s pullman carriage. It felt the height of luxury!

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We were served tea and coffee, and as the train chugged out of Puno bang on time at 07.30, with a 10 hour journey ahead of us our minds began to wander to Murder on the Orient Express! Only joking, we were really enjoying our fellow travellers company and there was a buzz of excited chatter.

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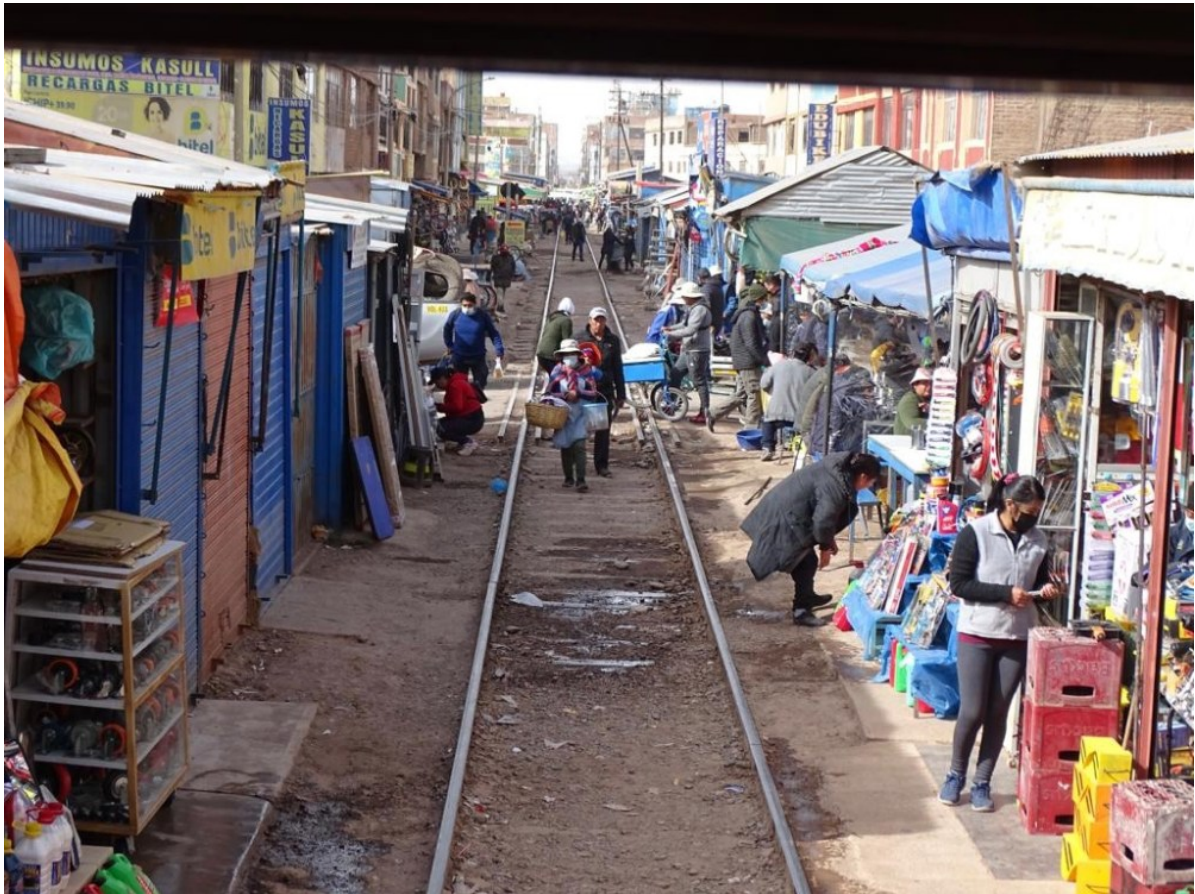
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Not long after leaving Puno we slowed down as we travelled through Juliaca, a city with a market ON the train tracks! It was a surreal experience standing on the observation carriage as the train squeezed through the tiny street and market sellers were literally squeezing up against the walls and quickly moving their stalls into the middle of the tracks, where the train just about cleared the items! It was chaos but WE LOVED IT!

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The sights, the sounds the smells. Everything about it was WONDERFUL. Little did we know, this was only the start. We celebrated with a cocktail in the bar, and watched as the band set up.

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It was only 9am but we were treated to half an hour of Peruvian jazz by a sax, guitar and drum trio. Boy- we were in HEAVEN!

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As part of the music, the train staff, very humourously put on a 'fashion show' for us. I don't think I stopped laughing – it was SO surreal. They really went to town with it, the band played Pretty Women and outside the windows were herds of wild alpacas, with the Andes as the backdrop. We all drank pisco sours and the mood was just electric. After

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the musical entertainment, we stayed in the observation car for some time watching the scenery become more and more remote and the mountains becoming closer and closer. I couldn't resist buying an alpaca poncho, modelled beautifully by one of the train staff in the fashion show, and we were served more cocktails.

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Soon it was lunch time, and we were served a really delicious meal, whilst watching us climb higher and higher into the Andes. The scenery, oh my goodness. It was spectacular.

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A little while after lunch the train paused at the highest point of its journey, 14,000 feet. The air was thin so we couldn't move around too fast but it was great to get a picture with the front of the locomotive.

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From here it was downhill for the next few hours, still the scenery just breathtaking as we went through some of the tiny towns. We saw so many wild dogs, alpacas, llamas, farmers tending their crops, families drying out piles of potatoes and corn. During the afternoon we enjoyed more music from the in house band, plus learnt how to make Pisco Sours with the bar team. Tea time arrived and we were treated to an Andean Afternoon

tea. Very similar to our English one, other than the coca or mint tea rather than Earl Grey! The day – It was just incredible and I don't think I articulate highly enough how much we enjoyed ourselves. It was an attack on our senses in every single way. We LOVED it.

Around 6pm our train rolled into Cusco station and we were met by Rom our new guide. We were taken to our hotel, where we had a quick change and hit the streets of Cusco with some of our group. Everyone was exhausted as the day had just been tremendous, but we enjoyed a quiet beer in a micro brewery very close to the hotel before a very good nights sleep dreaming of the Andes.

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