

# Sunrise Senior College and Friends' Excellent Adventure to Machu Picchu and the Galapagos

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*Because We're Old Enough to Know that We're Young Enough to Learn*

Karen Mabus of Cherryfield worried about the weather: on January 13 her long driveway was about to become a downhill ice slope. So, her bags packed for over a month, she climbed into her trusty Mitsubishi four-wheeler and made her way to Machias to stay the night with her friend, Barbara Anthony. The next morning a friend drove them to the Bangor airport—slowly and carefully—where they caught a plane to Philadelphia, and from there, circuitously to Lima, Peru.

Gail and Wayne Peters of Roque Bluffs were in New Hampshire, tending to their daughter, who'd had major knee surgery and major young children needing supervising. They nurtured, cooked and froze meals for the family and then headed to Gail's sister in Miami, Florida, to hook up with friends all headed for Lima.

Dixie Dahmen of Sorrento, discovered Etta Abrahams of Jonesport, Maine and Okemos, Michigan, and Jenifer Banks of Okemos, Michigan in the Miami airport. The three had to wait about five hours before their plane took off for Lima along with Gail and Wayne. Rendle and Pat Jones of Camden, with Betty Rinehart of Caribou made it earlier; so did Kay Larson of Bethel. Michigander Madeline Masterson arrived in Lima in the middle of the night; Californians Sara Chandler and spouse, George Titensor, arrived, as did Sara's sister, Kathy Guins, who flew in from Maryland.

So there we were, a strange group of senior folks, some old friends, some relatives, some frequent travelers, some strangers: 15 of us from four states, all brought together in Lima, Peru, thanks to the good will of Sunrise Senior College, as well the Maine Senior College Network, and networking friends.

Here's how it began: Etta Abrahams, charter member of Sunrise Senior College and Maine resident (now splitting her time by going "south" to Michigan for the winter—no comments, please), and her good friend and former colleague, Jenifer Banks, of Okemos, Michigan (formerly of Falmouth in Cornwall, England), turned 70 in December, just three days apart. It had been Etta's dream to go to the Incan city of Machu Picchu and the wondrous and warm islands of the Galapagos. Jenny, who is much more widely traveled, thought this adventure would be fun and invigorating (actually, both first thought of spas and massages and oceanside cocktails brought to them by doting servers). Then, following the example of other MSCN groups, Etta decided to put out a call to the Sunrise Senior College membership. That got the attention of Karen and Barb who farm their land and had a life-long desire to see Machu Picchu as well as the over 400 varieties of potatoes native to Peru; Wayne and Gail signed on next. So now we were six. Then, Etta got smart(er) and sent out a notice to MSCN. That netted Dixie (Acadia and

Downeast Senior College), Kay (Western Maine Senior College), Rendle and Pat (Senior College at Belfast), and Betty (SAGE). Jenny told a friend in Michigan, Madeline, and she signed up and told her friends, Sara and George, who were visiting Sara's 94 year-old mom in Michigan. At Christmas in Michigan, Kathy, Sara's sister, found out about the trip and expressed a strong desire to go. With one space left (our group was limited to 16 travelers and one had requested a single room), Etta called the travel company from a coffee house, and the group was completed.

We encouraged each other to read the many books suggested by our travel leaders. Some of us did—I think Karen wins the prize here for most variety of books read about Machu Picchu and its Incan history, like *Turn Right at Machu Picchu*, and mysteries of the Galapagos, including *The Beak of the Finch*, about the evolution of Darwin's Finches found on the islands. We thought we'd discuss the books in our free moments, but rarely did. Reason: hardly any free moments, and during those few there were, we explored on our own, shopped, and occasionally nodded off. We did learn a lot from our guides, including about the "Lost City of the Incas," discovered in 1911 by Yale archaeologist Hiram Bingham, who was a descendant of the missionary Hiram Bingham, the model for Michener's *Hawaii*. The missionary's descendant Hiram Bingham became a U.S. Senator from Connecticut, and was himself said to be the model for Indiana Jones! Archaeologist Bingham's later unearthing of the Inca Trail and the 1941 discovery of nearby Huayna Picchu suggest that Machu Picchu was not simply a "lost city" but part of a whole "lost region."

There's a hackneyed saying that old age isn't for sissies, and Sunrise Senior College and Friends seniors are proof of that. We trekked over three miles a day through Lima, Cusco (at 11,000 feet, that's high altitude, dude), Urubamba, and the Galapagos, schlepped some of our luggage and purchases, and at the same time wielded backpacks, cameras and binoculars. We visited local markets, bargained for trinkets and learned the difference between baby alpaca and "maybe alpaca," spoke *un poco Español*, ate guinea pig (honest—they're endemic to Peru, where Peruvians kid, "We eat your pets"), toured churches and museums and then, in the Galapagos, frolicked in the 80-degree Pacific Ocean surf with sea lions, visited with red-footed, Nazca, and blue-footed boobies, Marine iguanas, Lava lizards, almost tripped over some 150 year old tortoises (*tortugas*—the Spanish word both for turtles and tortoises), got a little seasick (sometimes), a bit of *turista* (a very few of us), and rode to the islands and back and around in pangas (ours were hardened canvas inflatable motorized rafts or dinghies). Some of us walk with canes when we're not using walking sticks, some of us have arthritis, hip replacements, high blood pressure, and fear of heights (yours truly). We're not all swimmers or snorkelers, though half of us are. We climbed on and off many buses, trains, and trails that had washouts from flooding. And we did it all with little grumbling, a lot of good humor, and the spirit of adventure. Side note: in Machu Picchu, we were approached by three young women from Bologna, Italy, who asked to take our photo because they wanted to show their reluctant "older" friends back home that even the "aged" can climb rocky trails. We willingly posed.

Grand Circle Foundation, the parent organization of our tour company, Overseas Adventure Travel (OAT), also has a commitment to the culture and wellbeing of each country's people. To that end, a "Day in the Life" of a typical family is included, whenever possible, with each trip. In Peru, we ate lunch with a local family—that's where the guinea pig was sampled by most, beautifully plated and looking like a skinned and glazed rat—and participated in making a stuffed poblano pepper dish: yum on the latter, *eeuw!* on the former. We also learned how to make and enjoy a traditional drink, Pisco sour, which combines Peruvian Pisco brandy with other ingredients and is topped by frothy egg whites and a dash of

angostura bitters: also yum with a kick. In Quito, Ecuador, we visited the Sinamune Disabled Children's Orchestra, whose members are physically or mentally disabled. This was a moving experience for us, both emotionally and literally, as we watched the remarkable accomplishments of young adults as they played, danced and sang for us, and as we danced and interacted with them. We were moved not only by their talents but by their affection, which we gave back with lots of hugs.

There is much more to convey about our adventure. Sunrise Senior College has Summer Shorts every year—free to members, they're usually single sessions that focus on a topic or skill or day trip. This summer, members of our group will participate in a travelogue describing in detail with beautiful photos and videos, their adventures in Machu Picchu and the Galapagos, where they experienced a warm climate, warm people, and the history of two countries—and where they straddled the Equator! We'll let you know when we're giving our presentation, and invite you to come to our beautiful Sunrise Senior College in Machias! Who knows? We may teach you how to make a Pisco sour. But we promise that we won't serve glazed guinea pig.

By the way, we're in the nascent stages of planning a trip to Africa's Serengeti for the winter of 2015. If you're interested, contact Etta Abrahams: [etta1225@gmail.com](mailto:etta1225@gmail.com).